Galatians Study

Started: 24 May 2017

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**Teaching Schedule**

**Week 1 – Introduction** background and context

**Week 2 –** Perversion of the Gospel – What’s the problem? (1:6-10)

Defending Paul’s authority

**Week 3** – Paul’s independence from the twelve apostles. Disrespecting apostleship.

We are all apostles after a fashion

Authority – Man’s authority or God’s authority (1:13-24)

**Week 4 (Deane)**– Paul opposes Peter (2:11-21)

Peter disfellowshipping with Gentiles to avoid aggravating Jews.

Others Jews followed suit

Gospel compromised among the Gentiles

Crucified with Christ

**Week 5** – Justification by faith – Did you jump through a hoop or did you believe Jesus? (3:1-5).

Main Themes – Justification by faith; defense of Christian liberty against legalism.

Author – Paul is accepted as the author of Galatians in the vast majority of circles.

Original audience – The Christian church in Galatia (Modern day Turkey).

Date – Most believe Galatians was written about A.D. 48.

Historical Context – First Jerusalem Council was held in

Purpose – Galatians was written to remedy a desperate situation, to call early Christians back from the Mosaic Law to grace, from legalism to faith. It is an emphatic statement of salvation by faith apart from works and is as relevant today as when it was originally penned.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Judaizers** Gentile Christians who adopted Jewish customs, and/or those (Jews or Gentiles) who encouraged such practices.

1. Custom-observing Judaizers maintained distinct Jewish customs within Graeco-Roman society but placed no salvific or membership significance on observance of the Mosaic law.

2. Social Judaizers placed social or membership significance on observance of the law and insisted on social separation from Gentile Christians.

3. ***Elitist Judaizers*** placed salvific and membership significance on observance of the law and insisted on circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, dietary restrictions in order to belong to God’s people and be saved.[[2]](#footnote-2)

*Legalism, according to Galatians, was a religious system that combined Christianity with Mosaism in a way that demanded total commitment to Israel’s law as the climax of one’s conversion to Christ. This “deeper commitment to the law,” according to Paul, was a subversion of the adequacy of Christ’s work and an abandonment of the Holy Spirit as God’s way of guiding Christian ethics. In other words, the legalism of the Judaizers is more than a problem: it has become a new message, a different gospel*.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Judaizers were trying hard to add Moses to salvation along with Jesus. This would be like telling people here who give their lives to Jesus that they should also become Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, or whatever before they are 100% saved. Now the message moves from “submit to Jesus” to “join our club”. Christians were trying to convert people to faith in Jesus while Jews were trying to nationalize the new converts.

The focus is, in short, give your life to Jesus, but be a good and observant Jew, as well. In this way, the emphasis of the Judaizers is still on the national identity of the Hebrew nation. “Be a Christian, but look like a Jew” is one way to look at it. In a day and age when Judaism was already struggling to maintain its identity by keeping customs such as circumcision and the dietary restrictions, Christianity came along and introduced a freedom from such legalistic observances.

The problem of legalism for Christians today is one of balance and human effort. Humans who are caught up in a legalistic, works-based theology often think that they have to do enough good things to counterbalance the bad things that they do in their lives. Wicca (modern day witchcraft) has a tenet called the Rule of Three. It states that the good or bad energy that a person puts into the world will be visited back on that person three-fold. This means that for every bad thing a person does, he or she has to do three good things to counterbalance it. Karma, which is a central tenet of a number of pagan religions to include Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Taoism means that a person’s good and bad actions will contribute to future happiness or suffering. At the center of these pagan religions is a focus on self rather than on the person and work of Jesus. This is the problem of legalism: that we find the will of God in following a ritual, routine, or set of rules.

Is it possible that the church defaults to “rules and regulations mode” whenever it feels insecure or in need of something tangible to grasp onto? It certainly is easier to focus on my behavior and the behavior of others than it is to concentrate on communicating the gospel. If I focus on fixing behavior, I don’t necessarily have to take the risk of actually talking to people and having them turn their back on me for what I believe. I can validate my own behavior if I constantly compare myself to other people’s behavior, which I can deem as “worse” than mine. In other words, if I make someone else’s addiction my mission, I can make myself feel better about myself. “At least I’m not like…” is what we end up saying to ourselves whether or not we really realize it. When I start comparing behaviors, I lose sight of people. I lose sight of the fact that the person’s behavior whom I am focusing upon is a soul that God wants in His family. When I focus on behavior and perfecting behavior, it can become an exercise in humans changing humans in human time. This can put pressure on others to change things that they may take them more time to change than we are willing to invest. We get frustrated with the slowness of change and communicate that frustration. The person we are trying to change becomes frustrated and loses hope, thinking that Christianity is just an unattainable set of rules. We get caught up in the rules and lose sight of the sufficiency of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross.

So what do Christians “add” to the gospel that replaces the sufficiency of Jesus?

1. Bible reading/Christian Disciplines – Many people feel that they are less loved by God because they don’t “get into the word” enough. They feel they are distant or need God’s forgiveness for not engaging the word. It is really important that we learn to love the word of God, but reading the Bible doesn’t necessarily make us relationally closer to the Lord. That isn’t what makes us acceptable before the Lord.

2. Politics – The church can take on an agenda that wasn’t necessarily ever meant to be the message of the church. The church can take on an agenda that IS Biblical and apply it in a way that pushes others away from the Lord. Lots of good, God-fearing Christians love this country and are extremely patriotic, but the Constitution of the United States is a poor master for spiritual growth. Nationalism and conservatism can become the agenda rather than Jesus.

3. Education/Theological Knowledge – Knowing stuff about Christian doctrine doesn’t make a person acceptable to God. There exist atheists who teach college courses on Christianity. These are folks who can describe Christian doctrine, but aren’t going to heaven.

4. Church attendance/Christian performance – “I go, therefore I am saved!” “My parents are Christians, so that means I’m a Christian, too.” Going to a football game doesn’t make you a football player. It makes you a football spectator. Helping old ladies across the street doesn’t mean God loves you more.

Honoring God is more than not breaking rules. Loving and honoring God looks like whatever it is that we do with Jesus. If I love my wife, I do more than follow the boundaries that she has set. I communicate with her. I am proud to tell others about her. I brag on her. I seek out her company.

**Chapter 1**

V.1 – Paul kicks this thing off by stating that he is an apostle and that he is not sent by men. He makes clear that he is sent through Jesus Christ and God who raised Jesus from the dead. He appears to be defending his own credentials here. It seems that the fact that he was not one of the original twelve apostles has called into question his authority as a messenger. Paul may be implying that the Judaizers whom he is resisting in this epistle ARE from men, or their message is from men. He is trying to separate himself from the legalistic tendencies that have come from human thought over the course of the 400 years of the intertestamental period.

**Bible Word Study – “apostle”**

**652** **ἀπόστολος** [*apostolos* /ap·**os**·tol·os/] n m. From 649; TDNT 1:407; TDNTA 67; GK 693; 81 occurrences; AV translates as “apostle” 78 times, “messenger” twice, and “he that is sent” once. **1** a delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders. 1a specifically applied to the twelve apostles of Christ. 1b in a broader sense applied to other eminent Christian teachers. *1b1* of Barnabas. *1b2* of Timothy and Silvanus.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The word “apostle” simply means “he that is sent”. An apostle is a person who is sent with a message. In this light, the twelve apostles were just the first twelve of an army that has since been sent by Jesus into the world. If a person carries a message, that person has an apostleship that is implied by the very carrying of the message. Paul’s apostleship was not granted by any manmade body. He wasn’t sent by a church to plant other churches. He was sent by God. Today’s church is (or should be) FULL of apostles. We are all sent by Christ as mandated by the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). In the first century, this apostle was deemed as an agent that actually represented the person who sent the apostle.

Paul finishes the introduction by stating that the purpose of the coming of Jesus is to rescue them all from the “present evil age”. He wasn’t just talking about those of us who are reading Galatians today. He was referring to his own time. The age into which Paul is speaking is that of a church that is being brought under the bondage of rules and regulations. The Law itself wasn’t a bad thing. It was the application of the Law that was hurting people and drawing them into an inaccurate gospel.

So once we get beyond the introduction, Paul runs right to the heart of the matter about which he is writing. He is amazed (6) that the Galatians have so quickly deserted the message of grace that Christ brought. Paul says the they are actually deserting Jesus when they desert the message. They have exchanged one gospel for another. Paul spoke about this in Romans 1:25 when he told the church in Rome that they were exchanging truth for the lie that the world was offering. The gospel they were given was one based in a personal relationship with Jesus. The new and evil one was one that was based on a relationship to good works and being made acceptable by following rules.

**Bible Word Study – “distort”**

**3344** **μεταστρέφω,** **μετατρέπω** [*metastrepho* /met·as·**tref**·o/] v. From 3326 and 4762; TDNT 7:729; TDNTA 1093; GK 3570 and 3573; Three occurrences; AV translates as “turn” twice, and “pervert” once. **1** to turn around, turn around.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The word used here for “distorting” the gospel is the Greek word, *metastrepho*. Literally translated, this word is a verb that means “to change after” or “to turn after”. So the true gospel came along in the person of Jesus and the Judaizers, years later, changed it to fit their own agenda. The Judaizers had an agenda, so they tried very hard to take the truth of scripture and mold it to suit their Jewish sensitivities. They created a new picture of the truth that, unfortunately, was so different that it became entirely different. So it’s almost like I fall in love with a picture of my wife and neglect the real thing that is standing in front of me. The Galatians were living in the days of the Law, which was a picture of Jesus in the Old Testament instead of living in the new revelation of God in Jesus.

Paul states that even if an angel from heaven were to come and preach something other than what Jesus brought to His people, that being would be accursed (8).

**Bible Word Study – “accursed”**

**Accursed** (ἀνάθεμα). See on Rom. 9:3, and offerings, L. 21:5. Comp. κατάρα *curse*, and ἐπικατάρατος *cursed*, Gal. 3:13. In LXX always *curse*, except Lev. 27:28, and the apocryphal books, where it is always *gift* or *offering*. By Paul always *curse:* see Rom. 9:3; 1 Cor. 12:3; 16:22. The sense of *excommunication*, introduced by patristic writers, does not appear in N. T.[[6]](#footnote-6)

This word, “accursed”, carries a sense of excommunication from the church. A person bringing this other gospel of works is to be cut off from Jesus in that he or she is lying about the gospel. Paul is lumping himself into this warning, as well. He says that even if “we” bring this gospel that is contrary to Jesus’ message, he himself is to become a curse, or be cut off from the church. So what Paul is saying here is that God will display His wrath on people who substitute the grace of Jesus with the Law of Moses as the primary revelation of God.

So how do we apply this for today? Today’s Christians aren’t necessarily concerned with the Old Testament rules and regulations per se, so we don’t necessarily concern ourselves too much with replacing what we do as Christians with things like planting our fields with two types of seed or cutting the hair at the sides of our heads. We have to remember that not all rules are bad, either. Some rules are just good for maintaining order. What we are concerning ourselves with are modern applications of “religious rules” that distort the gospel of grace that we find in Jesus.

This message of grace doesn’t mean that we are to be complacent, either. It doesn’t mean that we can do whatever we want and just say, “to heck with Christian discipline! That’s just following a bunch of rules!”.

VV 10-12

V. 10 – So Paul takes just a moment here to separate himself from a number of other authorities. He is trying very hard to establish his own independence here. In the section between 1:10 and 2:21, Paul distances himself from human teachings, the major churches, the Jerusalem “pillars”, and the apostle Peter. Just as those other sources are independent sources of the gospel, so is he. He merely wants to establish that his source of revelation is Jesus Christ, just as the other messengers are sourced by Jesus. Paul was called the apostle to the Gentiles, which would mean that conversion to Judaism would not be necessary for them. His message was not a message of conversion to a faith, but to Jesus.

Remember that the Jews were coming out of an intertestamental period in which the Law was expanded in order to maintain the “Jewishness” of the Jewish people. The land of the Jews had been occupied for some time by invaders who were actually trying to eliminate Jewish identity. The Samaritans were living proof of that! Paul’s statement that he wasn’t “seeking the favor of men” was his way of saying that he wasn’t trying to follow the expanded rules and regulations that came out of the intertestamental period when the written Law that was actually in the Bible was expanded to tens of thousands of tiny little picky rules that everyone was to live by in order to be a “good Jew”. This part would be easily referred to as the “Law of man” as opposed to the true Law of God that is written in the Bible (which Paul preached shouldn’t be relied upon for salvation anyway). So what we end up with here is mainly a conflict between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. The Jewish Christians were having a hard time letting go of the aspects of their old life in Judaism that identified them as Jews, or God’s chosen people. Gentile Christians did not grow up with this culture, so it was easy to dismiss. Paul did, however, grow up with this culture, but somehow he managed to become the conduit through which this change would be communicated to the world. He was the first real apostle to the Gentiles and it was his place to attempt to reconcile Jewish Christians with this reality.

V. 11-12 – Paul continues in V. 11 with his conversation about from where he received his revelation. He makes the very clear case that his revelation came from Jesus himself. Recall in Acts 9 when he met Jesus on the Damascus Road. We can assume here that Paul was hearing a great deal of commentary from others that his authority wasn’t directly from Jesus, but from other people, from the church, and from Jerusalem and not from Jesus. I can imagine that it was hard to hear. It was probably hard for other people to acknowledge that a person who was so hateful to the gospel now had any authority over the church.

It is important to differentiate one thing here before we move on. That Paul is asserting his independence is definitely a true premise, but the focus here is not on independence, per se. The focus is on his revelation being directly from Jesus. Paul is not interested in freedom to preach or teach anything. He is interested in making sure that those hearing his words know that his revelation came right from the mouth of Jesus and was not subject to the interpretation of men in Jerusalem. If Paul’s revelation was directly from Jesus, it would not need to be confirmed by anyone on earth or meet any approval of men before Paul could travel and deliver the message in the revelation. If it WERE from Jerusalem, then the Jews in Jerusalem would have to stand behind the revelation as having come to the church in Jerusalem, which would give them a right to “correct” said message if need be. Since the revelation did not come from Jerusalem, they had no say in what the message of Paul contained. But what if the gospel coming from Jerusalem is wrong? What if the religious leadership has been broadcasting a message that conflicts with some guy who claims to have a new word from Jesus? Now what does the church do?

