

# *Paul's Letter to the Galatians*

## *'Faith versus Works' Freedom and Obligation*

It was controversy that made Paul's theology what it was and Galatians is at the heart of the most fundamental of all controversies, the controversy that threatened to turn the gospel into something that was not gospel. The theology that was hammered out in controversy was welded into a whole, and the theology of Galatians is at the heart of the whole Pauline system. It is not itself the whole: anything less like a 'Summa Theologica' it would be hard to imagine. But it is one of the creative springs of the whole, and if Paul's theology has any permanent value this can be perhaps exercised through Galatians, provided that the reader is prepared to be patient with the language and penetrate through its surface to its meaning. (C.K. Barrett, Freedom and Obligation, page 50)

My vocation has become clearer as the years go by: to study the unchanging God without something else to do, some pragmatic reason or result. This is what I feel most called to do: simply enjoy the study of God – not write about it, not view it in relation to its political residue or imagine that my opinion will have some visible social effect. The joy of inquiry into God is a sufficient end in itself, not only a means to some practical consequence. (Thomas C. Oden. The Rebirth of Orthodoxy. page 95)

The theological value of the letter to the Galatians lies in the fact that the Galatians are so similar to Christians of every age. (R. Allan Cole, Galatians, page 43)

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For the Berean Class  
2009-2010

# A Study of Paul's Letter to the Galatians

## The First Readers

Paul's letters are usually addressed to a particular community which he established. Often his writing serves the purpose of correcting both behavioural and theological problems which threatened the 'spiritual health' of the community. His letters were written to hold each church to the normative truth of the Gospel. This letter is corrective in nature as well but it is addressed to a number of churches that existed in the Roman province of Galatia.

Chapter 4:12-13 clearly establishes the apostle as the 'founder' of the churches that comprised his audience.

*I beg you, my brothers, be like me. After all, I am like you. You have not done me any wrong. You **remember** why I preached the Gospel to you the first time; it was because I was sick, (4:12-13)*

## Authorship

There is little dispute over the authorship of this letter. The early church was uniform in its claim that Paul was the author and the letter itself provides no internal evidence that would counter the church's claim. The style, the vocabulary and the theological content are entirely consistent with other letters whose Pauline authorship is undisputed. The modern reader can, with absolute confidence, hear these words knowing they are listening to the very person encountered by the living Christ on the Damascus road. (See Acts 9:1-19; 22:6-16; 26:12-18)

## The Audience

There has been considerable debate in the literature about the location of the various congregations that comprised the audience for Paul's letter. The churches were all located either in the southern or northern Roman province of Galatia. Some scholars favour northern rather than southern Galatia but the weight of the evidence is on the side of the southern region. The Romans had not developed their system of roads in the north as they had in the south so it is unlikely that Paul would begin his work where the climate and geography was more severe and travel more difficult. Paul's poor health makes the southern region more likely the place where he began his evangelistic work.

If the various churches had been located in northern Galatia the people would have been almost exclusively Gentile since few Jews lived there. Contrastingly, the southern region would include a mixture of Jews and Gentiles therefore the theological arguments used in chapter 3 and 4 are more appropriate for the multicultural audience offered by this region. However, there would have been

some Gentiles closely associated with the synagogue (God Fearers) who would have had some familiarity with the passages Paul uses in chapter 3 and 4. Lastly, the theological dispute itself would more likely arise where there was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles especially if Paul's opponents were from within the Galatian church itself. On the other hand, if the letter was written to churches in the north, Paul's opponents would most likely have come from outside the community.

C. K. Barrett suggests the possibility that several divergent anti-Pauline groups existed in the early church from the very beginning. The intention of each group was to offer an alternative to the law free Gospel taught by Paul. Some groups wished to recover Paul's converts to a law centered Judaism in which Jesus was given the status of a rabbi but nothing more. Other groups were willing to embrace Jesus as Messiah and Saviour but believed that Paul's Gentile converts were better off if they accepted circumcision and the specificity of the Torah as a compliment to Paul's Christ centered Gospel. The letter makes it clear that Paul would not tolerate any change or addition to his preaching. He was unwilling to consider any compromise to his law free Gospel whereby men and women had been rescued by God apart from 'works of the law'. His letter will show that God's action in Christ was anticipated by the story of Abraham and illustrated in the narrative of Abraham, Hagar and Sarah.

## **Date**

There exists, however, some controversy concerning the date the letter was written. The popular view is that the apostle wrote to the Galatians sometime between 50 BCE and 55 BCE. John Stott suggests that the letter could have been written as early as 48 BCE. The main dispute concerning the date revolves around the relationship of Paul's letter to the Jerusalem council recorded in Acts 15. Some scholars insist that the letter was written before the council took place while others prefer a date after the Jerusalem council.

The case that the letter was composed before the 'Jerusalem Council' recorded in Acts 15 is as follows.

1. When the apostle wrote Galatians he had made only two visits to Jerusalem since his 'conversion'. The evidence for two visits only is contained in 1:18 and 2:1. In this section of the letter, Paul speaks of two visits only. If more than one visit had occurred the subject matter of the letter would have compelled him to mention a third visit to Jerusalem when the early church, under the leadership of James, resolved the question concerning the application of Torah to non Jewish believers. Had the Acts 15 meeting taken place previously, Paul would have made a direct appeal to the council's decision as a way of strengthening his case.

2. Therefore, the letter must have been written before the 'Jerusalem Council'. This hypothesis is further supported by the fact that Acts 13-14 records that the Galatian churches were established just before the events of Acts 15.
3. The letter may be Paul's first and it was written in Antioch in Syria after his first missionary journey between the events described in Acts 14 and 15.

Some scholars find evidence for a later date in Galatians 2:1-10 where Paul appears to be describing the 'Jerusalem Council' in retrospect. The events and issues described in Acts 15 involving James, Peter, Paul and Barnabas echo the retrospective account in Galatians 2:1-10. The many corresponding details suggest that Paul was referencing Acts 15 meeting as a past event. If this date is correct we wonder why the agreement did not hold in Galatia. Barrett attempts an explanation by raising the possibility that the agreement (Acts 15) was ambiguous enough to be understood differently by Paul and James. The Jerusalem group, led by James, accepted the notion that Gentiles were legitimately members of the church but the agreement did not mean that kosher Jews would abandon the food laws by actually eating with Gentile believers. On the other hand, Paul understood that the Jerusalem council did in fact compel Jewish believers to eat and observe the 'Lord's table' with their Gentile brothers as a matter of course. There is evidence in the letter that Peter may have left the meeting with an understanding similar to Paul's. It makes no sense to call Peter a 'hypocrite' unless there was real dissonance between his antisocial behavior and his inner theological convictions.

It is possible that the dispute in Galatia arose after the Jerusalem meeting because the agreement was ambiguous. Paul had one understanding and James had another. Peter agreed with Paul but his courage collapsed under pressure to conform.

*Fourteen years later, I went back to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went back because God revealed to me that I should go. In a private meeting with the leaders I explained the Gospel I preached to the Gentiles. I did not want my work in the past or in the future to be a failure. (2:1-2) (GNB)*

### **The Purpose of the Letter**

The occasion of the letter is easily identified in 1:6-9. Obviously, news had reached Paul that a serious debate had begun that threatened the normative truth he had established in the first place. A "different gospel" was being presented by visiting preachers and some members were embracing what Paul regarded as a message foreign to the one he had preached. The reader can only speculate as to why some Gentiles were so willing to abandon Paul's teaching. Their eagerness to accept a "different gospel" may be accounted for by the fact that many of them had prior connections with the synagogue. When

the Christian community began they simply 'went across the street' because they preferred a form of Judaism that did not require circumcision.

The letter provides little insight as to who Paul's opponents were but there is no reason to assume that they were Jews from outside the community. Jewish members were the most likely the source of the heresy Paul so vigorously opposed but it is also possible that they were Gentiles drawn away from their association with the Temple and synagogue by Paul's initial preaching. Subsequently, the teaching of Paul's opponents caused them to reconsider the issue of circumcision and Torah observance.

The main theological dispute had the effect of casting doubt on Paul's apostleship; his authority was being questioned and his status lowered below that of the other apostles whose authority the visiting preachers did not doubt.

The letter deals with two issues but, in Paul's mind, the first one posed the most serious threat; it had the potential to divide the church over the applicability of the Jewish Law for Gentiles. Paul's position throughout his letters is that non Jewish 'Christians' were free from the demands of the law as a necessary requirement for their reconciliation to God. Since all believers are 'justified by faith alone', non Jews could become 'bona fide' members of the community without Torah. Paul's opponents were presenting the case that freedom from the Jewish Law was not possible even for Gentile members; they insisted that Gentiles were not 'paid up' members without circumcision. Paul disagreed. He believed that both Jew and non Jew are bound together as equals by being "in Christ". Some scholars, such as James S Dunn, believe that Galatians 3:28 is the center of Paul's message. (See Galatians 3:28)

There was a second issue that demanded resolution as well. The section beginning at 5:13 contains Paul's ethical teaching as a response to the false accusation that he taught a normless gospel (antinomianism) that included no behavioral demands whatsoever. (2:17-21) This secondary issue, fuelled by the fear of acculturation, also demanded Paul's attention so in the last two chapters he explains what freedom from the law means and does not mean. Freedom, he will argue, is for the purpose of obligation.

*As for you, my brothers, you were called to be free. But do not let this freedom become an excuse for letting your physical desires control you. Instead, let love make you serve one another. For the whole Law is summed up in one command: "Love your neighbour as you love yourself." (5:13-14) (NEB)*

The issue Paul is addressing in this section (Chapter 5-6) is one that he addressed in 1 Corinthians and Romans 6 as well. His critics had distorted his teaching that faith alone justifies the individual apart from works of the Law. They accused him of teaching a normless Gospel that encouraged 'lawless' behaviour. They argued that if reconciliation to God occurs by grace rather than by human achievement then it follows that the sin is desirable because it allows

God's grace "to abound". Hence, we do God a favour by sinning continuously. The more we sin, the more apparent is his grace. (See Romans 6:1) As a counter argument, Paul writes that Spirit of God in the believer does what the Law could never do. "But the Spirit produces love, joy, .... and self control." (5:22)

### **The Structure of the Letter**

Various commentators have suggested a variety of ways of analyzing the structure of the letter as a means of understanding Paul's message. Richard Longenecker mentions several of which the following is one example. He refers to the work of Hans Dieter Betz. Betz suggests that the structure of the letter follows that of a forensic argument where Paul is the defendant, the Galatians are the jury and the intruders are the accusers.

- A. **Epistolary Prescript:** (1:1-5)
- B. **Exordium:** (introduction) Sets out the character of the speaker and defines the central issues to be addressed. (1:6-11)
- C. **Narratio:** Functions as a statement of the related facts of the case. (1:12-2:14)
- D. **Propositio:** Sets out the points of agreement and disagreement as well as the central issues to be proved. (2:15- 21)
- E. **Probatio:** Develops the central arguments of the dispute. (3:1– 4:31)
- F. **Refutatio:** Rebuts the opponent's arguments. (5:1- 6:10)
- G. **Peroratio:** Summarizes the entire case and evokes a sympathetic response. (6:11- 18)

Because Betz reads Paul's letter as a court case, he believes that every argument in the letter is a direct rebuttal of something said by the Judaizers. He argues that the Biblical passages refer to by Paul were identical to those used by his opponents. The difference between them was a matter of exegesis; they drew one theological conclusion but Paul drew another.

John G Gager (Reinventing Paul) advocates a simpler structure.

- A. **The Statement of Facts and External Matters** (1:11- 2:14)
- B. **The Legal Definition** (2:15-21)
- C. **The Rebuttals** (Chapters 3-5)

The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible sets out the following.

- A. **Salutation and Introduction** (1:1-5)
- B. **Personal Defense** (1:6- 2:21)
- C. **Defense of the Gospel** (3:1- 4:31)
- D. **Ethical Implications of the Gospel** (:1- 6:10)
- E. **Conclusion** (6:11- 18)

## Chapter One

### **Salutation: (1:1-5)**

*Paul, an apostle – sent not from men nor by men, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead ---- and all the brothers with me, to the churches in Galatia: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen*

The letter's salutation, though brief, anticipates several critical themes addressed by Paul in the body of his letter. The basis for his authority as an apostle, his complete independency from the other apostles especially Peter, the bodily resurrection of Christ, the relationship of the Son to the Father, the Lordship of Christ, the sin bearing death of Jesus as the only basis for mankind's reconciliation to God, the behavioural obligations of faith, and the believer's rescue from evil are all briefly mentioned.

There is never a hint in Paul that our rescue from evil demands our actual separation from mainstream society as there is in Amish society. The Amish point of view is beautifully described in "Amish Grace" by Kraybill, Nolt and Weaver-Zercher. This book explains how this sect continues their tradition of 'forgiveness and submission' by isolating themselves from the outside world. The authors argue that the centrality of forgiveness in Amish life would be impossible to sustain without a radical separation from main stream society. In the opinion of this writer, Paul would not approve of their methodology.

Paul's opening statement is uncharacteristically brief and for good reason. The issues he intends to address are seriously threatening; there was no time to waste. (Both Ephesians and Philippians have long thanksgiving sections where Paul expresses his gratitude for them.) Reports had come to Paul that his status and authority as an apostle were being undermined so he began by stating his status as an apostle unequivocally. The section of his letter from 1:11 to 2:10 lays out the foundation of his apostolic authority. He argues that his message had come to him by revelation and it developed without the tutelage of the Jerusalem pillars.

The arguments, both experiential and theological, require their acceptance of Paul as an apostle otherwise his words will lack the persuasive power of normative truth.

Jesus had many disciples and from these, twelve apostles were especially chosen and given unique authority. To this list, Paul forcibly and unhesitatingly adds his own name. In verse 2 he unashamedly places his name first and takes

care to distinguish himself from the other brothers. Their presence has the effect of endorsing Paul's authority as an apostle. He adds weight to his claim with a negative and positive statement; his authority was not derivative of the other apostles; it had no human source whatsoever. Positively, he had been called and given divine authority by Christ and the Father without distinction. Right from the beginning of the letter, Paul is telling the Galatians that the dispute can be settled decisively only on the basis of his normative word as an apostle. The contemporary church would do well by reinstating the apostle to the authoritative place he deserves. The apostle is still being falsely accused of promoting a husband's right to dominate his wife when in reality he teaches mutual submission as reference to Christ. More seriously, some writers have argued that he was more of an originator than a follower. Paul's modern critics accuse him of building a complex Hellenized message that bears little relationship to Jesus own self understanding. According to this point of view, Paul fashioned a new religion that is not firmly grounded in the teaching and person of Jesus. In short, he turned the 'Jesus movement' into the 'Christ movement'.

The word 'apostle' had a great impact at the beginning of the first century because it had no ready parallel in Greek or Hellenistic Jewish writing. Karl Rengstorf suggests that the Jewish tradition of *saliah* may have served as a model for the calling and commissioning of the twelve but there are significant differences between the rabbinic idea of *saliah* and the Christian concept of apostle. *Saliah* involved an appointment that was only temporary. The commission ended when the task was completed whereas the word 'apostle' involved a lifelong commission that included unique authority. Paul insisted that his commission came from Christ and God without distinction. (1:1a)

Paul's high Christology is evident in the very first verse where he writes "... but by Jesus Christ and the Father..." and in verse 3 he adds, "Grace and peace be to you from Our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Notice that the first phrase begins with 'Jesus Christ' and the second begins 'our Father' because their relationship is so intimate that the order does not matter. The association of the Son and the Father means that the Son was not acting unilaterally as the Redeemer of mankind. Rather, the work of the Son is identical with the work of the Father. N.T. Wright emphasizes this critical Biblical truth. "[R]edemption is not something alien to the creator but rather something he will undertake with delight and glad giving." (N.T. Wright, Surprised By Hope, page 96)

Several modern critics of Paul say that incarnation was an 'invention' of Paul. However, it is clear from the Gospel writers that the early church, from the very beginning, understood that their encounter with Christ was an encounter with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The critics who argue that Paul changed the Jesus of history into the Jesus of faith are misinformed. The Gospel writers are in line with Paul; they too present Jesus as the unique incarnate son by repeatedly showing him exercising prerogatives that are exclusively God's. Christ forgave sin and spoke with his own authority. The religious elite came into



conflict with Jesus because they recognized and were outraged by his unique claim of authority as he forgave sin and spoke without reference to the tradition of the elders.