With authority coming from Jerusalem, it could be suggested that if Paul’s authority came from Jerusalem, the Judaizers could also claim authority over the gospel. In other words, Jerusalem suggests an authority that comes from Jerusalem since Jerusalem was the center of faith, which means it was the center of Judaism. If it could be suggested that Paul’s authority came from Jerusalem (Jewish religion), the Judaizers could sort of ride Paul’s coattails into their own brand of usurped authority. This would give them a sound basis (or so they thought) for their claim to authority. This would, subsequently, give them a way to supplement the gospel message with elements of Judaism. The Judaizers could claim that Paul’s gospel wasn’t the full gospel without the trappings of Jewish tradition and ritual. There was probably a great fear that Christianity was going to wipe out Jewish identity and heritage.

Paul’s gospel was not one that was nationalistic or ritualistic in nature. It was holistic in that it was the answer for all people for all time. Paul wasn’t selling a “cheap grace”. He wasn’t selling salvation without obedience to God. He was promoting freedom in Christ. We are free to follow Jesus without having to feel fear or guilt that comes from the Law.

The “gospel which was preached” by Paul had three main emphases. First, salvation is found in Jesus Christ alone. Jesus was a fulfillment of all that Moses had given in years past. Second, one is accepted based on the sacrifice of Jesus and not by following the Law. Third, the acceptance of God is as open to non-Jews (Gentiles) as it is to Jews. The gospel is for everyone!

**VV. 13-24**

V. 13 – Paul even goes on in V. 13 to discuss how horrible he was in his persecution of Christians. In fact, this verse starts a section in which Paul reacts against the suggestion that his authority is of human origin. He tells of what he was like before he was a Christian. It is clear that he was a persecutor of those who believed in Jesus and he considered himself to be very dedicated (zealous) to that very purpose. Say what you want about Paul, but when he’s all in for something, he truly is all in. He believed that Christians were wrong before he was a believer himself, and he did everything within his power to support his beliefs. We find this same set of values in action when he becomes a believer. Paul was a man of integrity.

History is important. Whenever I look back on my own history and see how my path has brought me to where I am today, I can see lots of little lessons and experiences that shaped me uniquely to be in the position I am in today. As of this writing, I am part of a church that is almost six months old. We are planted in an area known for its addiction to heroin. Folks here aren’t rich. In fact, many are struggling financially. The area is what I call a “diamond in the rough”. I have been really impressed with the caliber of people who have been called out to our church! I think back on my experiences and wonder if the influence our church has had would be the same if I had grown up differently or with more resources at my disposal. The same applies to Paul. He grew up the way he did. He learned a religion that caused his behavior to escalate into a hostility towards others. However, his personality was such that when he learned truth, all of that experience and passion was brought to bear in support of the cross instead of in opposition to the cross.

VV. 15-17 – Paul describes a little what happened on the Damascus road at his conversion (Acts 9). So once Paul was converted, he immediately entered into a process of discipleship in this new way of life. God called Paul to Gentiles, so he went to Arabia and Damascus to begin his indoctrination into the Christian way of life. Notice that he did not go immediately to Jerusalem, which is the center of Jewish thought in his day. In other words, he didn’t go to the Jewish culture to be discipled, but to Gentiles.

V. 18-19 – It wasn’t until three years after he converted that he went to Jerusalem to meet with Cephas), whom we also know as the apostle Peter (that’s the Peter who walked and ministered with Jesus while He was on earth) and James (who is Jesus’ half-brother and the one who wrote the letter we know as James in our Bible. He spent just over two weeks with Peter. I can imagine all of the stories that he heard in those two weeks! There probably wasn’t enough time from sun up to sundown each day of those two weeks to hear it all. So Jesus “ambushes” Paul on the Damascus road, Paul goes to Arabia and Damascus to be discipled by Christians there, and then he goes to Jerusalem to hear more from Peter.

V. 20 – It is so important to Paul to be sure that he had no other contact with any other apostles that he makes a pretty strong statement reflecting this fact. What he says is in effect, “I swear to GOD, I didn’t talk to any other apostles!” Again, he’s arguing that he wasn’t in Jerusalem to learn about Christianity. He has already told them that it was three years before he set foot in Jerusalem and now when he did go to Jerusalem, it was only to see Peter. It sounds like he only happened to meet James, who may have merely been with Peter while Paul was visiting at some point.

V. 21 – So after that Paul returns to the land of his birth. Saul is originally from a city in southeastern Turkey called Tarsus, which is in an area formerly known as Cilicia. If you keep heading south around the Mediterranean Sea, you run into Syria. He had become widely known as a persecutor of Christians and the gospel message. People were saying about him, “He’s the guy who is now preaching the faith he once tried to wipe out”. His reputation had changed from an angry and violent man to a man of peace and reconciliation.

Chapter Two

V. 1-2 – So Paul spent the next fourteen years in Syria and Cilicia before he returned to

Jerusalem. By this time, he was hanging out with two guys with whom he spent a great

deal of his time during his ministry. Barnabas was a Jew of the tribe of Levi. Titus was a

Gentile. Evidently Paul had received some sort of revelation that prompted him to return

to Jerusalem (2). There, it appears that he appeared before the Jerusalem church leaders

to explain the gospel that he presented to the Gentiles (yes, that seems awkward since he

was just writing that his authority didn’t come from man). For some reason, it seems that

Paul wanted to run what he was teaching by them. It may be that he was trying to find

some common ground with the church after having distanced himself for so long. He

was not, after all, opposed to the church. It was the church that was saying the he had no

authority since he was such a persecutor of the Jews a few years prior to them having met

him. At this point, it has been almost twenty years since his conversion. He may be

thinking that he wants to be sure that what he teaches is aligned with correct doctrine

taught in the church.

VV. 3-4 – It was probably Paul’s intent that the leadership in Jerusalem would see that Titus, a Gentile, was being used by God for the advancement of the gospel so that they would see Paul’s point about not making Gentiles be circumcised in order to jump through the Jewish ritualistic hoops. Paul states that the “false brothers” had infiltrated their ranks and began to influence the ranks of the newly converted believers. The Jerusalem church was NOT among the Judaizers. They probably did have a problem with Paul reaching out to Gentiles, but this was new evangelistic territory for them, as well. Paul paved the way for the church to expand outreach from just the Jewish nations to the Gentiles, as well.

We can assume from this that since the “pillars of Jerusalem” did not see it necessary to have Titus circumcised even though he was a Greek Gentile, they did not believe that any other Gentile would have to be circumcised in order to be inducted into Christianity. This was a first step in making a clear break from the requirements of the Law since the Law had been fulfilled in Jesus. I am really encouraged that Paul did what he did. He trusted the leadership in the church to see that salvation is by faith alone and that the relationship with the Lord is based on faith and not on the Jewish ritual. He was right in taking a chance and it paid off. When he did this, he gained an ally in the fight against the Judaizing “Christians” who thought that observance of Torah would also be necessary for salvation alongside of recognizing Jesus as Lord and Savior.

VV. 5-10 – Having stood against the Judaizers and even gone to the Jerusalem leadership, Paul found that he received the “right hand of fellowship” from the church. He had overcome his own past and gained enough credibility in the church to mold their way of thinking towards Gentiles. Now Jerusalem actually endorsed Paul’s mission and was able to emotionally, physically, and Spiritually get behind it.

Paul makes sure in this passage to let the reader know that the Jerusalem church was acting independently on its own, as well. Here we have a number of well-respected leaders such as James, Peter, and John who are in leadership. V. 6 states that they “added nothing to my message”, meaning that they believed that Paul did, in fact, carry a full gospel that was not deficient in any way. He wasn’t selling it out to just please the Gentiles. They didn’t believe that the Torah had to be observed in order for a Christian to be a “real believer”. They were making a transition from the “church” being a Jewish community to a worldwide community. It was probably a difficult transition to make, in fact. Think of how the church is changing today. Traditional churches are turning on more contemporary churches and calling them “shallow” and contemporary churches are firing back at the traditional church calling it “outdated”. Change isn’t easy. Traditional churches today were, at one point in time, very cutting edge and probably were looked at as selling out the gospel in order to become palatable to the masses. Contemporary churches need to remember that, while we look different than what we call the traditional church, they serve the same Jesus as we do. Times are changing and so is the face of the church. It’s okay for the face of the church to change as long as the heart of the church remains unified. At the heart of the church is a desire for the world to know Jesus.

I think the thing that I appreciate so much about the reaction of the church in Jerusalem is that, while it was used to a very Jewish faith and expected a very Jewish Christianity, they were able to see through their own expectations to the call of both Peter and Paul. Peter was clearly called to a ministry that they could easily get behind. Peter was an evangelist to the Jewish nation. Of course there was no conflict with Jewish culture. Paul, on the other hand, was called to those who had no idea what to make of the boundary markers of circumcision and food law. Gentiles didn’t know what it looked like to be a Jew because they didn’t grow up Jewish. The church recognized the ministry of Paul (maybe as they gave Titus a chance) to the Gentiles and saw that there is a different way. Times had changed. The spiritual landscape had shifted. The rules were now different for this new ministry target (Gentiles). They really had to be “all things to all people”. Under this change in heart by the Jerusalem church was the conviction that God was at work in Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles.

So they offered the right hand of fellowship to Paul and to his Gentile ministry (9). This means that, while they might not fully understand the method or the culture of Gentiles, they agreed theologically and philosophically with Paul and actually supported Paul in his mission. They lent their blessing and credibility to ministry to the Gentiles as they validated what Paul was doing in their culture. They publically threw their weight and influence behind Pauls’ ministry, thus sending the message to the church, particularly those of Jewish heritage, that the Gentiles were valuable and in need of the message of salvation unencumbered by Jewish tradition. What was the one stipulation the Jerusalem church put on Paul? Don’t forget the poor (10). That was something both Jews and Gentiles alike could agree on.

**2:11-14**

In a tense confrontation between Paul and Peter, Paul displays his independence from the Jerusalem leadership even further. He did not confront Peter in an effort to distance himself. It just happened to work out this way, but Peter’s actions needed to be addressed in public since his actions caused a very public rift in the ministry. Rather than promote unity in the body, Peter contradicted the gospel by separating Jews and Gentiles by not associating with them publicly once certain men came around.

V. 11 – Note in V. 11 that Paul approached Peter and confronted him “to his face”. This is a great example of how Christians should confront. There is nothing going on behind Peter’s back. There is no gossip on Paul’s part. He goes straight to the source of his problem. There is no way for the conversation to be twisted. I know sometimes I complain about others instead of complaining to them. This is just counter-productive to finding a solution to any issue. I have learned that Paul’s approach is certainly the best approach to handling difficulties and disagreements. Also note that Paul considered Peter to be “condemned”.

**Bible Word Study – “condemned”**

**2861** καταγινώσκω (*kataginōskō*): vb.; ≡ Str 2607; TDNT 1.714—LN 30.118 **condemn**, convict (1Jn 3:20, 21+; Mk 7:2 v.r. NA26); (pass.) be in the wrong, be condemned (Gal 2:11+)[[7]](#footnote-7)

The word used here for “condemned” is the Greek *kataginosko.* This word carries with it a sense of not just being shunned by humans. This same word is used in 1 John 3:20 and there it is used in the sense of being condemned by God. I think there is an urgent compassion on the part of Paul to bring Peter to a true gospel that includes Gentiles so that Peter doesn’t find himself answering to God for a really bad heresy.

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*Note on Jewish Food Laws* [from *NIVAC on Galatians*]. To understand this text aright it is important to know what Jews thought about certain foods. Basically, the Bible (Lev. 11; Deut. 14) prohibits the consumption of (1) all four-footed animals except sheep, goats, cattle, and a few kinds of deer, the most notable prohibition being pork; (2) shellfish and molluscs;6 (3) birds of prey; (4) most insects (except locusts, crickets, and grasshoppers);8 (5) swarming land creatures (like lizards, crocodiles, chameleons, and weasels); and (6) dead animals (which should be obvious). Furthermore, for food that was permissible there was a further restriction: no food could be consumed that had either fat or blood (Lev. 3:17). In the passage of history, Jews added other prohibitions, like Gentile meat and wine (cf. Dan. 1:12–16), because both could have been contaminated through idolatry. One other prohibition was the eating of food that was not properly tithed, though Pharisees debated this point quite heatedly. These rules were not rules governing only the behavior of priests; they were rules for all of Israel. While there were variations, it does appear that most Jews kept most of these laws: it was too easy for their neighbors to “rat on” them, and most Jews wanted to maintain good standing in the community. But more importantly, most Jews wanted to live before God in obedience. Sanders, speaking of the value of food laws for the Jews, infers: “the food laws stood out, along with the observance of the sabbath, as being a central and defining aspect of Judaism.”

When they did become unclean as a result of contact with one of these forbidden foods, the observant Jew did what the Bible said: he washed himself and waited until evening (Lev. 11:24–28). These rules seemed to vary only a little in the Diaspora, differing no doubt according to availability and the animal’s perception in that part of the world. Thus, the precise animals listed in Leviticus 11:4–8 and Deuteronomy 14:4–5 were supplemented at times with the water buffalo and the giraffe. Gentile oil was also apparently prohibited in certain locations.