The early church's affirmation that God was uniquely present in Jesus came from Jesus himself. Therefore, on the issue of the 'incarnation' there is no valid reason for driving a wedge between Paul, the Gospel writers and Jesus himself. The Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith are the same person.

At the end of verse 2 Paul mentions the resurrection because it is central to the Christian faith; he sees the faith as sharing in the death and resurrection of Christ. (See Romans 6) For the apostle the bodily resurrection of Jesus anticipates God's eventual recovery of the entire creation. Never does he or the other New Testament writers imagine that this world will be destroyed and replaced by another. Such a belief would mean that death remains undefeated and Satan victorious over God. The apostle's eschatological vision is much more expansive than that normally envisaged by the contemporary church. In 1 Corinthians Paul speaks of Christ's bodily resurrection as an anticipation (first fruit) of our resurrection and he means much more than the continued existence of believers in heaven. Christ's bodily resurrection is the guarantee that the creation in its entirety will be resurrected and perfected in like manner. Paul was unyielding in his conviction that God's redemptive plan would restore his creation within space and time. The apostle's view of the future is in radical opposition to the Gnosticism taught by Greek philosophers. Unfortunately, Greek philosophy has seeped unwittingly into Christian theology and made the modern church all too willing to replace Paul with Plato. Unfortunately, many Christian funerals feature the Greek philosopher more than the Christian apostle.

Redemption as involving the rescue and perfecting of the physical world is made sufficiently clear in the eighth chapter of Romans where Paul encourages the church to endure its suffering by considering the future. "The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God." (Romans 8:19-21) This passage makes it unambiguous that Paul did not expect those 'in Christ' to meet Jesus in the sky and be whisked away to another place outside of space and time. (Referred to as the tribulation) However, the contemporary church continues to believe that the immortality of the soul and the eventual destruction of this world is bedrock orthodoxy in spite of the clear teaching in Romans 8:19-21 and Paul's more intensified and detailed discussion of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. In this chapter Paul argues that the Lord's resurrection was real, material and bodily. His resurrected body, like God's redeemed creation, existed within space and time. Paul's Greek contemporaries would never speak of resurrection in this way nor would they regard it as a good thing. Their philosophy required escape from the physical body as the process

necessary for perfection. Paul's vision of resurrection is an intensified version of what Judaism believed with several modifications. (For a convincing analyses of these modifications (mutations) see N.T. Wright's major work on the resurrection or read Surprised By Hope by the same author. See also P.C. Ferguson, The Resurrection: Fact or Fiction on the church's website)

The Anglican Bishop N.T. Wright has been writing feverishly to salvage the New Testament's vision of a renewed physical creation from the shriveled dualistic notion carried around in the head of the 'average' Christian as orthodox faith. Wright writes passionately and persuasively that the framing question of the New Testament is not how individuals get to another place called heaven. He insists that the early church well understood that the resurrection was all about renewing the actual creation and individuals along with it. Humankind is 'saved' as part of the entire recovery process. Wright compares modernity's obsession with individual salvation with ancient Israel's preoccupation with the restoration of their nation. It is worthwhile reflecting on his perceptive comment.

"[T]o insist, in other words, that what happens eventually to individuals humans is the most important thing in the world – may be to make a mistake similar to the one made by the Jewish people in the first century, the mistake that both Jesus and Paul addressed. Israel believed that the purpose of the creator God all came down to this question: how is God going to rescue Israel? What the Gospel of Jesus revealed, however, was that the purposes of God were reaching out to a different question: how is God going to rescue the world through Israel and thereby rescue Israel itself as part of the process but not as the point of it all? Maybe what we are faced with in our day is a similar challenge: to focus not on the question of which human beings God is going to take to heaven and how he is going to do it but on the question of how God is going to redeem and renew his creation through human beings and how he is going to rescue those human beings themselves as part of the process but not as the point of it all." (N.T. Wright, Surprised By Hope, page 185)

What Wright says does not in any way diminish God's desire to redeem individuals since the rescue of the physical creation includes the rescue of individuals. Wright also points out that the recovery of the entire creation did not render Paul a universalist. He believed that only those 'in Christ' will be rescued when the fallen creation is perfected.

Paul's eschatological expectation may come as a surprise to many contemporary believers but there are several 'hints' in the Hebrew Bible that demonstrate the correctness of his theology. (See 1-6 below.) The manner in which the redemptive story begins points towards the nature of its culmination in stark contrast to Greek philosophy where human life begins when the perfect immortal soul meets and is corrupted by the physical body. The corruption that this encounter accomplishes is countered when, at death, the soul enjoys release from the earthly body. Paul could not disagree more and his disagreement finds

support in the Hebrew Bible as well as in the resurrection accounts in the four Gospels. These accounts report Jesus' resurrection as entirely historical. The appearances are not recounted as visions or dreams that emerged from the wishful thinking of the apostles. Before the post resurrection appearances the apostles had no expectation that the dead messiah would rise from the grave as he did. As far as they were concerned the crucifixion ended all their messianic hopes and dreams. These were recovered and modified by the empty tomb and the subsequent appearances of Jesus to as many as five hundred people according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. So confident were they that the master had actually risen, they did not hesitate to report that the risen Jesus was seen first by women. Had they made up the story women would never been chosen as witnesses because they lacked the legal status necessary to serve this function. Women were included in the story because that's what happened. The following six statements are intended to demonstrate that Paul's eschatological vision is not a diversion; it is part of a continuous pattern established in the narrative of the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels.

1. After Adam and Eve sin they are 'kicked' out of the garden but not totally abandoned. God provided clothing for them. God dismissed Adam and Eve from the Garden but he had no intention of completely destroying what he created and called "Good". (Genesis 3:21)
2. The story of Noah and the flood ends with God promising that he will not destroy the world. "And never again will I destroy all the living creatures as I have done." (Genesis 8:21) "I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life cut off by the waters of the flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth." (Genesis 9:11)
3. The benefits of his covenant established through Abraham were to be realized in space and time through his descendents. "... and all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:3)
4. The Promise led to the establishment of Israel and the nation was given the task of living as a counterculture under the reign of God. The New Testament sees Israel as a foreshadowing of the final kingdom inaugurated by the Messiah but brought to completion upon his return. At this time suffering will end and justice will be the order of the day. All of this happens within the space time universe unlike anything believed by the dualism of Greek philosophy.
5. In the New Testament God enters into human history, culture and experience through the 'incarnation'. The physicality of this event is inconsistent with the notion that God's final intention involves replacing what he has created with one that is outside space and time.
6. All four Gospels report the resurrection appearances of Jesus as real objective events. The apostle includes his own parallel account in 1 Corinthians 15. For Paul, the events of Easter guarantee mankind's resurrection as an aspect of creation's final redemption. The idea of eradication and replacement is nowhere to be found in Paul's thought.

The apostle's eschatology belongs on the same continuum as the first four statements above. What Paul wrote in Romans 8:22 and 1 Corinthians 15 is cause for a greater celebration than the Greek philosophy we learned in Sunday school.

The notion of rescue had a familiar appeal to his Jewish readers because of its association with their great hero Moses. They would easily recall how God rescued their people from slavery in Egypt and led them to freedom in the Promise Land. Whereas, Moses rescued them from their Egyptians masters, Jesus had rescued them "from the present evil age". (1:4) Two important meanings of rescue are contained in the one phrase; Jesus death gives us freedom from the guilt of sin as it also provides the means to have victory over it.