It should also be said that there were variations among Jews about what constituted permissible food. Some Jews (like the Pharisees) were more radical in their applications of biblical laws than others and extended such laws to degrees that others thought were fanatical. It goes without saying that such a radicalism would have been found more often in Palestine than in the Diaspora. I am persuaded that the party that came from Jerusalem was more along the line of the radicals than along the line of the “strict, but accommodating” group. Some Jews would eat no food that came from Gentiles, but Diaspora Jews were forced to do this; some radicals, therefore, could have seen almost all food in the Diaspora as unclean (but I know of no evidence that suggests this); at any rate, some would have seen lots of danger in the food laws in the Diaspora. What we do find is that Jews frequently had to agitate in their Diaspora communities in order to acquire “pure food” because much of it had been previously offered to idols.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_[[8]](#footnote-8)

Here’s an interesting irony. Paul went to Jerusalem to meet with the Jerusalem elders, including Peter (who is referred to as Cephas [KAY-foss] is some translations). Peter and all of the others validated their ministry and sent them on their way. However, when Peter visited Antioch (probably the one in Syria), Paul had to confront his attitude towards the Gentiles. Evidently, Peter had validated the ministry to the Gentiles, but he wasn’t interested (at least at first) in engaging Gentiles in his own ministry. The funny thing is that it depended on who Peter was around. If Peter was only around Gentiles and Gentile leadership, he would hang out with Gentiles. When “certain men from James” (12) came around, he distanced himself and would hold himself “aloof”. The reason Paul calls out is fear.

What is interesting here is that it was Peter and not Paul who received a specific vision about the lifting of the dietary restrictions in Acts 9-15, 28. Peter was already aware that things were changing as he was receiving visions from the Lord, just as Paul was. This is why he felt free to eat with Gentiles in the first place. It seems like there were some folks who came from Jerusalem who were not “in the know” about this vision, or were having a hard time accepting the lifting of the restrictions (remember that the restrictions were one of the practices that promoted the Jewish identity). These folks who came from Jerusalem were sent by James and were in what was called a “circumcision party”, or a group of people who still believed that believers must become circumcised. It is unlikely that they had James’ full endorsement for this attitude since James was there when Paul’s ministry with Titus, a Gentile, was validated (2:9). Whatever the case, these folks caused Peter to become a little self-conscious about who he was eating with.

Probably a bigger problem than Peter’s short-sightedness, other Jewish believers picked up on this and followed suit. Barnabas himself even took on the habit of not eating with Gentile Christians. Barnabas, who was a giant among his Christian brethren, was led astray in this fashion. Even the greatest of leadership in the church is susceptible to false doctrine and making really bad decisions. Strong leadership can completely collapse under the threat of persecution and the peer pressure to “be like the rest of us”. So the leadership was fragmented in supporting what amounted to two separate bodies of Christ: Gentile and Jewish. This was a terrible heresy that needed to be corrected.

V. 14 – Paul calls Peter out even further on the carpet here when he accuses Peter of being a Jew, living like a Gentile, and “forcing” Gentiles to live like Jews. Why would he, who is living like a Gentile, force the Gentiles to live like Jews?

**Bible Word Study – “force”**

The word for “force” here is the Greek *anankazo*, which means to literally make someone do something. Peter was evidently making Gentiles take on Jewish customs by his actions. This is the same word that Paul uses in Acts 26 to describe his former life as a Jewish persecutor of Christians. He would force Christians to blaspheme so that he could have them arrested and killed. It was more than just the moral pressure applied here. It was a physical and spiritual pressure that came with the moral pressure. He was clearly placing the social stigma of not being saved on the Gentiles if they did not adopt these Jewish customs. In effect, what Paul was doing was converting the Gentiles to a brand of religion that closer resembled Orthodox Judaism than Christianity. This effectively wrecks the gospel.

At the end of the day, why was Peter wrong? There are a number of reasons, but I don’t want to be too hard on Peter here, either. I have, after all, had my own struggles with interpreting and applying Scripture and some doctrines. I have struggled through some issues, particularly regarding eternal security and whether a person can lay down his or her salvation. I believe that a person cannot ever lose salvation, nor do I believe that a true believer will willingly lay down salvation if he or she truly understands the gospel. It is in the “laying down salvation” that I once struggled. I have worked through that, and maybe Peter was just needing to work through some things. The confrontation described in Galatians 2 may be just what he needed. Should Paul have confronted him privately? Well, we don’t know that he didn’t at some point do so. It may have been that the heresy of the Judaizers was spreading so rapidly that Paul had to take extreme actions. Sometimes, a confrontation needs to happen or a statement needs to be made publicly to address a situation that is quickly getting out of hand. If Barnabas was being led astray, the situation was probably getting pretty bad. Peter was not just tolerating social differences between Jews and Gentiles. He was conforming Christianity to the restrictions of Judaism. Peter was making a very public error that Paul addressed publicly. This was not a matter of a private sin where Paul would have addressed it privately, and only privately, with Peter.

**Galatians 2:15-21**

So Paul, possibly in reflection as to the contentious confrontation that happened with Peter at Antioch, writes what seems to be his processing of the tension. He starts by saying that “we” who are Jews from the very start know that a person cannot be saved by acting out the Law. Salvation is by faith alone.

VV. 15-16 – There are a number of topics to cover from this section. Paul is addressing Jews and acknowledges the common conversion experience that Jews and Gentiles share. What I mean by that is that if Jews can be saved by faith AND the gospel is for everyone, then the gospel/salvation is available to everyone. Paul starts by saying in VV. 15-16 that it is common knowledge that Jews come to justification (salvation) not by works of the Law (jumping through hoops) but by faith in Jesus. Sin was atoned for in the Old Testament by the blood of animals, but salvation was not EVER addressed in the sacrifices. People in the Old Testament were saved by their faith in the work that God did for them. Jews and Gentiles alike are saved by grace through faith.

Another interesting usage of language from the Jewish perspective is that of the “sinful Gentile”. The assumption here is that the Gentiles were neither given the Law, nor did they obey the law, therefore they were “lost” and given to sinfulness. They had no way of regulating a sinful lifestyle since they had no written code (the Law) to direct them towards righteousness. The word for “sinful” here is the Greek *hamartolos*, which indicates that the Jews believed (not necessarily Paul, though) that Gentiles were bound for hell simply by their “non-Jewishness”. In the recognition by Paul that man is not justified by observing the Law (16), he was really turning the Jewish perspective of the world on its head!

The Greek word for “law” is *nomos.* There is a little known fact that a lot of folks either do not know, they miss, or they ignore. When Paul uses the word “law”, he often means “legalistic observance” or “legalism”. The term *erga nomou*, which means “works of the law” or basically, “things we do to DO the Law”. So the argument here is not that “Torah is bad”. Paul was a Jew and, therefore, cherished the Law. The argument here is that “legalistic observance of Torah is bad”. There is another Greek phrase used by Paul that means “under the Law”. The Greek phrase *upo nomon* carries this sense. To live *upo nomon* means to live “under the system of rules”. This is an oppression by rules over a person’s life. Am I really going to live my life by checking off the list of rules? Anyone can do that and have zero faith in Jesus whatsoever.

V. 17-18 – Jews would argue with Paul that if they simply threw out the Law, they couldn’t know how to live sinlessly. In other words, if faith is in place and the law is eliminated, it actually encourages a person to live lawlessly, or sinfully. In this manner, a person could put “faith” in Jesus and do whatever he or she wanted to do, either good or bad, and not have to worry. This is what some people call the “license to sin”. This is actually a case of classic antinomian heresy. Faith isn’t a license to sin. Faith is a license to live free.

V. 17 seems to ask the question, “If I am saved by faith in Jesus and can do whatever I want (live as sinlessly as I want) doesn’t that mean that Jesus aids and abets sin?” This is a complete misunderstanding of what it means to be saved by faith. Paul counters the argument by basically stating the purpose of the Law, which is to point out sin. He says that he a person returns to the Law after receiving the message of Jesus, that person would recognize the sin of legalism that the Law would point out as wrong. In an interesting irony, the Law will point out legalism as a sinful pattern! The Law was never meant to be a checklist for behavior for all of mankind. It was meant for the Jews to know what sin was. In a way, the Law was put into place so that the Jews could know what behaviors to AVOID, not what behaviors to DO.

V. 19 – “Through the Law, I died to the Law”. This is the stance Paul takes as opposed to the stance that Peter seems to be advocating with a return to the Law for Christians. What did Peter do with the Law? He encouraged believers to adhere to it, suggesting that he was clinging to it, as well. Paul let the Law go. He did not let it go as if the Law was a bad thing. He let it go as fulfilled.

V. 20 – Crucified with Christ suggests completion. When Jesus said it was finished at His crucifixion, it is finished at our crucifixion with Him. When I die, Jesus takes on my life for me. Breaking the Law results in death for all who break it. Jesus died that death on behalf of all sinners as a representative. The Law killed Jesus and every single person who died with Him. Having paid the penalty for breaking the Law (having died to all things), we are free to live for the Lord now. These verses suggest that since we shared in Jesus’ death, we also share in His life in resurrection to a new life. In this new life, I am no longer on the throne of my life. That guy died. Jesus is replaced as the center of my life. Jesus is replaced when we live our new lives in the Lord by living it in faith in Christ.

The life of the believer is one that is devoid of self. It is a life of the indwelling Christ and the Holy Spirit that Jesus left behind. For the Jew, when he or she died to the Law, that person was resurrected with Jesus into a new life of grace. That person would not no longer need to rely on the Law to guide and direct, but could now rely on the Holy Spirit of Jesus to guide and direct his or her steps. It is in this way that Jesus fulfilled the Law. He did not replace the Law, but he perfected it in His death.

V. 21 – “I do not nullify the grace of God (by living my life according to the Law)”. Paul is saying the since he is living his life in the grace of Jesus, that life does nothing to nullify God’s grace. In fact, it fulfills God’s grace even more. He goes on to say that if righteousness comes by doing the Law, then the purpose of Jesus dying on the cross is completely lost. It was for nothing.

**So Now What?**

Peter and Paul were both Jews. Both had been faithful to Torah and both had been used to following the rules of the Jewish faith at some time in their lives. Both had come to have an experience with Jesus. Peter’s experience was much more personal and extensive than was Paul’s. For whatever reason, Peter had a harder time letting go of those old ways. For both, the object of faith had originally been God’s revelation in Moses. Paul had a much easier time transitioning his focus to God’s revelation in Christ. Christ has replaced Moses as the focus of salvation, just as the Spirit has replaced the laws of Moses as the focus of God’s will.[[9]](#footnote-9) So for the Jew and for the Gentile, salvation is still by faith. Peter believed in Jesus as Messiah. Paul’s message to Peter was that Jesus was enough. Paul wanted Peter to know that there was no need to add observance of Torah to the gospel. It was not Jesus plus Moses equals salvation. It was simply Jesus.

The application here is pretty simple today. Find a church that places value on Christians or people in general by what they do and how they act and you will find a church in a very similar situation to the Galatian church. We live in a world where moral absolutes are a thing of the past. There is no black and white. There is no right and wrong. Even the Bible is looked at by some devout Christians as not really the “rule” for living. The things that we read in the Bible that point towards moral living are looked at as good for only some people and not for all people. Even with the message of the topic that we are discussing here, the danger of “rule-following”, lends itself to being twisted by those who would say, “The Bible isn’t a rule book to be followed. I don’t have to do what it says because that would be jumping through hoops!” So we are left with only our subjective feelings to guide us. This creeps its way into the pulpit. In today’s society, where more and more people are losing sight of any degree of absolute moralism, I think there are three brands of church leader. The first is the conservative preacher who stands his ground, believing the Bible to be right and true in its moral guidance. He is willing to lose followers (butts in the pew) in order to maintain an orthodox faith (please don’t read in legalistic pastor/church as that isn’t what I mean). The second is the pastor who fears losing followers, so he is compromising on the Bible as a guide. If people are going to leave because of a conservative interpretation of the Bible, then I will interpret it a little more loosely. The third brand of pastor is the modern-day pastor who had grown up with no moral absolutes and looks at the Bible through the lens of subjectivism. “The Bible is good when it applies and I get to choose when it applies.”

In all of this, there seems to be a widespread belief that there is no real right and wrong. Even Christians do what “feels right” completely ignoring the warning that the heart is deceitful above all things. As this attitude progresses and spreads, it works its way into a church. While we do believe that we don’t follow the Bible in order to gain God’s approval AND we don’t add extra legalistic moral codes to God’s word, we do believe that we have to stand for what is right. We have to begin praying for a revival. We have to teach that it is God’s ethical standard of right and wrong and not a human standard that is the right one. We have to teach this generation of young people that is so averse to having anyone tell them what to do that it isn’t always bad to have guidance and direction in their lives. Figuring it out for yourself is sometimes foolhardy when we can have the voice of experience and wisdom to point us in a right direction. Young people have to come to actually trust the Bible and Jesus as an authority in their lives. We do this by teaching them that Jesus did not come so that we could dress a certain way at church or act a certain way immediately upon our salvation. We have to remind them that we are all in process and that sometimes change takes time.

**Chapter Three**

V. 1-14 – So Paul starts in on a theological defense/argument for what he claims in his letter to the Galatians, namely that believers are saved not through works, but by faith. He goes back to the Old Testament, which I think is a really strong method for proving Scripture for a couple of reasons. First, using Scripture to interpret Scripture is just the right way to do any exegesis. Second, using the Old Testament shows that God is consistent all through history in that salvation has always been by faith.

V. 1-2 – First of all, let me just point out that Paul isn’t winning any friends here. He starts out by saying, “You foolish Galatians!” This is sort of like me looking at someone and saying, “Hey dummy!” The Greek word there, *anoetoi,* literally means “unintelligent, without knowledge, or illogical”. He’s telling them that they are illogical and not very smart for falling into such a fallacy. Paul starts a series of questions here. He starts by asking a question that strikes at the heart of the thesis of his letter. “Did you receive the Spirit by works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?” By this he means, “Were you saved by what you did to earn it or what you heard and believed someone did for you?” Another way to ask the question is, “Is your conversion through Moses or Jesus?”

The underlying sense I get to this question is a reflection on what a person bases his or her reality. If I am saved, what did I experience in order to come to a salvation experience?

On another note, Paul uses a very specific word when he is asking the Galatians about how they went astray. He asks them, “who has bewitched you?”