There is no suggestion in this text that we are rescued 'out of the world'. We are rescued 'from the world' in the sense that evil (the world) has lost (or is losing) its ultimate power over us. Paul never teaches that the believer is sin free after 'conversion' but he does teach that those who trust in the Gospel of grace are indwelt by the Spirit and empowered to grow in conformity to the son. As a matter of fact, Paul argues at the end of this letter that the obligation to be a bearer of other people's burdens requires a sense of one's own sinfulness. (See Galatians 6:1-5)

**... being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will be able to carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6)**

Verses 3-5 are loaded with theological content and they encapsulate Paul's Gospel in a single paragraph. A purpose of God's salvific activity is the reconciliation (peace) of mankind with God, peace between men and women as well the inner peace that forgiveness brings. The means of peace is 'grace' and 'grace' is God's free favour dispensed to men and women apart from human achievement. Both 'peace' and 'grace' come from the Father and the Son as a single essence.  
(1:3b)

Paul's first readers would not have expected to find a theological statement concerning the work of Christ in the salutation. They would have anticipated a more gradual transition to the main issues that required discussion and consensus. The brevity of his opening statement is because the message of the Judaizers threatened the very core of Paul's gospel – the work of Jesus Christ. It is as if Paul is saying, "Let's be clear ladies and Gentlemen. You are on the brink of believing that our Lord's death on the cross was an event insufficient to save you from your sins. Christ's death, you say, requires additional human achievement in order to be effective. If this is what you are beginning to believe then let me be clear. If you allow yourselves to be circumcised then Christ died for nothing!"

What the apostle writes in 1:4 anticipates 3:13 where he will further explain, in Jewish terms, by what means Christ has rescued them. In the meantime, he is satisfied to point out the one great truth; Christ death was not primarily an act of love or an act of extreme courage; it was 'a once and for all' sacrifice for and rescue from sin.

Again in 4b the apostle takes care to say that Jesus' self offering was entirely consistent with the will of God lest he give the impression that the atonement was the unaided work of God the Son. There is no antithesis between a harsh father and a loving son. Rather, the work of the son indicates the love of the Father. The unity of the Son and the Father is foundational for Paul.

We are enabled to respond in faith because the objective plan of redemption is manifested in the faithful self-giving of the Son. It is Christ's faith that produces faith in us. If faith was essentially a human construct then faith itself would save and become a 'work'. In verse 4 Paul is insisting that we are rescued only by Christ's death on the cross.

Paul uses the word 'rescue' (1:4) to denote the action God is doing in creation. He thinks of mankind's rescue from sin as one aspect of an even larger rescue mission directed towards the whole of creation. The notion of rescue has enormous eschatological implications for Paul that radically distinguishes his vision from the Gnostic one that has had such an influence on Christian thinking overtime. Paul chose the word 'rescue' to indicate that 'in Christ' God was not planning to 'trash' this creation in order to replace it with a new spiritual non physical one at sometime in the future. Again N.T. Wright writes, "Redemption doesn't mean scrapping what's there and starting again from a clean slate but rather liberating what has come to be enslaved." Later the same author adds, "The slavery consists, rather, in sin, redemption from which must ultimately involve not just goodness of soul or spirit but a newly embodied life." (Both the above quotations are found in Surprised By Hope, N.T. Wright, page 96)

One further point! The phrase "Gave himself for us" reveals that Paul had some knowledge of the 'Jesus tradition' because the words are a clear reference to Mark 10:45. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." As Paul recalled these words of Jesus, Isaiah 53:5-6 was lurking in the background of his mind. "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."

The paragraph finishes with "Amen" meaning 'let it come to pass'. R. Allan Cole suggests that the word has theological overtones in that it refers to the steadfast faith of the speaker as well as the faithfulness of the hearer. (Galatians, R. Allan Cole, page 74)

## No Other Gospel: (1:6-10)

*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!*

*Am I trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.*

“I am astonished that you ....” There is no easy or gradual movement to the subject matter. The strength of Paul’s language must not be over looked! He wrote vigorously because the fundamental objective truth of the gospel was at stake. Modernity, informed by the notion that truth is an ever changing human construct, will be at odds with the certainty with which the apostle writes. In today’s world, ‘tolerance’ is regarded as the only virtue that deserves universal consensus. The basis of ‘tolerance’ in modern culture is the notion that a statement is true because it is subjectively believed without reference to an objective norm. In other words, every statement of truth is as good as any other statement because no undisputed norm exists capable of establishing one truth over another. (This is ‘post modernism’ means by relative truth.)

The Galatians are held responsible for the crisis because it is something they are doing to themselves. They have no one to blame for their willing surrender. The carefully chosen language in this passage indicates the severity of the crisis. Paul is not interested in being tactful or ‘politically correct’ so he employs sharp words and phrases such as:

- *I am **astonished** ...*
- ***deserting** the one who called you by the grace of Christ*
- *some people are **throwing you into confusion***
- *trying to **pervert** the gospel of Christ.*
- *let him be **eternally condemned!** (2)*

The righteous anger Paul is expressing is enhanced further by what is not said. In his other letters Paul’s introductions usually include words of praise, gratitude, thanksgiving, commendation and prayer but the urgency of the situation demands that he launch forcibly into his argument immediately. The Greek word meaning ‘to desert’ is *metatithemi*. This word was commonly used in reference to a soldier who deserted their post and revolted against their commander. An individual who transferred their loyalty to another political party was said to be *metalliemenos* which means ‘turncoat’. In effect, the apostle is accusing the Galatians of being deserters and turncoats because they have turned to another gospel.

The essence of the gospel Paul preached was 'grace'. The Good News was that God saved guilty sinners solely on the basis of Christ's death on the cross accepted by faith. Salvation comes to the individual as pure unmerited gift; it has nothing to do with human achieve or law keeping. The false teachers, by insisting on circumcision, were adding 'works' to the work of Christ. (1:6)

It is important to understand that the apostle was writing primarily to Gentile believers. He was not insisting that Jewish believers abandon their obligations to Torah so long as they did not impose it on their Gentile brothers. In addition, he expected the Jewish believers to abandon Torah as a means of self vindication because it was never given for this purpose in the first place. The substance of Richard Longenecker's comment is endorsed by several weighty commentators including C.K. Barrett, N.T. Wright, Allan Cole and Herman N Ridderbos.

"Paul, of course, does not deny that he himself continued as a Christian to live a basically Jewish life style, (See 1 Corinthians 9:19-23) or that he saw it as legitimate for Jewish believers in Jesus to continue to express their faith in the traditional forms of Judaism. (See 1 Corinthians 7:17-20) But he made a distinction between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians with regard to the Mosaic Law." (R. Longenecker, Galatians, page 180)

In all likelihood, Paul's opponents saw themselves as offering a message that complimented the one he preached. They may have never denied that faith in Christ is necessary but they were insisting that Jewish rites and ceremonies be maintained by everyone. However, their gospel did not compliment; it contradicted the gospel of grace and brought with it nothing but disharmony and confusion. He used the word *tarasso* which means to shake or agitate and in 7b he goes further by using an even stronger form of the verb (*metastrepsai*) to indicate that their gospel constituted a complete reversal of his. If their false gospel were to win the day then the Gospel of Christ would be turned upside down, robbed of its strength, obliterated and replaced by another principle altogether. (1:7)

The success of these false preachers may have resulted from their persuasive rhetoric and charismatic personalities so Paul underlines the fact that the truth of his message is rooted in the Gospel itself. Even if an angel preached a contrary gospel it would still be false because the truth of the Gospel is independent of the speaker including the apostle himself. The preacher's authority is a derivative of the Gospel, not the other way around. There is an important lesson here for the contemporary church. Every preacher's words must be compared to the normative Gospel instead of assuming that the words are true just because he/she is popular, articulate, interesting, imaginative and well respected. Every believer has the responsibility to listen with a critical mind but not a critical spirit; there is a world of difference between the two. Unfortunately, critical listening is largely absent in the evangelical church because Biblical literacy is so sadly lacking. One wonders if the Gospel has been taught in a colourless one dimensional fashion when it is actually full of colour and multidimensional in

every respect. This writer is constantly amazed at the depth and breadth of the New Testament serendipitously discovered in discussion with other believers willing to suspend their preconceived notions and read the text from the New Testament writer's point of view. Serious interactive Bible study must be given the place it deserves in the contemporary church.

In 8b and 9b Paul uses the disturbing phrase "let him be eternally condemned". The reader may struggle with the judgmental intensity of his language but here Paul is in good company. "And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck." (Mark 9:42) (1:8-9)

In verse 10 the apostle deals with the issue that he has been 'playing to the crowd'. The reader can infer the possibility that the Judaizers had told the Galatians that Paul actually did believe in and preach the necessity of circumcision but had modified his preaching to gain their favour and approval. Perhaps they were accusing Paul of editing himself in order to gain a more positive response. The section of the letter ends as Paul simply states that he is a servant of Christ not men. A 'man pleaser' would not have written this letter in the first place and certainly he would not use words and phrases such as "deserting", "throwing you into confusion", "trying to pervert" and "let him be eternally condemned".

In his commentary on Galatians, Allan Cole tries to account for the sudden falling away of the Galatians as a way of finding relevance for the modern church. He suggests the following reasons.

1. They desired to escape the criticism coming from the Jewish community that still regarded the church as a Jewish sect. The criticism would likely to have been directed towards the Jewish members.
2. Another reason may have simply been an expression of the human tendency to seek self vindication because of pride. If this was the case then Jewish rites and festivals would provide the external means for self justification.
3. The early church experienced many signs and wonders and it may have grown to expect them as frequent occurrences in all times and in all places. When this did not happen they became 'discouraged charismatics'. They insisted on living on a diet of spiritual excitement and thrill rather than persistent obedient faith. Over time, the desire for the supernatural directed them outwards toward the structured forms of spiritual life provided by the Torah.
4. They discovered that inspite of their faith in Christ sin remained a force in their lives. This fact made them vulnerable to the argument that Paul's



gospel of grace lacked the specificity of the Jewish law. (See Allan Cole page 37-45)

**Statement Concerning Paul's Authority: (1:11-12)**

*I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached to you is not simply human. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.*

Paul has rebuked this church for its willingness to embrace a false gospel that was, in every sense, a foreign gospel. The sharpness of his accusation was justified because the false teachers were leading the Galatians away from their initial confession into a gospel that was nothing less than "perversion". The challenge had to be confronted in order to avoid a disastrous 'works based gospel' that would impose an almost impenetrable barrier for Gentiles. Paul realized that Gentile Christians were being enticed by apostasy; the truth of the Gospel of grace was under attack because the most critical aspect of his message was being disputed. Paul took his stand on three principles.

1. Gentiles can enjoy a common experience of salvation with their Jewish brothers without circumcision.
2. Gentiles can live as authentic Christians without embracing Jewish life style.
3. Jew and Gentile have equality in the church because both have been reconciled to God on the same basis. Both are joined together in fellowship by their common faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

It is common in modern times to accuse the apostle of building a theological monstrosity on top of the simple teaching of Jesus. The apostle is often accused of being an originator rather than a follower. This proposition is often supported by assuming that Paul knew little of the 'Jesus Tradition' even though there is abundant evidence in his writing to suggest otherwise. It is reasonable to assume that Paul knew a great deal about the Christian message even before his 'conversion' - at least in its broad outline. After all, his only reason for becoming such a vigorous opponent was his objection to the message being preached. He must have known what it was. It makes no sense to think that he would terrorize a miniscule group, largely from the lower classes, if he knew nothing about what they were preaching. He did know. The movement was a threat so he decided to get rid of it by any means possible. Paul acted decisively and brutally without the slightest pang of conscience because he regarded Christian preaching as apostasy.

Criticism of Paul is not new; it has occurred several times in the past. Towards the end of the second century someone referred to as The Ascension of James wrote that Paul's law free approach resulted in fewer Gentiles coming to Christ.

He wrote that Paul was son of Greek parents (ie. not Jewish) who wanted to marry the daughter of a high priest so he submitted himself as a proselyte for circumcision. He failed to win the girl and his disappointment led him to write against circumcision and all things Jewish. (Galatians, Longenecker, page 26)

Paul response to his modern critics is the same as his response in the first century. He made three stunning claims concerning his gospel.

1. It is not a human construct. He did not make it up. (1:11)
2. It is not human tradition. (1:12a)
3. The gospel was not acquired through human transmission; it came by revelation. (1:12b)

### **Recounting the Past: Early Life, Conversion and Commission (1:13-17)**

**NOTE:** See Acts for accounts of Paul's conversion. Acts 26 is told by Paul and the other two by Luke. (9:1-31; 22:1-21 and 26:1-32)

*For you have heard of my previous way in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age, being far more zealous for the traditions of the fathers. But when the One who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace was pleased to reveal his son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately thereafter consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia and returned again to Damascus.*

Now Paul supports the thesis previously stated with a review of facts that were, to a great extent, public knowledge. He reviews his personal history by painting a dramatic before and after picture in order to support the unique claims he has made for himself as an apostle. (1:11-12) The desired impact of his narrative is for the Galatians to draw the conclusion that his calling and commission were the exclusive call of God, not of men. He points out that the radical change in his thinking as a model Pharisee could not be explained in either psychological or religious terms. There was nothing in his background as a zealous Jew that could lead to the unanticipated change that followed his life changing experience on the Damascus road. Before his encounter he did not believe the Gospel but was in fact infuriated by it as nothing less than blasphemy.

Several scholars have attempted a rational or psychological explanation of his 'conversion' but Richard Longenecker has pointed out that such attempts have largely been put to rest. He writes:

"Commentators have seen in Paul's persecution of the Christian church an attempt to slay externally the dragons of doubt that he could not silence within his own heart and to repress 'all humaner tendencies in the interest of his legal absolutism'. But the day of the psychological interpretation of Paul's conversion appears over, and deservedly so." (Galatians, Richard Longenecker, page 28)

His previously stated thesis demanded some kind of proof so Paul adds weight to the claim made in 1:11-12 by reviewing several known and accepted facts. These are contrasted with the radical readjustment that followed his 'conversion' in order to raise at least two obvious questions. How can his radical change of heart and mind be explained in human terms? How can it be explained apart from divine intervention?

"The situation before his conversion, at his conversion and after his conversion were such that he clearly got his gospel not from any man, but direct from God." (John Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, page 31) The apostle writes that:

1. He persecuted Christians and tried to completely destroy the church.
2. He was advanced beyond others in his life as a Pharisee.
3. His enthusiasm for the 'traditions of the elders' abounded.

The reader cannot read 1:13-14 without applying the term fanatical. Literally, Paul was describing himself as a terrorist as far as the church was concerned. Luke, the writer of Acts, confirms Paul's state sanctioned terrorist activity.

1. As Stephen is put to death by the Sanhedrin Paul "was there, giving approval to his death". (Acts 8:1a)
2. "But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison." (Acts 8:3)
3. In the apostle's own words: "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them." (Acts 26:9-11)

Luke has described the 'before' Paul so in Galatians 1:15-16a the apostle leads his reader to the only reasonable explanation of the transformation that has taken place in his life.

1. God had set Paul apart even before he was born. (1:15)
2. He was called by God's grace and nothing else. Mercy and grace found him. (1:15b)
3. God revealed Jesus to (in) him. (1:16) What began as a revelation of Christ became a revelation of Christ in Paul.

4. He was called for a purpose. His task was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. (1:16)
5. He did not consult with any man even the apostles. He retired immediately to think out for himself the implications of his new discovery.(1:16-17)
6. He went immediately to Arabia before returning to Damascus. (1:17)

By recounting his life before and after the Damascus road, the apostle has argued his thesis by forcing his readers to deal with the facts of the case. His gospel had authority because God Himself was the source. His Damascus road experience was just as real an encounter with Christ as that experienced by the other apostles. Next, Paul will go on to say that not even the 'development' of his gospel understanding came from the apostles.

#### **Paul's First Visit to Jerusalem: (1:18-24)**

Paul has just finished presenting the case that the transformation of his entire life was due entirely to a direct encounter with Christ. Therefore, his call to be an apostle was not inferior or less authoritative than the other apostles. He adds substance to the argument by showing that his apostleship and message of grace was not derived from any of the apostles including the three pillars Peter, James and John. His only tutor was the risen Christ.

There is no reason to believe that Paul's gospel was necessarily fully formed immediately following his conversion on the Damascus road. During his three year sojourn in Arabia the apostle must have gone through a period of intensive self examination during which he came to a new understanding of the law, the prophets and the inclusive nature of God's plan to rescue all of his creation, both Jew and Gentile through the sacrificial death of Jesus. He came to understand that Salvation begins and ends with God and its benefits are offered as unmerited gift, given by grace and received by faith apart from human achievement.