**Bible Word Study – “bewitched”**

**βασκαίνω** 1aor. ἐβάσκανα; originally *cause harm with unfavorable words*; in the NT *bewitch, cast the evil eye on, put a spell on* someone (probably used ironically in GA 3.1); figuratively *cunningly deceive* (possibly GA 3.1)[[10]](#footnote-10)

**940** **βασκαίνω** [*baskaino* /bas·**kah**·ee·no/] v. Akin to 5335; TDNT 1:594; TDNTA 102; GK 1001; AV translates as “bewitch” once. **1** to speak ill of one, to slander, traduce him. **2** to bring evil on one by feigning praise or an evil eye. **3** to charm, to bewitch.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Pulling no punches, Paul calls this doctrine that the Galatians have embraced exactly for what it is. He calls it out as demonic. The word there in Greek is *baskaino,* which seems to be rooted in a sense of having occult origins. The sense that is intended here is a deception that comes from a use of magic.

V. 3 continues the exploration of the first question by asking a deeper question. He asks the reader, “Having begun by the Spirit [assuming conversion has occurred], are you perfected by the flesh?” In other words, why would we be saved by the perfect Spirit of God and be perfected (more and more disciplined) by observing rituals that we perceive as having the power to make us “more saved” or “closer” to the Lord? This is a question of completion.

***Philippians 1:6 (NASB95)***

**6** *For I am* confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus

What Jesus starts, He will perfect. The Law was never meant for discipleship, but for helping the Israelites know what sin looked like. Recall that the terms used for “works of the Law” refer to the things that people did in order to be acceptable to the Lord. Jesus did everything that we needed in order for us to be acceptable to the Lord, so everything else that we try to are works in the flesh (in our humanity and our own effort). We cannot perfect ourselves by doing certain things.

V. 4 – Here, Paul raises a question about persecution that the Galatians have endured. “Did you suffer so many things in vain…?” It would appear that the Judaizers, given their role in this letter, may have taken a part in the persecution of the Galatian church to which Paul refers here. The question he asks here basically has the sense of asking, “Why would you revert to a false Judaic faith after suffering for Christianity?”

V. 5 – Paul then asks a question about the miracles that God works. Does he work those miracles by human effort or any effort of the Law, or does he do them as a result of faith in Christ?

This whole section regards the experiences that the Galatian church experienced while engaging faith. There were two mode of engaging faith that were in question. One mode was wrong and one mode was right. The wrong mode, as you might have guessed is by relying on human effort. The experiences that come from human effort are as temporary as people are. The right mode, reliance on the Spirit of Jesus, is eternal. The most powerful experiences in our lives are the ones that change us.

There are a few of factors that change people at their very core. Among these factors is the people that we come into contact with. I can think of just a handful of people who have changed me in ways that are permanent. I find myself taking on personality characteristics, ways of talking, figures of speech, and the like that I became accustomed to by being around these people. I have ways of thinking, acting, and reacting that I learned from others. People change us in some really good ways. My dad, a college professor, my high school band director, my father-in-law(s), etc. are examples. These are just a few people who have shifted me at my core in ways that I can actually see and feel today.

Experiences such as my time in the Marine Corps changed me. My time as a married man has changed me dramatically. The single most dramatically changing experience has been my time as a believer, however.

While we say in the church that we can’t rely on emotional experiences, I think that there is a difference between emotional and Spiritual experience. Experiences are as important to shaping our own lives as they are to shaping those around us. Children are shaped by the experiences of their parents. Churches are shaped by the experiences of the staff that run them. Businesses are shaped by the people who work there. The people who work at a business are shaped by their bosses. It’s a cycle that goes on and on. What is truly amazing is to hear the stories of influential people when they talk about the people who influenced them. The story of Mordecai Ham comes immediately to mind. Long story short: two young men were in attendance at a church meeting by Mr. Ham one night. One of them gave his life to the Lord and began a walk in ministry. That young man was Billy Graham. No one knows Mordecai Ham, but the legacy of his ministry lived on in Billy Graham. The experiences that shaped Mordecai Ham and made him who he was as the Holy Spirit molded him into an evangelist led him to a place of influence. Billy Graham has influenced millions and his influence continues to this day in his son, Franklin. Spiritual experience becomes a legacy of faith as generations will be influenced by those who came decades before.

***Galatians 3:6-14 (NIV)***

**6** Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. **7** Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. **8** The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, “All the nations will be blessed in you.” **9** So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

**10** For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.” **11** Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, “bThe righteous man shall live by faith.” **12** However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, “He who practices them shall live by them.” **13** Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”— **14** in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.[[12]](#footnote-12)

This passage continues Paul’s argument that it is faith and not works that justifies a person. He appeals to history as it is recorded in the Old Testament to further drive home his point.

V. 6-7 – Paul goes all the way back to Abraham in order to have this discussion. He quotes Genesis 15:6 where Moses records that Abraham “believed in the Lord and He reckoned it to him as righteousness”.

***Genesis 15:6 (NIV)***

6Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Recall that Abraham grew up pagan in a pagan land before God called him out of that land. So Abraham, as the very first called by God, is referred to as the Father of the Jews. Being first in our line of faith on this earth, God promises Abraham that “all nations will be blessed through” him. We should also note that, while Paul constantly refers back to Abraham and the fact that God declared him righteous, he did so at a time when there was no Torah just yet. In fact, Abraham was declared righteous even before he was circumcised.

***Genesis 12:3 (NIV)***

**3** And I will bless those who bless you,

And the one who curses you I will curse.

And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

V. 9 – Since Abraham is the Father of the Jews (and Christians for that matter), AND since his faith was credited as righteousness (not his observance of laws since Torah cam after God validated Abraham’s faith as his righteousness), all who come after Abraham as believers through faith are also blessed as Abraham is. This is an interesting connection to the Jewish faith of thousands of years ago.

Put another way, the logic goes like this: (1) Abraham was justified by faith (Gal. 3:6–7); (2) Gentiles are justified in Abraham because all nations, that is Gentiles, will be blessed in connection with Abraham (v. 8; from Gen. 18:18); (3) therefore, since Gentiles are justified in Abraham’s promise, they must be justified as Abraham was: that is, by faith, not works of the law.[[13]](#footnote-13)

V. 10 carries some really interesting language regarding the word “curse” here. The concept of a curse in the Bible is based in the idea that it is a denunciation of sin, a judgment of sin, or that a person suffering the consequences of sin by God’s judgment. In the Hebrew world, the spoken word is more than just words. It is an active agent. When God speaks, his words are more than just words. God literally spoke everything that exists into being. Jesus is referred to as the Logos, or the Word of God. When God speaks a curse, it’s a really big deal. He isn’t just telling everyone that the one cursed is “stupid” or a “poopy head”. He’s saying that this person is, in a very real sense, under His judgment for sins committed. To be under that negative judgment by God has eternal consequences that no one reading this commentary wants to be at the wrong end of! Jesus spoke a curse on a fig tree and it died. Jesus spoke miracles into people’s lives and they were healed. To be blessed or cursed by God is a big deal. The Law of Moses was never intended to be an agent of salvation in the first place. The Law was only ever intended to point out sin. It was intended to be a pronouncement of guilt, or curse. Put another way, “*since* Abraham was declared acceptable with God on the basis of faith, then it follows that those who opt for the “law system” are living under a curse since they have not followed Abraham.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

**Bible Word Study – “curse”**

**κατάρα, ας, ἡ** (1) as a legal action, of a supernatural power *curse* (GA 3.10); (2) as human utterance wishing evil on someone *imprecation, curse* (JA 3.10); (3) as the object of a curse *something accursed* (GA 3.13)[[15]](#footnote-15)

**826** אָרַר (*ʾā·rǎr*): v.; ≡ Str 779; TWOT 168—LN 33.470–33.475 (qal) **curse**, place a curse, i.e., invoke harm or injury by means of a statement, by means of the power of a deity (Ge 12:3); (qal pass.) **be cursed**, be under a curse (Ge 3:14); (nif) **be cursed** (Mal 3:9+); (piel) **bring a curse** (Ge 5:29; Nu 5:18, 19, 22, 24,27+); (hof) **bring a curse upon one** (Nu 22:6+), note: some parse as qal pass.[[16]](#footnote-16)

V. 11-12 – Again, Paul reminds the Galatians that no one who relies on the Law is justified before God since those who are declared righteous by God are so declared as a result of their faith in God. Perfect performance of the Law in the life of a Jew was not necessarily expected. There were provisions made for people who could not perform it perfectly. In fact, the Torah anticipates that people will fall short of perfect obedience and makes provisions for restoring fellowship with God: they have to repent and sacrifice. What these verses mean, in my opinion is that the person who relies on the Law for salvation is cursed. The law brings with it an inherent pronunciation of sin when a person does something to break it. The pronunciation of sin damages the relationship he or she has with the Lord, but that relationship can be restored.

V. 13-14 – A person who breaks one part of the Law is guilty of breaking it all (James 2:10). A person who breaks the Law is liable for breaking the law and has forfeit his or her life. The Law, in other words, becomes a curse. Jesus takes on the curse, or more plainly stated, bears of the consequences/curse of our sin for us. This is what we refer to as a substitutionary atonement. Jesus became the curse for us so that we could receive the blessing given to Abraham and that we could receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

**Bible Word Study – “redeemed”**

**1805** **ἐξαγοράζω** [*exagorazo* /ex·ag·or·**ad**·zo/] v. From 1537 and 59; TDNT 1:124; TDNTA 19; GK 1973; Four occurrences; AV translates as “redeem” four times. **1** to redeem. 1a by payment of a price to recover from the power of another, to ransom, buy off. 1b metaph. of Christ freeing the elect from the dominion of the Mosaic Law at the price of his vicarious death. **2** to buy up, to buy up for one’s self, for one’s use. 2a to make wise and sacred use of every opportunity for doing good, so that zeal and well doing are as it were the purchase money by which we make the time our own.[[17]](#footnote-17)

**“to buy”**

**59** **ἀγοράζω** [*agorazo* /ag·or·**ad**·zo/] v. From 58; TDNT 1:124; TDNTA 19; GK 60; 31 occurrences; AV translates as “buy” 28 times, and “redeem” three times. **1** to be in the market place, to attend it. **2** to do business there, buy or sell. **3** of idle people: to haunt the market place, lounge there.[[18]](#footnote-18)

The word we know in English as “redeemed” is the Greek word *exagorazo.* It literally means “to buy out from”. This means that I buy something from someone else to remove it from that person’s presence. To redeem something means that a trade is made, but the trade costs the person trying to redeem an item. The word carries with it a sense of deliverance from something. In other words, if I saw a dog about to be killed, I could offer to buy the dog from the person about to kill the dog. This would, in essence, save the dog’s life. The same principle applies to the concept of Jesus redeeming humankind.

In this sense, we see Jesus buying humankind from the slavery that we were under to the Law and to sin. The price Jesus paid for humans was his own life. What does it mean that Jesus “became a curse”? Well, Jesus died the death of a sinner when he had never sinned. When Jesus took the place of sinners on the cross, he essentially traded places. If I am guilty of a crime and a person were to trade places with me, that person would take on the consequence of the crime that I had committed. Jesus, being innocent and sinless, was an unblemished sacrifice that was required by God for any blood sacrifice. The fact that he was divine meant that he could have the sinless nature and resurrect at the end of the ordeal. Jesus, in his final act on the cross, ended the need for the Law to convict people of sin. The Holy Spirit seals believers and places the Law on our hearts, meaning that we have the ability, through the Holy Spirit, to know sin when we see it. This is how the Holy Spirit fulfills the Law.

So at the end of the day, Gentiles are brought into the covenant people without having to become Jews. We don’t have to join a nationalistic movement. We join a Spiritual movement.

**Galatians 3:15-18 (NASB95)**

**15** Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is *only* a man’s covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it. **16** Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, “And to your seed,” that is, Christ. **17** What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. **18** For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

Paul has made it clear from his arguments in the previous verses that Abraham was justified (saved) by faith. Since Abraham was saved by faith and he is the father of all nations (including us), we are all saved by faith, as well. To avoid the argument of some who might come along and claim that the Law changed this original covenant that God made with Abraham, Paul explains that covenants cannot be simply set aside or changed at random. This would be common knowledge in that day and age when Roman covenants (or wills) were treated much the same way.

V. 15 – The word for “covenant” in this verse is the Greek *diatheke*. This word is not referring to a covenant by God to His people, but is simply making an analogy to the human oaths/wills of that day. The Jewish New Testament translates V. 15 as follows:

15Brothers, let me make an analogy from everyday life: when someone swears an oath, no one else can set it aside or add to it.

V. 16 – The emphasis on “seed” and not on “seeds” here is to emphasize that the blessings promised to Abraham would come to fruition through Jesus. The Jewish use of the word for “seed” means “posterity”. Paul uses this term to connect us to Jesus and to the promise of Abraham. Again, reference to a Jewish perspective will help to clarify this.

From the Jewish New Testament Commentary (JNTC):

(1) Israel is God’s son.

(2) The Messiah is God’s Son.

(3) Israel is descended from Avraham, is Avraham’s seed, the children of Avraham.

(4) The true children of Avraham are those who trust.

(5) Those who trust in Yeshua are united with him by that trust—they are part of his Body, one with him, one, singular.

(6) In the thinking of the *Tanakh*, a king represents his people to the point of being one with them; and the king of Israel is treated as representing Israel, standing for them, being one with them.

(7) The Messiah Yeshua is the King of Israel, the promised Son of David, one with Israel.

(8) By trusting, Gentiles become identified with and in some sense a part of Israel.

(9) All of God’s promises reach their culmination and fulfillment in the Messiah, who is Avraham’s “seed.”

All nine of these truths lead to this verse, and this verse leads to these nine truths, each of which is expressed at greater length elsewhere in Galatians and the rest of the Bible (see, *inter alia*, Hosea 11:1; Mt 2:15&N; Yn 17:20–26; Ro 9:6–13&NN; 2C 1:20&N; and below, 3:26–4:7&NN, 4:21–31&NN). [[19]](#footnote-19)

V. 17 – The Law doesn’t fulfill the covenant that God made with the Israelites. Jesus is that fulfillment of the covenant. The fact that the death and resurrection of deity is what fulfills the covenant is what makes the covenant take effect forever. What does the 430 years mean? The common knowledge of the day is that there were 430 years between Abraham and Moses. Moses represents the Law to Jews, so this would mean that there were 430 years between the Abrahamic covenant and the giving of the Law.