In the passage that follows, Paul defends the authority of his message by underlining one important fact; the formation of his gospel was not due to his interaction with any of the apostles.

#### **First Visit to Jerusalem: (1:18-24)**

*Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles – only James, the Lord's brother. I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: "The man who*

*formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.” And they praised God because of me.*

There is no suggestion in the letter that Paul’s Damascus road encounter fully formed his gospel message instantaneously even though it did involve a direct encounter with the risen Christ. He understood that he had been called and given divine authority to take the Good News to the very community he had previously disparaged.

The reader must continually keep in mind the purpose of the apostle’s argument thus far. He has been developing his credentials as an apostle to establish his preaching as ‘normative’ teaching. He is pressing the Galatians to reject an alien Gospel because it conflicts with his. His case has two foundations; the direct nature of his calling (“I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.”) and his non association with the apostles, particularly Peter.

Chapter 1:1-17 has been dedicated to 1:12b so now he turns his attention to 1:12a. In 1:18-24 he will argue that there is a second reason to accept his teaching as normative; the gospel of grace through faith apart from the works of the law was not passed on to him by the other apostles nor did it require their confirmation. This fact substantiates his first claim concerning the actuality of his direct encounter with the risen Christ.

He makes the following points:

1. Three years went by before he went to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus. (The three years may echo the three years the apostles spent with Jesus before his crucifixion)
2. He stayed in Jerusalem for only fifteen days.
3. The only apostles he met were Peter and James the brother of Jesus.
4. Later he went to Syria and Cilicia where he was personally unknown.
5. The stories they had heard were seen to be true. “And they praised God because of me.” (1:24)

In this passage Paul is offering a counter claim to the allegation that he learned the Gospel and received his authority from Peter. Losing this argument would have been costly; his authority would have been greatly diminished or destroyed altogether. In 1:18-24 the apostle sets out what he had been doing since his ‘conversion’.

Paul chose his words carefully and included only the most decisive details. He made it clear that his visit was not for the purpose of instruction or confirmation. The Greek word, translated “to get acquainted” is the verb *hístoresai*. In everyday Greek this word meant ‘to sight see’ and when used in reference to a person it indicates a temporary first meeting. The meeting took place three years after

Paul's 'conversion' and three years was time enough for him to come to an understanding of the gospel; he did not require instruction from Peter. The meeting lasted only three weeks and much of the time was spent preaching. (See Acts 9:28-29) Therefore, the suggestion that Peter's tutelage was a critical element in the formation Paul's gospel is false.

Obviously, Paul and Peter had time to talk about subjects other than the weather. They may have "discussed matters pertaining to their common commitment to Christ". (Longenecker, page 38) It is also likely that Peter shared details of the 'Jesus tradition' that were still unknown to Paul. However, conversations such as these do not suggest that Paul was looking for correction or credentials.

The contrast in verse 24 is noteworthy. Whereas his opponents were bent on falsifying Paul's gospel, the churches initially unfamiliar with him reacted to his message with joyous affirmation because they recognized Paul's gospel as identical to the one they preached. (1:24)

Dr. Stott summarizes verse 13-24 beautifully: (The Message of Galatians, John Stott, page 36)

"The fanaticism of his pre-conversion career, the divine initiative in his conversion, and his almost total isolation from the Jerusalem church leaders afterwards together combined to demonstrate that his message was not from man but from God. Further, this historical, circumstantial evidence could not be gainsaid. The apostle is able to confirm and guarantee it by a solemn affirmation: "In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!" (1:20)

## Chapter Two

### Seeking Consensus in Jerusalem: (2:1-10)

*Fourteen years later I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. I went in response to a revelation and set before them the Gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain. Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the Gospel might remain with you. (2:1-5)*

Paul has already established his gospel as arising from his encounter with Christ on the Damascus road. Furthermore, the content of his preaching was not derivative because it developed independently of the other apostles. Why then did he travel to Jerusalem for the purpose of consulting with the leaders of the Jerusalem church after so many years? What was he seeking?

For fourteen years Paul had preached a gospel that included Gentiles as equal partners with Jews. The work of Christ on the cross, he taught, was sufficient to reconcile both Jew and Gentile to God and to each other. While Jewish believers could continue to live as Jews, there was no justification for imposing the law and circumcision on Gentile believers.

News must have come to him that, once again, the Judaizers were attempting to undermine his gospel by driving a wedge between him and the other apostles and by spreading the rumour that two distinct gospels were being preached – a law free one by Paul and another by the Jerusalem church. Therefore, the goal of this second visit was not to have his message ratified but to demonstrate that his gospel was compatible with the leaders in Jerusalem. (Perhaps it was not identical in every respect.)

He took companions with him. Barnabas was a Jew and Titus an uncircumcised Gentile. Paul brought them as a concrete expression of Christian liberty made possible solely by a common confession of Jesus as Messiah, Lord and Saviour. The friendship of these two men demonstrated that an enormous social barrier had been breached by the power of Paul's Christ centered gospel. Secondly, if Titus could move about the Christian community in Jerusalem with total acceptance, what excuse would there be for imposing a more exacting requirement on Gentile Christians. The acceptance of Titus by the Jerusalem church would strike a decisive and commanding blow against those seeking to disrupt Paul's ministry by adding law to gospel. (2:1) The friendship of Barnabas and Titus reminds the reader of Paul's letter to the Ephesians where he writes so rhapsodically of an impassible barrier turned to rubble by the cross of Christ.

*For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.*  
(Ephesians 2:14-16)

Paul states the purpose of his visit unequivocally; it is to lay out the gospel he has been preaching to the Gentiles for more than a decade. His plan to visit Jerusalem did not result from an invitation nor was it a submission to an authority residing in the Jerusalem church to which he felt accountable. He was responding to a revelation. (2:1)

He met privately with leaders "for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain." (2:2) Paul cannot mean that he had accumulated a number of serious misgivings concerning the substance of his preaching. He was not insecure about his gospel but he did recognize that a dangerous schism was developing where everyone, theologically speaking, could go their own way. The seriousness of the threat made him determined to demolish the influence of the

Judaizers otherwise the impact of his seventeen year ministry could be overturned. There was a lot at stake and the apostle knew it.

What did not happen reassured Paul and for good reason. The presence of Titus made concrete the substance of Paul's preaching and it placed the church in a position from which they could not hide. They had the choice of insisting that Titus be circumcised or they could demonstrate their unity with Paul by doing nothing. They chose the latter. Titus was acknowledged as a brother Christian – no questions were asked and the threat of a theological schism was put to rest. (at least for a time) (2:3)

The words, "Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was Greek" (2:3) reveal the level of stress Paul must have felt as he made his way to Israel's sacred city. "Not even" suggests that the outcome he desired was 'not a done deal'. He did not assume a positive outcome. As we read the third verse, a sigh of relief is almost audible as Paul realized that at least for a while, a major tragedy had been avoided and he had not 'run in vain'.

Who the false brothers were we do not know and Paul may not have known either. If the letter was written to churches in northern Galatia the Judaizers were most likely Jewish visitors attempting to disrupt the growth of the Jesus movement by calling the 'God Fearers' back to the synagogue. However, if southern Galatia was the location then Paul's opponents could have come from within the community itself. If this was the case, they could have been Jews and/or Gentiles. He was sure, however, that they were false brothers because of their unwillingness to accept uncircumcised Gentiles as bona fide members of the Christian community. They were in complete denial of the universal/inclusive gospel lying at the core of the gospel Paul preached. No compromise or negotiation was possible so the apostle simply 'dug in his heels'.

Paul calls them spies and infiltrators thereby questioning their right to even belong. Pretending to share friendship and common cause with the church, they were in reality, intent on developing a tactic to destroy the freedom contained in the message of 'free grace'. Only two possibilities existed. Either a person is a free in Christ or they are a slave to the massive details of the Jewish law. What does Paul mean?

When Paul wrote of 'slavery' (to the law) he was thinking of a distortion that had arisen in Israel after the destruction of the first temple. Israel, in their mistaken legalism, had forgotten that their unique relationship with God was the result of His promise to Abraham. They had forgotten that the law was a gracious gift that revealed the nature/will of God and formed them as a covenanted people. They had turned God's gift into an abstracted legalism which provided a means of finding favour with God. In other words, reconciliation with God and the maintenance of the covenant, from their flawed perspective, depended on human



achievement. Paul called this notion slavery and by doing so he drew them back to the worst moment in their history; the time when they were slaves in Egypt. The insistence that Gentiles be circumcised effectively returned the church to slavery as oppressive as that experienced by Israel in the past.

The law, misunderstood as a means of self vindication, rendered their situation as hopeless as their captivity in Egypt. Freedom from the tyranny of the Egyptian Pharaohs required divine intervention. Paul drew a theological parallel between the past and the present. His message was a gospel of grace in which Christ's death was **the** divine intervention that freed the Galatians from the guilt of sin and from the burden/slavery of human achievement. A free person lives within the reality that they have been rescued by God apart from merit whereas the slave is chained to a legalistic abstraction of the law never intended by the God in the first place. (Paul never did believe that there were two covenants – one of works and one based on grace. His illustration from Israel's history assumes the point of view of his accusers.)

The reader must not interpret 2:5 as the words of a man gloating over a hard won personal victory. He had remained resolute so that the gospel would 'remain' in them. The real issue was the enduring truth of grace apart from works. The apostle was gratified because the acceptance of Timothy into the community indicated the church's acceptance of a non-negotiable enduring truth.

There were other circumstances; however, when Paul's flexible side broke through. He was willing to 'bend' for the sake of the gospel if basic truth was not under attack. Acts 16:1-5 contains an account of Paul's visit to Derbe and Lystra, two Galatian towns. The visit turned out to be noteworthy because it was the occasion when the apostle met Timothy, the son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father. Timothy and his mother were probably 'converts' from Paul's earlier visit. Since his conversion, Timothy had become one of the most admired members of this early church community. Everyone sang his praises so Paul decided to recruit Timothy as a member of his 'team'. Paul knew that Timothy's Jewish/Greek heritage would help them gain access to both the Jewish and Greek communities. Even though Timothy had not been raised an observant Jew, he would have been regarded as fully Jewish because of his mother's background. This way of establishing a person's identity as a Jew remains true today.

Therefore, Timothy needed to be circumcised as a practical matter. Paul knew that the advancement of the gospel in Jewish communities would require that he circumcise Timothy. This was a remarkable decision on Paul's part because of the stand he had taken at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15) in addition to his uncompromising conviction contained in his Galatian letter. Many would accuse him of gross inconsistency. John Stott deals with the question of inconsistency by pointing out the difference between policy and theology. He wrote, "But there was a deep consistency in his thought and action. Once the principle had been

established that circumcision was not necessary for salvation, he was ready to make concessions in policy. What was unnecessary for acceptance with God was advisable for acceptance by some human beings.” (John Stott, *The Message of Acts*, page 254)

First Corinthians 9:19-23 was another occasion when Paul, for the sake of the Gospel, appeared to compromise. Apparently, his behaviour in the market place had attracted the view that he was not observant in respect to the food laws.

*Though I am free and belong to no man, I made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but I am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.*

In the above passage, the apostle offers a defense in which the principle idea is not his personal freedom but the advancement of the gospel. As a slave of the gospel, he is prepared to accommodate himself to a variety of social settings to win as many as possible as long as fundamental gospel truth remains uncompromised. Therefore, he was prepared to be kosher among Jewish people and non kosher when he ate with Gentiles. Paul took this stance because he no longer believed that these practices were essential for a right relationship to God. He had no difficulty with his fellow 'Christian' Jews practicing the kosher laws as long as they understood that they too had been reconciled to God by grace alone.

Paul appeared to obey the dietary laws in the same way as those he was trying to win but he differed profoundly in his motivation. Some abstained from eating certain foods out of legal obligation but Paul abstained because he desired to win them to the gospel.

C.K. Barrett summarized Paul's varying attitude as follows:

“Thus Paul can adopt his varying attitude – to the Jews as a Jew, to the Gentiles as a Gentile – because he recognizes not a smaller but a greater debt to God than legalism implies. He is not related to God by legal observance, but by grace and faith, and in Christ, only; but precisely in this non legal relationship he is Christ's slave, who owes absolute obedience not to a code (though on occasion, and with due caution, he can give precepts to his converts) but to Christ as a person, and to the absolute principle of universal love, which Christ both taught and exemplified.” (C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, page 214)

R. Allan Cole has also pointed out Paul's flexibility concerning the Torah. He agrees essentially with Barrett, Stott and Longenecker on this point. The reader

can find Cole's comment on page 10 of his commentary. (See the second last paragraph.)

In his letter to the Galatians, however, the apostle recognized no opportunity for accommodation; truth was at stake. Paul continued to make his case in the next paragraph.

*As for those who seemed to be important, - whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not judge by external appearance – those men added nothing to my message. On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews. For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles. James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do. (2:6-10)*

Paul referred to the apostles as those “who seemed to be important”. These words combined with what follows in verse 6 give the first impression that Paul was disparaging Peter, James and John. Reading Paul as if he is devaluing the three apostles makes little sense given what he had written in 1:17 where he acknowledged the fact that they were all ‘apostles before’ him. Secondly, the paragraph ends as Paul emphasizes the agreement between him and the others concerning the unity of the gospel; all three preached the same message supported by the fact that nothing was added to his message. If Paul intended to cast aspersions on them he would have been undermining the appeal and strength of his own argument. Herman Ridderbos believes that Paul intended an “indirect but undeniable criticism of the way in which others were trying to play off the prestige of these leaders against him”. (The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia, Herman Ridderbos, page 86)

Paul made it plain that the very people whose authority had been played off against him were in complete agreement with his message. In the first century the giving of the right hand indicated reciprocal knowledge of a common cause. They shook hands in theological agreement as each accepted the other's unique mission.

The apostle's visit to Jerusalem firmly established the following critical truths.

1. He has preached the same gospel from the beginning.
2. His gospel has formed independent of the apostles.
3. His visit to Jerusalem was compelled by a revelation. He did not go because he was commanded to do so by a higher human authority.
4. The apostles accepted the validity of his Gentile mission as paralleling their mission to the Jewish people.
5. The apostles asked only that he continue to remember the poverty of the Jerusalem church.

## **Paul Calls Peter on the Carpet: (2:11-21)**

*When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. (2:11-13)*

There never was a golden era in the church. Nearly all the letters and epistles were written to prevent the church from fragmenting. James wrote his epistle because intellectual affirmation of “Christian orthodoxy” found little application in everyday life. Faith was in danger of being separated from ‘works’.

The church at Corinth was a predominately Gentile. Their Hellenistic world view and attitude towards ethical behaviour lingered and caused them to completely misunderstand the nature of Christian freedom. Paul recognized them as believers but he saw that, without some radical surgery, they would never progress in their spiritual journey.

Even when the apostle wrote to churches doing well he took time to remind them that they were sinners who had been saved by grace. (See Ephesians 2:1-10) Modern Christians who become discouraged by the many struggles of the church have no reason to look back to a better time; it never existed.

The integrity of the New Testament and the early church shines through this passage. As Paul ‘washes the church’s dirty linen in public’ the reader becomes acquainted with what life was really like for the first followers of Christ. Paul’s narrative allows us to understand the gospel’s power to overcome preconceived notions and the simple human tendency to conform to a more popular idea brought by men with a reputation.

Paul did not hesitate to contrast himself with Peter and Barnabas to show the harmony between his actions and message. He ‘stuck to his guns’; they did not. “When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face,” signals the seriousness of the situation but there is no hint in the text that Peter had actually change his mind concerning Gentiles and the law. Only Peter’s outward behaviour changed so Paul called him a hypocrite for that very reason. The previous passage was an account of how Peter had given Paul his right hand as a sign of solidarity. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine how Peter could change his theological position and forget the dramatic events recorded in Acts 10 and 11.

He was in Joppa relaxing on the roof of a house when suddenly he fell into a trance. A four cornered sheet fell from heaven containing a variety of ‘unclean’ animals. “Rise Peter; kill and eat.” Peter resisted so the voice continued repeating itself three times. “What God has cleansed, you must not call common.” Peter got it! He decided to accompany the Gentile messengers to the

house of Cornelius and enter his house. Normally, Peter would not have done this because it was unlawful for a Jew.