V. 18 – The basis of the inheritance (covenant) is the promise of God. God promised to give the Israelites land, nationhood, and future blessings. So this Law, which came so long after Abraham, cannot be invalidated. The Law, which did come and did provide a much needed function among the Hebrew nation still did not take away the promises that God had pronounced to Abraham. Those who commit themselves to the Law of Moses completely invalidate what God pronounced to Abraham.

***Genesis 12:1-3 (NASB95)***

**1** Now the Lord said to Abram,

“Go forth from your country,

And from your relatives

And from your father’s house,

To the land which I will show you;

**2** And I will make you a great nation,

And I will bless you,

And make your name great;

And so cyou shall be a blessing;

**3** And I will bless those who bless you,

And the one who curses you I will curse.

And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

V. 19 – Here’s a good question: “Why was the Law ever put into place if salvation is through faith?” The Law was given because of transgressions.

**Bible Word Study – “transgressions”**

**3847** **παράβασις** [*parabasis* /par·**ab**·as·is/] n f. From 3845; TDNT 5:739; TDNTA 772; GK 4126; Seven occurrences; AV translates as “transgression” six times, and “breaking” once. **1** a going over. **2** metaph. a disregarding, violating. 2a of the Mosaic law. 2b the breach of a definite, promulgated, ratified law. 2c to create transgressions, i.e. that sins might take on the character of transgressions, and thereby the consciousness of sin be intensified and the desire for redemption be aroused.[[20]](#footnote-20)

The word for “transgression” here carries with it a sense of “overstepping boundaries” or being disobedient. This is much akin to the concept of sin, but the word for “sin” in the Greek language is different. Why not use the typical word for sin, which is *hamartia*? The term here for “transgression” carries with it a sense of a “positive transgression”. A positive transgression would be the kind of thing that would serve to highlight the positive rather than the native. In other words, if I commit a “positive transgression”, I do something that is clearly wrong, but rather than to be pointed to the fact that I did something wrong (the negative), I am pointed to the right thing that I was supposed to do. The “transgression” feels very much to me as if it is an “overstepping” that leads a person to a response in faith that seeks to correct the behavior where sin may not lead to such a response. When I “transgress” God’s expectations, I agree with Him about my transgression, turn away from it, and move forward in righteousness. When sinners are caught up in sin, they aren’t necessarily convicted of it until the Holy Spirit illuminates that sin in the person’s life.

***Romans 5:20 (NASB95)***

**20** aThe Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

When “transgression increases”, awareness of God’s expectations increases. The function of the Law was to increase awareness of God’s expectations for holy living for His people. Sinful people are referred to as sinners. That is their identity. Righteous people are known as saints. I think it is a good thing to differentiate between transgression and sin so as to differentiate between the sinner and the saint. It is possible to be a saved believer and transgress (overstep the bounds of) God’s expectations.

The original promise given to Abraham (cf. Gen. 12:2–3; 17:1–8) had within it eight separate promises: (1) offspring, (2) blessing for Abraham, (3) a great name, (4) blessing or cursing, depending on how one treated Abraham, (5) occupancy of the Promised Land, (6) blessing of Gentiles, (7) God being God to his people, and (8) kings descending from Abraham. This promise, I believe, was administered, in the history of God’s dealing with humans, in three separate covenantal arrangements: (1) the covenant of circumcision from Abraham to Moses, (2) the covenant of Moses from Moses to Christ, and (3) the new covenant from Christ to the end of time. From this brief sketch on “how to read the Bible,” we can see the crucial role Abraham played in being the one with whom God set up his promise and began his covenantal arrangements.[[21]](#footnote-21)

***Galatians 3:19-29 (NASB95)***

**19** Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.

20 Now a mediator is not for one *party only;* whereas God is *only* one.

21 Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law.

22 But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

**23** But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.

24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a atutor.

26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.[[22]](#footnote-22)

This is an extremely complicated passage, and probably the most important passage when it comes to dealing with Paul’s argument against the Judaizers. This is where we gain a real understanding of what it is that Paul is saying. This passage is a much-debated passage, so all that we can do is break it down as best we can and try to see what the Bible says. Much care must be taken to not read into the passage. Scot McKnight provides a great outline for VV. 19-25 as follows:

I. The Question About the Historical Purpose of the Law (vv. 19–20)

A. The question (v. 19a)

B. The answer (vv. 19b–20)

1. The purpose of the law (v. 19b)

2. The temporal limitations of the law (v. 19c)

3. The circumstances of the giving of the law (vv. 19d–20)

II. The Question About the Historical Function of the Law (vv. 21–25)

A. The question (v. 21a)

B. The answer (v. 21b)

C. The reason for the answer (vv. 21c–25)

1. The inability of the law (v. 21c)

2. The function of the law in history (v. 22a)

3. The function of the promises in history (v. 22b)

4. The explanation of the function of the law (vv. 23–25)

a. Time elements of the law (v. 23)

b. Effect of the law (v. 24a)

c. Result of the law’s effect (v. 24b)

d. Suspension of the law (v. 25)[[23]](#footnote-23)

The bottom line is that the Law was never intended to be a means by which a Jew could achieve salvation. As Paul asks the question as to what the Law was intended for, there are three main answers that Christians usually give when they are asked. Some Christians see the Law as having been totally done away with by Jesus and the new era of the Holy Spirit has come. A second view would contend that the Law was a first revelation by God, but it was an incomplete revelation until Christ came as the full revelation. This second view suggests that, while Christians aren’t under the Law, it does lend to the Christian faith some very good principles for living. A third view would suggest that the Law should still be performed, but it can’t be performed correctly without the Holy Spirit.

V. 19-20 – to anyone who argued with Paul’s assertion that the Law could never bring salvation, Paul answers with the question, “Why the Law?” What he’s asking here is a question that seems intended to head off this challenge. He answers his own question by answering that the Law was a means for checking sins. So it says that the Law was “added because of transgressions”. This seems like a strange way to word this, but to clear it up we can ask the question, “What came first? Sin or the Law?” Obviously sin was in effect in humanity before the Law. So the Law was “added” so that humanity could identify God’s expectations for righteous behavior. Mcknight notes,

“Paul states that the law does not give life (vv. 21–22) but is a teacher (v. 24); elsewhere he says that “through the law we become conscious of sin” (Rom. 3:20; cf. 7:7) and that when there is no law there is no sin (4:15; cf. 5:13). Romans 5:20 states that “the law was added so that the trespass might increase” (cf. 7:13). Thus, I conclude with many who see the *purpose of the law* as being that it was given in order to reveal certain kinds of behavior as sinful.”[[24]](#footnote-24)

The Law was NEVER intended to be a permanent fixture in the Jewish community. It was put into place “until” (Greek *achris)* the “seed” of Abraham, which was Jesus, came into the picture. The Law was also only to be a temporary fixture until the “seed”, which is Messiah, came into the world. Law was also given through angels and entrusted to Moses as the mediator of the Law. Part of the Law’s function was to allow people to know what sin is. When Christ’s work was complete, the Holy Spirit came as an Advocate that would help God’s people to know what sin is.

V. 20 seems to suggest the following according to the commentators that I have read: since the promise of Abraham was given directly to Abraham by God without a mediator, the promise is superior to the Law, which was given to the people though the mediation of Moses. What seems to be the inference here is that any arrangement between two people that has mediators is inferior to an arrangement that is directly from the Lord to His people.

V. 21-22 – Paul goes on to ask another logical question. Does this mean that the Law is opposed to the promise? The answer is basically, “Well, no, but the law cannot give life. If it could, then all we would have to do is follow the rules”. This would have been pretty offensive the Jew of that day since they had elevated the Law to a status of being able to redeem people. The Law was a reminder that the world was “locked up under the control of sin”. The Torah itself said that it was Abraham’s faith that made him righteous and not any written code. The world was held captive by sin and the Law described what that sin looked like. When the world realizes its captivity by way of the Law, it should logically react by trying to give up trying to please God through self-effort. This means that the only option for reconciliation with God would be through Jesus.

VV. 23-25 – Continuing with the “prison motif”, Paul uses a couple of unique figures of speech to describe the Law. Paul simply means in V. 23 that mankind was under the law until Jesus came. When the world was able to rely on Messiah, the Law was no longer needed for reconciliation to the Lord. Again, Paul is talking about two distinct time periods. There was a time when the Law was effective and necessary. There came a time when Law would step aside for faith in the “seed” of Abraham, which is Messiah. V. 24 likens the Law to a guardian that kept watch over mankind until the coming of Jesus. This gives a sense of the Law being that which could guard God’s people from sin by reminding them of it until the coming of Jesus. Another rendering of the word that is translated as “guardian” is “tutor”. Notice that Paul points out that the Law was the “tutor” or “guardian” to lead people to Christ so that they could then be justified by faith. V. 25 finishes up these verses by noting that the Law has been suspended since we now have a Messiah on which we can place our faith.

A very loose analogy that we can use to describe the relationship and dynamic of the Law and faith can be found in today’s technology. Pick anything that we use today that has sort of “evolved” in its form. Take a typewriter, for example. Typewriters used to be this archaic thing that we used to do word processing. If you messed up, you had to start all over or get one of those little correction strips to blot out the mistake. Today, we have computers. I’m typing as we speak on a Mac. If I make a mistake, all I have to do is backspace and it’s gone. Typing is faster and easier. So the point of the computer and the first typewriter in word processing is to put words down so that people can read them. The goal is the same. However, the Mac is obviously an upgrade compared to the first typewriter. The first typewriter did what my Mac can do, but the Mac can do far more!

**Bible Word Study – “guardian/tutor”**

**παιδαγωγός, οῦ, ὁ** (*paidagōgos*) (1) literally *boy leader*, a trusted attendant who supervised the conduct and morals of a boy before he came of age *guardian, trainer, instructor*; (2) figuratively in the NT; (a) as a spiritual *instructor* (1C 4.15); (b) metaphorically, as the historical function of the Mosaic law under the old covenant *supervisor, guide, one in control* (GA 3.24, 25)[[25]](#footnote-25)

Either way, the sense of the word is basically one that suggests that the Law guards or teaches how to live life until Jesus could come. In a sense, the guardian and the tutor is the same thing. In ancient Greece a *paidagôgos* was a slave who conducted a boy to and from school. It is therefore not surprising that the KJV renders the phrase, “the law was our schoolmaster to bring us [Jews] unto Christ.”[[26]](#footnote-26)

The Mac (or any computer) is what the typewriter always aspired to be. To get to the laptop computer, the typewriter had to come first. Would we have today’s technology without having yesterday’s technology go build on? Well, would humankind have been able to comprehend faith in Christ without having first been tutored IN faith by the Law? Everything that the Law ever aspired to be or do is found in Jesus, but now we have a perfect salvation.

**Galatians 3:26-4:7**

VV. 26-27 – So Paul describes the adoption that comes from our faith in Jesus. Being “baptized” means to be immersed. To be immersed implies that the one being immersed absorbs some of the qualities of that which he or she is immersed into. Since we are baptized into Jesus, we absorb some of the qualities of Jesus and become changed into His image. Being baptized into Jesus isn’t just about getting wet, but being changed. We change our old worldly clothes and clothe ourselves (cover ourselves) with Jesus. In the Roman society when a youth came of age he was given a special toga, which admitted him to the full rights of the family and state and indicated he was a grown-up son.[[27]](#footnote-27) So the old “covering” of the Law is put aside and the righteousness of Jesus is put on.

VV. 28-29 – There is a prayer that was spoken by free Jewish men in their morning prayers. This prayer may be one that has been handed down for a long time. The prayer goes something like this:

“Praised be you, Adonai our God, King of the universe, because you have not made me a Gentile.

“Praised be you, Adonai our God, King of the universe, because you have not made me a woman.

“Praised be you, Adonai our God, King of the universe, because you have not made me a slave.”

Paul regularly spoke against Jewish nationalism in order to become a Christian. When Paul speaks of “neither Jew nor Greek” is saying that humans are treated in light of God’s love and not on their cultural past. This passage also assumes the belief that women are inferior to men in the first century culture. This was obviously a Jewish belief as it is seen in the prayer above. It is clear that Paul did not believe in such a belief playing out in a religious context. This type of sexism was obviously not to become the expectation for relationships between men and women.

These verses speak of unity in faith. All believers in Jesus are one body in Christ. There are no other human distinctions. Even the distinction between Jew and Gentile go away, which was probably really hard for the Jews to take. All have an equal standing before God. There is not one group, gender, or social status that has any spiritual superiority over another. Kings and slaves are equal in Christ. As believers, we are all Abraham’s descendants, or “seed”. We are all heirs of the promise that God gave to Abraham.

**Chapter Four**

***Galatians 4:1-7 (NASB95)***

**1** Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything,

2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father.

3 So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the belemental things of the world.

4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,

5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

**Bible Word Study – “child”**

**νήπιος, ία, ον** usually substantivally; (1) as a very young child *infant* (1C 13.11); plural *babes, infants* (MT 21.16); (2) figuratively, of adults; positively, of those unspoiled by worldly learning *childlike, innocent, simple people* (MT 11.25); negatively, of immature adults *childish, inexperienced people* (EP 4.14)[[28]](#footnote-28)

There are a number of words used in the New Testament to describe a child. The word used by Paul here (*nepios*) is one that is used less frequently than other such as *teknon* or *paidion*, which are also Greek words for “child”. The word *nepion* is one that is used on contrast to the word *telieos*, which would mean “full grown”. That said, the emphasis of this word is not one of age, but of maturity. A *nepion* is a person who is “childlike”. Now this may very well be an actual child or infant, but *nepion* seems to carry with it a sense of inexperience in life. So Paul is referring to an heir in V. 1 as a person who little life experience and is a bit immature. Now, the “child” is compared to a “slave”. The word here is the most common word used in the New Testament for “slave”.

**Bible Word Study – “slave”**

**1528** I. δοῦλος (*doulos*), ου (*ou*), ὁ (*ho*): n.masc.; ≡ DBLHebr 6269; Str 1401 & 1400; TDNT 2.261—LN 87.76 **slave**, servant (Mt 8:9; Mk 10:44; Jn 8:34; 15:15; Ro 6:20; 1Co 7:21; Gal 3:28; Eph 6:5; 1Ti 6:1; Phm 16)[[29]](#footnote-29)

Many slaves in the New Testament were enslaved by their own choice. Perhaps they had a debt to pay off that they couldn’t afford, so they agreed to work their debt off in service to the person to whom they owed the debt. They were enslave due to their inability to pay. It appears to me that the main sense of V. 1 is to suggest that both the child/*nepios* and the slave/*doulos* are both under authority because of their inability. This verse is FURTHER confusing because the “heir” is also referred to as “owner” of everything.

**Bible Word Study – “owner”**

**3261** κύριος (*kyrios*), ου (*ou*), ὁ (*ho*): n.masc.; ≡ DBLHebr 3363, 3378, 123, 1251; Str 2962; TDNT 3.1039—**1.** LN 12.9 **Lord**, supernatural master over all (Mt 1:20; 1Co 1:3); **2.** LN 57.12 **owner**, one who owns or controls estate land and property such as slaves (Lk 19:33; Jn 13:16; Gal 4:1); **3.** LN 37.51 **ruler**, master, lord, one who exercises authority over (Mt 6:24); **4.** LN 87.53 **sir**, a title of respect (Mt 13:27); **5.** LN 53.62 say that one belongs to the Lord, see 3951; **6.** LN 87.56 honor depends on master’s judgment (Ro 14:4+), see 5112[[30]](#footnote-30)

The word for “owner” is the same word used for “Lord” or “master”. So we have this heir who is immature and subject to another even though he or she is the owner of everything. It brings to mind the rich person who is enslaved to his or her material things. It also brings to mind a young person who has inherited a vast fortune, but is too young to manage it his or herself.

V. 2 – This heir is under the authority of a guardian (*epitropous)* or a manager/governor (*oikonomous*) until a date set by the heir’s father. “When you’re old enough, you can handle the money I’m giving you, but until then, this person will help to guide you”. The “date set by the father” has an interesting usage. The Greek word there is *prothesmias*.

**Bible Word Study – “appointed time”**

**4287** **προθεσμία** [*prothesmios* /proth·**es**·mee·os/] adj. From 4253 and a derivative of 5087; GK 4607; AV translates as “time appointed” once. **1** set beforehand, appointed or determined beforehand, prearranged.[[31]](#footnote-31)

In Athenian law the term limited for bringing actions and prosecutions. Προθεσμίας νόμος *a statute of limitations*. It was also applied to the time allowed a defendant for paying damages, after the expiration of which, if he had not paid, he was called ὑπερήμερος, or ἐκπρόθεσμος or ὑπερπρόθεσμος *one who had gone over his day of payment*.[[32]](#footnote-32)

So *prothesmias* is a legal term that speaks very specifically about a time that will expire. There is a limit on the time that the heir is under the guardian. This reminds us of the *paidogogos,* to which we referred earlier, who watched over his person, and trustees who protected his estate. This was true until he came of age as a son, an age that varied in the Jewish, Grecian, and Roman societies. Under Roman law the age of maturity for a child was set by his father and involved a ceremonial donning of the *toga virilis* and his formal acknowledgement as son and heir.[[33]](#footnote-33)

V. 3 – Paul says that, just as the above scenario suggests, we were all children (*nepioi)* held in bondage (slavery) under the elemental things of the world. This is clearly an analogy to the time that Jews were perverting the law as necessary for salvation.

V. 4 – At the right time, God sent Jesus into the world. Jesus himself was born under the Law. The Jewish New Testament interprets that verse as follows:

***Galatians 4:4-5 (CJB)***

but when the appointed time arrived, God sent forth his Son. He was born from a woman, born into a culture in which legalistic perversion of the *Torah* was the norm, 5so that he might redeem those in subjection to this legalism and thus enable us to be made God’s sons.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Being “born under the Law” means that he was born during the time when *Torah* was abused and used as a means to salvation, which was not as it was intended. This was so that He could associate with those under the Law and bring them out from under the bondage of the Law by his sacrifice. This sacrifice was so that we might all receive adoption as “sons”. So just as the father in Roman society could choose the time that a child could become an adult son, God chose the time for Jesus to transition the world from bondage under the Law to true sonship under grace. It was a very specific time when God had made all of the provisions necessary for history to converge at a certain crossroads. Rome had developed to a point at which communication was optimal for the time. There was a common language (Greek) across the empire with which to communicate, the monotheistic religion of the Jews had adequately spread across the empire.

V. 5 – Jesus was the one who kept the Law perfectly so that he could present the unblemished sacrifice for sin. Jesus was born into a society that was accustomed to perverting the Law so that he could better represent that society at the cross. So as “sons”, non-Jews inherit the promise of Abraham just as Jews inherited it.

V. 6 – The result of sonship is the inheritance of the Holy Spirit of God’s Son into the lives of those who believe.

V. 7 – The final end of all of this gift of the Holy Spirit is the release from the slavery of the Law and adoption as an heir through God.

**Implications of “sonship”**

First of all, we have to be careful to describe what “sonship” means. It doesn’t have anything to do with masculinity. In other words, it doesn’t leave females out when it talks of “sonship”. The term “sons of God” has to do with relationship rather than gender. The term “son” in the Old Testament, and even in the culture of the early church, would suggest inheritance, favor, and privilege. When Paul says there is “neither male nor female”, what he is saying is that when it comes to being in the family of believers, there is no distinction between males and females. Men are not favored over women in God’s economy. Those of more affluent social classes aren’t favored over those of less means. Skin color or race isn’t a deciding factor as to whom God values. To be a “son of God” means that God has adopted a person (whether male or female, regardless of skin color or ethnicity, and no matter the social class) into His family by his authority and sovereignty. So the first implication of being a “son of God” is this intimacy. We can draw near to Him and He will draw near to us (James 4:8).

The second implication is that we are free from the curse of the Law. We have inherited the promise of Abraham and that means that we can be free in Christ rather than in a set of rules. We no longer owe our lives FOR sin. Rather we give Jesus our lives freely because He gave His for us freely. We no longer need the guardian of the Law and can be led by God’s Holy Spirit. Just as a parent will eventually stop running alongside of the bicycle as kids learn to ride, and wait at the bottom of the slide to stop them, and stop riding with them as they are learning to drive, God turns us loose to allow the Spirit to guide us. There is no longer any fear of God’s wrath on our sin. There is no more guilt of being a sinner.

The third implication is that we are led by the Holy Spirit. In Romans 8:14, Paul says that any who are led by the Spirit are sons of God. This is as opposed to those without Christ being led by their wants, desires, and emotions. Being led by the Holy Spirit has a whole host of other implications to include being sealed for eternity, being gifted to serve the Lord, and being guided in righteousness.

**Galatians 4:8-20 (NIV)**

8Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. 9But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? 10You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! 11I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

12I plead with you, brothers and sisters, become like me, for I became like you. You did me no wrong. 13As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you, 14and even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. 15Where, then, is your blessing of me now? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. 16Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?

17Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may have zeal for them. 18It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always, not just when I am with you. 19My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, 20how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!

For the purposes of this commentary, I will summarize a little here in this passage and not go into too much detail. Paul is saying the same thing as he has been in previous passages, so there isn’t much new theology here. So Paul continues his arguments, but this time he uses an emotional appeal of sorts. He continues in V. 8 to discuss that fact that the Galatians, in their old lives, were slaves to paganism. In V. 9, he reemphasizes that they are known by God and should know better than to turn back to those pagan influences. Paul notes is V. 10 that Jews observe an awful lot of feasts and special occasions (Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, for example) and that those who are giving their lives over the Jesus (Christians) are starting to take on those Jewish customs. It is Paul’s fear (11) that he has wasted his time in preaching the gospel to them if they are just going to revert to Judaism. Paul encourages the Galatians to become like him because Paul became like them. The Galatians were not living under the Law. As a Christian, Paul did not live his life according to the Law as he one did when he lived primarily under Judaism. Now the Christians, who were Gentiles, were placing themselves under the Law once they became believers. It’s a strange flipping of roles that Paul was noting. Jews were leaving the Law that they lived under behind. Gentiles who had never lived under the Law were picking it up as a way of life.

VV. 13-16 – Paul speaks of a time when he preached to the Galatians “because of an illness” (13). Perhaps Paul was in the region of Galatia and had to stop a journey there because he fell ill. As he was recovering he found himself in a place that needed evangelism and discipleship, so he stayed. The Galatians didn’t look at him as a burden because of his illness, but looked at him as a messenger from the Lord (14). So when they heard the truth of Christ as a result of Paul’s visit, they cared for him and regarded him highly. He asks them why they are now turning against him (15). In a bold figure of speech, he even says that they would have torn their eyes our for him and given them to him, but now they consider him with hostility now that he is telling them that they are straying from the truth of the gospel.

VV. 17-20 – Paul continues chastising them by pointing out that the Judaizers are the ones “evangelizing” now. They are trying to win the Galatians over to their point of view (17), which is that they have to add the Law to their faith in Christ. This is pulling away from a true saving faith. The Judaizers, according to Paul, are trying hard to drive a wedge between Paul and them so that the Galatians would have that same regard for their false message that they had for Paul when he was with them. Everyone wants to be desired and it is flattering to be chased by someone even if they one chasing us is trying to take us somewhere that will hurt us.

Paul uses an interesting figure of speech in comparing himself to a pregnant woman in the pains of childbirth. Just as a mother endures a great deal of pain in childbirth, Paul states that he is enduring pain for the Galatians until such a time as they could be “delivered” from the false teachings of the Judaizers (19). His whole goal is to be able to relate to them positively in a form of discipleship that teaches them strong Christian standards rather than having to correct their beliefs because they have abandoned what he taught them in the first place.

**Galatians 4:21-31**

Paul uses a story that the Jewish perspective that he may have taught to them at some point. He uses the story of Ishmael and Isaac to illustrate what it means to live under the Law or in the Spirit. Now, the Galatians hadn’t yet submitted themselves to the Law (21), but they were getting closer and closer to it. He returns to the story of Abraham’s children. Paul reminds them that Abraham had two sons (22), one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. He clearly had more than two in his life, but the two in this illustration are the ones he was focusing on, so he only refers to the two here. Isaac was born to Sarah, the free woman, and Ishmael was born to Hagar, the slave. According to custom, the status of the mother was passed on to the child. If a mother was a slave, the child was born a slave. This was just one distinction between the two sons. Another distinction was in the manner of birth (23). One was a child of promise from the Lord. One was born by natural means. Isaac came to be born by supernatural intervention on the part of the Lord. Hagar needed no such intervention.

So Paul tells the Galatians that he was explaining an allegory between the birth of these two sons and the current situation. Hagar represented the Mosaic covenant of Mount Sinai, which indicates that the Law is in effect. The covenantal connection to Isaac is not explicitly stated, but implied to be the Abrahamic covenant of promise (24). Paul then goes on to describe the connection to two Jerusalems. The first Jerusalem is the one that exists in the first century, or the context in which the letter to the Galatians is written. The second Jerusalem is the New Jerusalem, which is the one to come to earth in the future (25-26).

Paul then quotes from Isaiah 54, which prophesies the changing fortunes of Israel. When Israel was free before the Babylonian captivity, she was like a woman with a husband. The barren (desolate) woman is Israel in captivity. The barren woman who eventually has children may represent Israel when she is restored or during the millennium. Sarah was a barren woman whose womb was miraculously opened by God. Paul is drawing yet another parallel from Abraham to those who are saved and free in Christ. So Paul makes three distinct comparisons in VV. 28-31. He first compares the birth of Isaac to the birth that Christians experience in Jesus. It was a supernatural birth that was instigated by God. It was a promise from God, just as the salvation of the Gentiles was a promise made by God. The second comparison was between the persecution that Isaac experienced at the hands of Ishmael and the false teachings of the Judaizers. The tension between Isaac and Ishmael can still be felt today in the conflict between Arab nations and Israel. The third comparison was drawn between the obligation of Abraham to banish Hagar and Ishmael and the Galatians’ obligation to put aside the Judaizers and their false teachings (30). Those who don’t disregard the false teachings, but embrace them, will not receive the promised inheritance of Abraham (30).

**CHAPTER FIVE**

At this point, I will resume a more detailed analysis of Galatians.

***Galatians 5:1-12 (NIV)***

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

2Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. 3Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. 4You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. 5For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. 6For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

7You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? 8That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. 9“A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.” 10I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion, whoever that may be, will have to pay the penalty. 11Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. 12As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

V. 1 is a very succinct summarization of all that chapter four of Galatians was intended to communicate. The theme of chapter four was basically about bondage to the Law. Chapter five is about freedom in Christ. Paul speaks of a “yoke” of slavery that the Galatians are not to be burdened by.

**Bible Word Study – “yoke”**

**2218** **ζυγός** [*zugos* /dzoo·**gos**/] n m. From the root of zeugnumi (to join, especially by a “yoke”); TDNT 2:896; TDNTA 301; GK 2433; Six occurrences; AV translates as “yoke” five times, and “pair of balances” once. **1** a yoke. 1a a yoke that is put on draught cattle. 1b metaph., used of any burden or bondage. *1b1* as that of slavery. *1b2* of troublesome laws imposed on one, esp. of the Mosaic law, hence the name is so transferred to the commands of Christ as to contrast them with the commands of the Pharisees which were a veritable ‘yoke’; yet even Christ’s commands must be submitted to, though easier to be kept. **2** a balance, pair of scales.[[35]](#footnote-35)

A yoke is a large piece of wood placed on the necks of cattle in order to steer them in a direction. A yoke is how a farmer in more rustic times would control cattle and turn then to the right or left. A “yoke” is also referred to as a body of teachings. A body of teachings by a rabbi is referred to as his “yoke”. In other words, what are the things that a teacher actually teaches that direct his or her students? The yoke referred to here is the Law, which causes people to fall into a form of slavery. They had already been delivered from the “yoke” of hedonism (lost to the world), which drove them towards fulfilling their sinful desires. The main theme that Paul is setting for chapter five here is that it is Jesus who has set us all free. All of the previous discussion about becoming sons and daughters of God hinges on this idea that it is Jesus who sets us free to be adopted by God. It is Jesus who set us free from the guardianship or the tutelage of the Law.

But what is the freedom that Jesus set us free FOR? He set us free to live out our lives free from sin. We are free from being shackled to our past by the Law. We are free to carry that message of freedom to the world so that others can experience this level of freedom that we enjoy in Christ. We can live, navigate, and communicate in freedom so that minds are freed to allow Jesus to continue his liberation of the world.

V. 2-3 – Paul tells his audience that if they come under the yoke (teachings/direction) of the Law once again, the sacrifice of Christ is of no value. Jesus might as well have just died for no reason at all. What does it mean for a person to “allow himself to be circumcised”. Well, there is a pretty heavy implication in this. If I were to allow myself to become circumcised in order to be saved, this would reveal my belief about the sufficiency of the cross. If I rely on anything else to gain salvation, then I am saying that I do not believe that Jesus is the one way, the one truth, and the one life (John 14:6). The message of the Bible is that Jesus is sufficient.

***2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV)***

9But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

In fact, if a person wants to be circumcised in order to fall under the Law, he or she is obligated to fulfill the ENTIRE Law because that is what the Law demands. The word for “obligated’ is really specific.

**Bible Word Study – “obligated”**

**3781** **ὀφειλέτης** [*opheiletes* /of·i·**let**·ace/] n m. From 3784; TDNT 5:565; TDNTA 746; GK 4050; Seven occurrences; AV translates as “debtor” five times, “sinner” once, and “which owed” once. **1** one who owes another, a debtor. 1a one held by some obligation, bound by some duty. 1b one who has not yet made amends to whom he has injured:. *1b1* one who owes God penalty or whom God can demand punishment as something due, i.e. a sinner.[[36]](#footnote-36)

The word for “obligated” means “a person who owes another” or “debtor”. According to the Law, a person owes God for his or her own sin. What do they owe? They owe their life. The wages of sin is death. It’s just that simple. A person who is circumcised because they want to fulfill the Law now is “obligated to fulfill the Law”, meaning that this person has taken on the debt of sin, which is death. When we put this definition in context with what is said about Jesus’ sacrifice, it makes perfect sense. If I take on the debt of sin, I nullify the death that Jesus died to pay the debt I owed for sin.

Paul isn’t condemning the act of circumcision. He’s condemning the belief that circumcision is necessary for salvation. He has no problem with a person being circumcised, so long as that person is not being circumcised in order to gain acceptance by the Lord.

V. 4 – A person who is trying to be justified by the Law is said to be “alienated” from Christ.

**Bible Word Study – “alienated”**

**2673** **καταργέω** [*katargeo* /kat·arg·**eh**·o/] v. From 2596 and 691; TDNT 1:452; TDNTA 76; GK 2934; 27 occurrences; AV translates as “destroy” five times, “do away” three times, “abolish” three times, “cumber” once, “loose” once, “cease” once, “fall” once, “deliver” once, and translated miscellaneously 11 times. **1** to render idle, unemployed, inactivate, inoperative. 1a to cause a person or thing to have no further efficiency. 1b to deprive of force, influence, power. **2** to cause to cease, put an end to, do away with, annul, abolish. 2a to cease, to pass away, be done away. 2b to be severed from, separated from, discharged from, loosed from any one. 2c to terminate all intercourse with one.[[37]](#footnote-37)

The word for alienated, *katargeo,* seems to carry with it a sense of powerlessness, impotence, or ceasing. It’s like saying that a believer who reverts to the Law is rendered powerless to communicate Jesus. There is a tricky term here that talks about “falling away from grace”. On its face, this seems to suggest that a person can lose salvation by reverting to the Law. However, whenever we run into things that seem confusing or odd, we have to let the Bible interpret the Bible. There is too much other scripture that suggests that a person cannot lose salvation, so we need to as ourselves if there is another meaning for “falling away from grace”.

**Bible Word Study – “grace”**

**5485** **χάρις** [*charis* /**khar**·ece/] n f. From 5463; TDNT 9:372; TDNTA 1298; GK 5921; 156 occurrences; AV translates as “grace” 130 times, “favour” six times, “thanks” four times, “thank” four times, “thank + 2192” three times, “pleasure” twice, and translated miscellaneously seven times. **1** grace. 1a that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, loveliness: grace of speech. **2** good will, loving-kindness, favour. 2a of the merciful kindness by which God, exerting his holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to the exercise of the Christian virtues. **3** what is due to grace. 3a the spiritual condition of one governed by the power of divine grace. 3b the token or proof of grace, benefit. *3b1* a gift of grace. *3b2* benefit, bounty. **4** thanks, (for benefits, services, favours), recompense, reward.[[38]](#footnote-38)

The word for “grace” is the Greek *charis.* Among its meanings, it carries with it a sense of God’s good will, His loving-kindness, or His favor. If also carries with it a sense of a “system” of sorts. This suggests to me that if a person “falls away from grace”, he or she is abandoning a system by which God saves by grace for another false system. That doesn’t mean the person is not saved. It just means that this person has fallen into something that is simply wrong and will communicate salvation incorrectly in the future. Now, a person who truly believes that he or she can be saved through works may not be truly saved as this is just not the way God works. So, while “falling away” doesn’t mean that a person loses salvation, it is possible this person did not truly understand salvation and may not have come to a saving faith in the first place. This person needs to be educated as to what salvation means and how to receive it from the Lord.

But what about apostasy? Apostasy is an act by which a believer renounces faith. In other words, a person who apostatizes is one who is a true believer, but for whatever reason decides to walk away from (or lay down) faith. The believer is now condemned to hell. Now, there are a number of passages that describe what we can call apostasy, but I am not sure that I believe that apostasy is a real thing in the terms of an actual believer renouncing faith. I think a person who renounces faith THINKS that they were saved, but I’m not sure that a person would walk away from the perfection of Christ. I do realize that this means that some folks would call me a Calvinist, but Calvinism encompasses a body of interpretation that goes way beyond just believing that believers are eternally secure. I ALSO realize that I may be wrong in my interpretation here. I do admit that I have struggled with the concept of apostasy and I still wonder, but I continue to land on the side of true believers being eternally secure. I will leave it you, the reader, to figure it out for yourself, but be sure to take into account the full counsel of scripture.

V. 5-6 – Contrasted with this salvation by works is the righteousness that true believers wait for by faith. Again, the believer isn’t saved by works (circumcision). So if a person IS circumcises, it has no effect on whether or not a person is going to heaven. A person who is circumcised is doing that merely for health reasons, but not for eternal reasons. But why are we “waiting” for this righteousness? Well, salvation is a work that begins at the cross and is completed when we die. The moment we are saved, we are declared righteous by God. We are also declared justified, which is another word for “saved”. This forensic justification means that our future is secure. There is another sense of salvation that plays our over our lives. Our future is secure, but isn’t finalized until we die. So the Bible does contain language about believers “being saved”. Philippians 2 contains the verse that speaks of “working out your salvation with fear and trembling”. This doesn’t mean that we are working FOR salvation. What this means is that we are to live our lives focused on the fact that we ARE saved and that we are to live our lives as saints, respecting and following the Lord in all that we do. As we move towards the end of our lives, fully expectant of heaven (salvation), our salvation is playing out. Final salvation awaits us the moment that we die and are ushered to the finish line. It’s like the fastest man in the world running a race. He’s the fastest man in the world, so he’s going to win. BUT, he doesn’t actually win the race and receive a prize until he crosses the finish line.

V. 7 – Paul seems to use lots of sports metaphors in his writings. He talks about races quite a bit. Here he talks about Christians as “running a race”, but someone “cut in” on them and cut them off from achieving. This is obviously an allusion to the Judaizers who had “cut in” on the Galatians’ faith.

VV. 8-10 – The kind of “redirection” that came from the Judaizers to the Christians in Galatia could not come from God. Paul’s figure of speech about yeast in bread dough is meant to communicate that “a little goes a long way”. Yeast is actually a fungus that causes a reaction in bread dough. This reaction releases carbon dioxide and alcohol, which causes bubbles to form in dough. This makes bread rise. In the Bible, yeast is used as a figure of speech for corruption. The point here is that it doesn’t take much of a corrupting influence for a message to be compromised and hijacked. So to extend the metaphor, Paul is cautioning against those corrupting influences that can destroy the church’s message.

**Bible Word Study – “yeast”**

**2219** **ζύμη** [*zume* /**dzoo**·may/] n f. Probably from 2204; TDNT 2:902; TDNTA 302; GK 2434; 13 occurrences; AV translates as “leaven” 13 times. **1** leaven. **2** metaph. of inveterate mental and moral corruption, viewed in its tendency to infect others. *Additional Information:* Leaven is applied to that which, though small in quantity, yet by its influence thoroughly pervades a thing; either in a good sense as in the parable Mat. 13:33; or in a bad sense, of a pernicious influence, “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump”.[[39]](#footnote-39)

VV. 11-12 – Evidently Paul was being accused of continuing to preach circumcision himself. I find that ironic since the Judaizers were “correcting” Paul’s message and Paul was opposing that. To be clear, there was a time when he was preaching circumcision, but this would have been prior to his conversion in Acts 9. Paul makes an ironic comment about the offense of the cross. The point he seems to be making here is that if he is really preaching circumcision, the “offensiveness” of the cross would have been of little consequence to anyone and he could stop preaching about it. So Paul, who could be pretty rough around the edges, makes a really bold and strong statement. He said that he wished that the “agitators” would go ahead and castrate themselves! He may have been making a sort of a double insult towards the Judaizers. There were cults, such as the priests of Cybele in Asia Minor, who actually were castrated as part of their pagan practice. Leviticus 21:20 declares a castrated priest unfit for duty. Whatever the intent of Paul’s statement, it communicates Paul’s desire that the message of the Judaizers be rendered completely impotent.

**Galatians 5:13-26 (NIV)**

13You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. 14For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” k 15If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

16So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. 18But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

19The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

So Paul has taken a great deal of time arguing for a lifestyle of freedom vs. a lifestyle of bondage to rules and regulations regarding faith. But a question comes up in the minds of a lot of people. The question is, “What does a life of freedom even look like?” For many, to say they are to be free leaves them with the impression that they can do anything they want and God will just automatically forgive them. This is the “license to sin” that so many complain about when the grace of God is emphasized in faith. It is obviously incorrect to think that I could steal candy bars from a convenience store whenever I get hungry, pray for forgiveness, and then just expect God to let it go. I prayed for forgiveness, right? Others think that freedom is a new set of constraints. While this is true in a way, it doesn’t mean that I am not obligated to go to church every week, read the Bible every second of every day, and attend mission trips routinely. Those are good things, but they can’t be an overreaction that leads us back to rule following. Yes, go to church. Yes, read the Bible. Yes, be on mission. BUT, don’t revert to doing all of that because you think that makes you a good Christian or “more saved”.

This passage describes what a life of faith looks like. It actually describes what a life of sin looks like first, which is pretty interesting. We talk about the things that we do as a result of our faith in Christ. In other words, my reaction to my wife’s kindness towards me is to be kind to her in return and to love her more. I want to do special things for her and be helpful to her whenever I can. This is my reaction to her. What does the Christian reaction to Jesus typically look like? Paul tells us both what it doesn’t look like and what it does entail. The answer to legalism is application. The answer to libertinism (I can do what I want ‘cause God will just forgive me) is theology. We have to balance theology with proper application of that theology.

VV. 13-15 – Paul has made a pretty clear argument that Christians are free. We are free from sin and free from the Law. We now have the Holy Spirit to guide us, so there is no need for a written code unless we are allowing the Holy Spirit to illuminate Scripture in our lives to give us direction. Paul highlights that we are called to be free (13). The word for “indulge” has a military context.

**Bible Word Study – “indulge”**

**874** **ἀφορμή** [*aphorme* /af·or·**may**/] n f. From a compound of 575 and 3729; TDNT 5:472; TDNTA 730; GK 929; Seven occurrences; AV translates as “occasion” seven times. **1** a place from which a movement or attack is made, a base of operations. **2** metaph. that by which endeavour is excited and from which it goes forth. 2a that which gives occasion and supplies matter for an undertaking, the incentive. 2b the resources we avail ourselves of in attempting or performing anything.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Notice that first definition. It describes a place from which a movement or attack is made. It describes a base of operations. Indulging the flesh in this context suggests that a person actually used Christianity as a “base of operations” for living life selfishly. Want to have lots of sex with lots of women? No problem! Just leave “base”, go have an affair, and when you get back to “base” you are forgiven. “I can do what I want as long as I return to base”. This is a lifestyle that is referred to as “living in the flesh” in the Bible.

Contrary to what some would say, we don’t have a license to sin because we are free. We aren’t free to just indulge every whim of sin. It doesn’t work that way. We don’t take God for granted and expect Him to believe us when we say we love Him any more than I would expect the same from my wife. I can’t cheat on her whenever it’s convenient for me and just expect her to forgive me every time. That would just be spousal abuse! Freedom has a use that is separate and apart from a personal application. We are to use our freedom to serve others in love. In fact, Paul goes right back to the *Torah* to finish his point.

***Leviticus 19:18 (NASB95)***

18 ‘You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.

Freedom should not lead a Christian towards circumcision (becoming a Jew) OR towards indulging ourselves in sin. It leads us towards a ground that is quite different from either of these approaches. Both results above are self-absorbed. Rule following is as self-centered as libertinism. So freedom looks like loving one another. The first thing that it doesn’t look like is destroying one another (15). The biting and devouring one another that Paul speaks of is the constant conflict that people find themselves in with other people. V. 15 is actually a conditional statement that describes a result based on an action. IF you choose to bite and devour each other, you WILL BE destroyed by each other. We see this a lot in “Christian” debates. Christians who argue to determine WHO is right over WHAT is right are not making any headway in the Kingdom of God. Freedom is for loving others and not destroying others. There must have been an awful lot of fighting among the Galatian church. In Paul’s list of sins in V. 19, eight out of fifteen regard interpersonal relationships. One of the main expressions of love that is highlighted in Paul’s teachings is in interpersonal relationships.

VV. 16-18 – Paul makes a clear call to walk in the Spirit and stand against the flesh. He says that the answer to living in a negative pattern of behavior is to live by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He also makes clear that the conflict that happens within a person is between selfish desires and the Holy Spirit. Finally, V. 18 says that a person who is Spirit-led is not walking under the Law, meaning that this person isn’t trying to use the Law for salvation. There are two diametrically opposed lifestyles here. There is life following after the Spirit of God and a life following after selfish desires. One is a life surrendered to self and to the world. The other is a life surrendered to and aligned with the Spirit of God. We cannot have both. You can’t stand with your foot in one camp and one foot in the other. We definitely have to choose. This isn’t one of those friendships where I can flit back and forth from one tribe to another like I did in high school. Paul already pointed out that just a little yeast works its way through the whole batch of dough.

VV. 19-21 – Here Paul starts his lists. The first list is the “bad” one. This is sort of like Santa’s naughty list, but way worse. This one is real! Paul makes lots of lists in his writings. Some examples can be found in 2 Corinthians 6:1–10; 8:1–7; Ephesians 4:1–10; Philippians 4:8–9; Colossians 3:12–17; 1 Timothy 1:9; 6:4–6; 2 Timothy 3:2–4; Titus 3:3.

Paul calls these the “acts” of the flesh. The word for “acts” here is the Greek word *ergon.*

**Bible Word Study – “acts/works”**

**2041** **ἔργον** [*ergon* /**er**·gon/] n n. From a primary (but obsolete) ergo (to work); TDNT 2:635; TDNTA 251; GK 2240; 176 occurrences; AV translates as “work” 152 times, “deed” 22 times, “doing” once, and “labour” once. **1** business, employment, that which any one is occupied. 1a that which one undertakes to do, enterprise, undertaking. **2** any product whatever, any thing accomplished by hand, art, industry, or mind. **3** an act, deed, thing done: the idea of working is emphasised in opp. to that which is less than work.[[41]](#footnote-41)

This is a word that literally means “labors”. It carries a sense of “things accomplished”. How would you like to get to the end of a hard day, you sit down with a cold drink, and you reflect on the things that you accomplished over the course of that day. Your list includes witchcraft, fits of rage, and envy. Good day, right? How stressed must I be sitting there and relaxing at the end of that day. The word *ergon* means “works”. These are things that I worked to make happen. The end product of my efforts in a day were all of these bad things. What does that say about my focus? What does that say about my walk? What if I am calling myself a Christian and these things are the product of my day? All I did all day was make people mad. I gossiped about people or selfishly tried to get my own way. How will my interpersonal relationships look at the end of the day? Who are my friends, provided that I still have any if my walk is as dark as VV. 19-21 suggest.

Scot McKnight notes that Paul divides the “works of the flesh” into four areas that we cannot discuss in detail:

(1) sexual sins: “sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery”;

(2) religious sins: “idolatry and witchcraft”;

(3) social sins: “hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy”;

(4) drinking sins: “drunkenness, orgies, and the like.”[[42]](#footnote-42)

All of these indicate a problem with excess in behavior. There is no excess of Christian behavior here, so the excess is in selfishness. It is in the third category that Paul seems to focus. Again, eight out of fifteen of the sins listed are in this social category, so Paul seems to be really concerned with how the Galatians are interacting. Now he may very well be thinking of other churches, as well, when he makes this list, so I am sure that these problems aren’t completely unique to the Galatian church. I see a lot of these problems in the church today. The larger a family, the more it will fight. That’s just a fact of life. The same goes for a church. The problem for the church is that Paul is clear to point out that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God (21). The implications are very serious!

VV. 22-26 – So what does life in the Spirit look like? Well, Paul has a list for that one, as well. Here, we have a list that is a pretty well-known one that is referred to as the “fruit of the Spirit”. In contrast to the “acts of the sinful nature” discussed above, this list describes what it looks like to be driven by faith in Christ rather than by self. Another way to look at it is in regard to the discussion of what masters a person. Are we going to let list A or list B master us? Are we mastered and driven by our selfish appetites or by the heart of God? Do I want what I want or do I want what God wants? Before we begin the discussion, I want to point out one other thing that I notice. The word for “acts” in regard to sinful nature is *ergon* as discussed above. The Greek word used to describe Spiritual things is “fruit”, or *karpos.*

**Bible Word Study – “fruit”**

**2590** **καρπός** [*karpos* /kar·**pos**/] n m. Probably from the base of 726; TDNT 3:614; TDNTA 416; GK 2843; 66 occurrences; AV translates as “fruit” 66 times. **1** fruit. 1a the fruit of the trees, vines, of the fields. 1b the fruit of one’s loins, i.e. his progeny, his posterity. **2** that which originates or comes from something, an effect, result. 2a work, act, deed. 2b advantage, profit, utility. 2c praises, which are presented to God as a thank offering. 2d to gather fruit (i.e. a reaped harvest) into life eternal (as into a granary), is used in fig. discourse of those who by their labours have fitted souls to obtain eternal life.[[43]](#footnote-43)

The word for “fruit” carries with it a sense of “results”. The “results” of following the Spirit are love, joy, peace, etc. These aren’t things that I necessarily DID, but they happened as a result of my choice to follow the Lord. Now, I would agree that the “acts” of the sinful nature are results, as well, but I think they reflect a slightly different sense that Paul was going after here. Maybe there’s no real difference and I shouldn’t be calling this one out, but why did Paul use a different term? I think it matters. I think Paul is trying to make the distinction between man’s effort (*ergon*), and God’s results (*karpos*). In a way, it sort of speaks to the negativity of the “works of the Law”, as well. In other words, God works all things for good (Romans 8:28). It is God who causes these good things to happen as a result of our following Him. When we decide to follow our own flesh, we get the negative things at the end of the day. I caused my bad result by following my own path and not the Lord’s path. The wages (thing I earned) of sin is death, but the gift (the thing God gives) is eternal life (Romans 6:23). The “acts” are the things I do to earn my separation from God. The “fruit” are the gifts that God gives as a result of following Him.

**So What?**

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there should be certain things. But what it those things aren’t there? What does “church” look like when all of the wrong things drive us as a body of believers?

Let’s just think about it for a second. What would it look like if you took Galatians 5:19-21 and applied those things to the everyday life of the church?

Sexual immorality – “Church as a club”. This is where people go to hook up. The emphasis is on finding someone with whom to have sex. Adultery is rampant.

Debauchery – *aselgeiia* – lasciviousness; shamelessly and overtly sexua.. Church is the place to flirt with people and flaunt sexuality.

Witchcraft – *pharmakeia* – drugs were often used in dark arts. Our word for “pharmacy” and “pharmaceutical” comes from this word. Irresponsible drug use is unchecked and approved. “Medicated masses”.

Hatred – *echthrai* – open hostility towards others.

Discord – Focus on disagreements and arguments. Focus on WHO is right and not on WHAT is right.

Jealousy – “I want what you have” instead of “I’m glad you have what you have”. The New Bible Dictionary notes on “jealousy”, “Both Heb. and Gk. words refer to an exclusive single-mindedness of emotion, which may be morally blameworthy or praiseworthy depending on whether the object of the jealousy is the self or some cause beyond the self.”[[44]](#footnote-44)

Fits of rage – *thumos* – Carries a sense of drunkenness; “drunk with rage”; RAGE feels really good! This is a powerful drug in itself!

Selfish ambition – “I’m getting what I want and I don’t care who gets hurt”. Pastoral leadership.

Dissensions – Divisiveness. Intentional factioning and splitting into opposing groups.

Factions – *hairesis* – this is the word that is rendered “heresy”. This is a faction within a church that doesn’t agree with the church theologically, so it tries to take over.

Envy – defined as “A grudging regard for the advantages seen to be enjoyed by others”[[45]](#footnote-45)

The difference between jealousy and envy is a subtle one. According to Psychology Today, jealousy is a reaction to the possibility of losing something or someone of value. Envy is a reaction to wanting something that someone else has.[[46]](#footnote-46)

Drunkenness – this just is what it is, but the term is a bit more general in the sense of “intoxication”. So this could be expanded to the use of other intoxicating substances. I would say that the use of substances that intoxicate is probably intended to indicate the abuse of intoxicating substances. There are pain killers that are, quite frankly, MEANT to intoxicate to a certain degree. What does it look like when those substances are used in a way that they were not meant to be used.

Orgies – The Greek word *komoi* is not meant to communicate the modern sense of the word, which would indicate a heavily sexual connotation. An “orgy” in this sense is not a party at which a group of people show up to have sex with one another. The sense of this term is sort of “wild partying”. This isn’t necessarily sexual, but just wantonly irresponsible. I had my day when I was “drunk and stupid”. Allowing alcohol or other substances to control me in order to “have fun” is just wrong and not in keeping with Godly standards of moderation and control.

Folks who want to live in this worldly lifestyle get what they want. God’s funny that way, isn’t He? He lets us have what we are chasing after. I have to deal with the fallout from my behavior, though. I have to take what comes with the acts of the sinful nature. Bad relationships, health issues, disease, back-stabbing, destroyed reputation, loss of trust, and hangovers are just the tip of the iceberg. This is my “inheritance” according to the Lord. The thing is that there is only room for one inheritance. I can’t inherit God’s best for me if I am seeking MY best for me. It’s one or the other. Live in the moment or live for the future. From my own experience, I can tell you how empty the selfish lifestyle is. Drinking and chasing women just isn’t nearly as fulfilling as making the determination to live by Godly standards. My marriage is solid, my friends would die for me, and my colleagues respect me.

**Chapter Six**

***Galatians 6:1-10 (NIV)***

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. 2Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. 4Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, 5for each one should carry their own load. 6Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor.

7Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. 9Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. 10Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. [[47]](#footnote-47)

This is a passage that just seems like a random hodgepodge of advice at first. But when we take a closer look at it, it becomes more relevant in the fact that it carries the themes of personal responsibility and mutual accountability that was so lacking in the Galatian church.

VV. 1-6 – Bearing one another’s burdens means to help another person when he or she is down. Not only that, but also when a person is in a negative pattern of behavior and needs some accountability. If I were doing something that I knew was wrong, but I had descended into this pattern in such a gradual fashion that I didn’t even realize that it had happened, I would want someone to tell me. Who wouldn’t want to know they were doing the wrong thing? The person caught in a sin should be restored gently by those who are walking in the Spirit (1).

**Bible Word Study – “restore”**

**2675** **καταρτίζω** [*katartizo* /kat·ar·**tid**·zo/] v. From 2596 and a derivative of 739; TDNT 1:475; TDNTA 80; GK 2936; 13 occurrences; AV translates as “perfect” twice, “make perfect” twice, “mend” twice, “be perfect” twice, “fit” once, “frame” once, “prepare” once, “restore” once, and “perfectly joined together” once. **1** to render, i.e. to fit, sound, complete. 1a to mend (what has been broken or rent), to repair. *1a1* to complete. 1b to fit out, equip, put in order, arrange, adjust. *1b1* to fit or frame for one’s self, prepare. 1c ethically: to strengthen, perfect, complete, make one what he ought to be.[[48]](#footnote-48)

The word for “restore” in V. 1 is from the Greek word *katartizo*. This word carries with it a sense of healing and making whole. It is actually where we get our English word “cathartic”, which describes a healing experience. We are to bear one another’s burdens in such a way as we are healing that person and helping to restore that person to a healthy walk with the Lord. We have to be very careful of how we do this, though. I know I have been tempted to be really mean in my accountability towards others. Pride has a way of dragging me down when I really mean well for someone else. I have to be very careful to approach accountability with a spirit of love so that I am not tempted and dragged down by my own arrogance and self-righteousness (2). V. 3 reminds me that I should not think more of my self than I really am. Carrying one another’s burdens fulfills the law of Christ (2), which is based in love for others.

***John 13:34 (NASB95)***

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

There just isn’t any room for conceit or arrogance when it comes to bearing each other’s burdens. If a person is trying to “help” me by coming off as self-righteous and arrogantly beating me up with the Bible, is that really any help at all? All I do is communicate my lack of tolerance for their failure and dig that person deeper into a hole. How do I avoid this arrogance? Well, I just need to step back and take a look at myself first (4). If I feel any pride, it should be over what God had done, but I only compare myself to myself and not to others. I need to remember the very long road down which I have come in my life when I am bearing other people’s burdens.

**Bible Word Study – “pride”**

**2745** **καύχημα** [*kauchema* /**kow**·khay·mah/] n n. From 2744; TDNT 3:645; TDNTA 423; GK 3017; 11 occurrences; AV translates as “rejoicing” four times, “to glory” three times, “glorying” twice, “boasting” once, and “rejoice” once. **1** that of which one glories or can glory, matter or ground of glorying. **2** a glorying or boasting.[[49]](#footnote-49)

There are good and bad connotations to the word “pride”. The negative connotation in the Bible is found in the Greek word *alazoneia*. This word carries a sense of “arrogance” and means that a person thinks more highly of his or herself than is necessary or even warranted. This is a really negative a self-centered type of pride. It’s the type of arrogance a person feels when he starts believing his own hype. The “good” type of pride is what is described in this passage. *Kauchema* is a word that describes a feeling of pride towards something or someone else. Feeling proud of a child’s accomplishments is *kauchema.* Feel national pride would be a form of *kauchema*. *Kauchema* is a pride that isn’t centered on me, rather it is me feeling proud about something that is outside of myself. *Kauchema* glories in another rather than in self. Here, we find a person taking pride in himself, but the usage of the word for pride suggests that I am proud of something outside of myself. What this means is that if I feel *kauchema* towards myself, I am feeling pride in what God has done in me. I am glad that God has worked in me, but I don’t value myself above others for the sake of myself. I am glad that God has had His way in my life. *Alazoneia* (the “bad” type of pride) would suggest that I am glad for the changes that I have made in my life regardless of God’s influencing power to change me. When I glory in the changes that God has made in me, I am comparing who I used to be to who God has made me to be.

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