Peter preached his first sermon to an exclusively Jewish 'congregation' saying, "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality." When the Holy Spirit fell on them Peter understood that these Gentiles must be baptized and accepted into the church as they were.

In Antioch, Peter's unchanged theological position did not resist the pressures of the 'circumcision party' so he separated himself and Barnabas from the very people he had been eating with. In Jerusalem Paul resisted the pressure to conform but in Antioch Peter did not.

The catastrophic effect of Peter's withdrawal cannot be exaggerated. The meal Paul referred to would have included the fellowship/common meal as well as the 'Lord's Table'. Peter's withdrawal from the common meal, resulted in his separation from Gentiles at the 'Lord's Table' as well. His influence was immediate. The rest of the Jewish Christians, including Barnabus, followed suit. Paul had to act quickly otherwise two distinct groups would arise. Gentiles would be at one table during the Lord's Supper and Jews would be at another thereby implying that Gentiles were lacking in some respect when compared to Jewish believers. Peter's behavior played right into the hands of Paul's opponents because they believed that Gentiles were inferior in as much as they lacked the moral and ritual guidance provided by Torah.

Had Paul not 'called Peter on the carpet' the early church may have returned to an exclusively Jewish movement or it may have continued along two separate ethnic tracks thus reconstructing the wall of separation Christ's death was meant to tear down. (See Ephesians 2:14-18)

Was it necessary for Paul to be as irate as he was? Was his confrontational approach consistent with Jesus' teaching? "If your brother sins against you go and show him your fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over." (Matthew 18:15) The context of this teaching suggests that our Lord was speaking of interpersonal relationships. His teaching concerns what should be done when a harmonious relationship has been broken because of the actions of one person. The offended party, according to Jesus, has the obligation of restoring the relationship with honest talk. Paul did not react in a manner that Jesus would have criticized because he was dealing with much more than his relationship with Peter.

Jesus was highly confrontational to the point of anger in the temple because a fundamental non negotiable truth was at stake. Injustice and exploitation of the poor, even when they take place in the name of religion, are still an abomination before God. The disagreement between Peter and Paul was not simply a matter of friendship. Like the scene in the Temple, a fundamental threat to the truth of

the gospel was taking place. Peter, for whatever reason, had come down on the wrong side of this issue. He was dreadfully wrong in his public behaviour so Paul had to correct him publicly.

*When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?" (2:14)*

At this point in the letter Paul appeals to Peter's original attitude. He was unable to accept what Peter had done given his previous understanding. The apostle could not comprehend why Peter could again compel the Gentile believers to live as Jews. Paul assumed that Peter's withdrawal would have the effect of compelling Gentiles to live as Jews. He does not mention the stance taken during the Jerusalem council perhaps because it had not yet taken place. Peter's influence is taken for granted. His actions had great influence because he was, for good reason, highly regarded as an apostle who had spent three years with the earthly Jesus in addition to being a primary witness of Christ's bodily resurrection. Paul had to hold Peter's 'feet to the fire' because his momentary deviation from the gospel was intolerable.

The good news was that guilty sinners, both Jew and Gentile, are pardoned and accepted by God on the basis of pure grace. Jesus' death alone was sufficient to reconcile man to God. The fundamental truth of grace without works had to be maintained. In the next paragraph and in chapters 3 and 4, Paul continues this thought as he develops the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith.

*We who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Christ Jesus. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. (2:15-16)*

In the passage quoted above the apostle introduces the word 'justified' and he repeats it three times in the course of two verses. Paul was not writing as an 'ivory tower' theologian. He was not simply playing with ideas and abstract concepts in order to impress others with his intellectualism. Rather, he was addressing genuine problems existing in the early church. The one true gospel had to be grasped and held on to by the early believers otherwise the church would fragment into two distinct ethnic divisions – one Gentile and the other Jewish. Under these conditions the gospel could not advance and the church would become a momentary diversion before returning to a gospel of works.

When we think of Paul, 'justification by faith' comes immediately to mind but it is not his only salvific metaphor; there are others as well. Each of them deal with how the cross reconciles man to God and with each the apostle is careful to say that God is the beginning, middle and end of man's salvation. In other words' salvation is by 'grace alone apart from human achievement'. Like 'justification'

each metaphor is intended to lead the early church and us to the truth behind the metaphor. The modern evangelical church needs to be reminded that it is not saved because it believes in 'justification by faith'. The church is saved because it has faith in the Christ who justifies.

'Justification' is a forensic word associated with the Roman legal system. The metaphor places us in a Roman court of law where all the evidence necessary has been gathered to convict us; we have no means to prove our innocence; we stand condemned as we await our sentence. But then we are astonished to hear the judge say, "In spite of the evidence, you are free to go. You may leave the court as if you are an innocent person." John Stott wrote, "To condemn is to declare somebody guilty; 'to justify' is to declare him not guilty, innocent or righteous. In the Bible it refers to God's act of unmerited favour by which He puts a sinner right with Himself, not only pardoning or acquitting him, but accepting and treating him as righteous."

At the end of the American civil war one of Lincoln's Generals came to him insisting that the north punish the south. Lincoln was unequivocal in his response. "We will treat them as if they had never been away." The President may have had the prodigal son in mind as he spoke because the father in the parable treated the son as never having been away; he is returned to his previous status as the younger son. The son was 'justified' by the father.

Our justification takes place because of Christ's death. An exchange takes place whereby his righteousness is imputed to us as he receives God's judgment on our behalf. The cross is also the occasion when God, through his incarnate son, mysteriously absorbs our sin into Himself. In other words, God Himself takes responsibility for the sins of mankind through Christ's atoning death. The cross, therefore, is God's greatest work at the moment of his greatest weakness.

The beginning of verse 15 makes reference to those who are ethnically Jewish and those who are not. He makes this contrast because he had no intention of detracting from the privilege they experienced by being given Torah. In Romans he wrote, "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? **Much in every way!** First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God." (Romans 3:1)

While the apostle recognized the privilege that Torah had given the Jewish people, they were no more able to achieve righteousness apart from the unmerited grace of God than their Gentile brothers. (2:16) The last part of verse 16 is an allusion to Psalm 143:2 where the Psalmist writes, "Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you."

Next Paul deals with the objection that his gospel is bereft of ethical teaching.

*If, while we seek to be justified in Christ it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a law breaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing. (2: 17-21)*

The accusation being anticipated by Paul was a familiar critique. He had faced it before as in Romans 6. The above verses are not easy to understand and they have been interpreted differently by a variety of commentators. It is helpful, therefore, to keep the objection in mind. Paul, speaking on behalf of his objector, is saying something like this.

“Paul what you are teaching is very dangerous because it will cause men and women to sin. You say that faith in Christ alone justifies us. We believe that your gospel is lacks moral responsibility; it has no norm. If we are reconciled to God without works from where comes the motivation to do good. Paul, you are encouraging us to break the law. If God justifies people apart from works it follows that there is absolutely no reason why anyone should desire to be righteous. You are simply telling us to do as we like.”

Let's consider Paul's response one statement at a time.

1. *If, while we seek to be justified in Christ it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not!*

The apostle began by stating that their objection was absurd before he proceeded to say why.

2. *If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a law breaker.*

With these words Paul seems to be saying that a return to works righteousness will simply prove our sinfulness. Our inability to obey the law will again be exposed and we will be in the same place as before. We will discover again the folly of self-justification.

3. *For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.*

The law serves an important purpose. It shows man's inability to earn favour with God sufficient for salvation. The law kills our sense of entitlement and desire for self justification and we are driven to concede that only by living in union with God can we acquire Godliness.

4. *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*



Paul is here saying that 'justification' is more than a legal fiction whereby our status is changed but not our inner being. Justification includes not only forgiveness for past sins; it serves to give us victory over sin on a daily basis. However, Paul was no perfectionist. The pattern of our former life was law breaking but now we aspire to obey God. The law itself can never render us obedient but our union with Christ can. Because we are crucified with Christ our sins are effectively blotted out and we are united with him in his sin bearing death. Our union with him makes obedience possible because the pattern of disobedience is broken even though it is not yet perfected. Christ's faithfulness produces trusting faith in us

5. *I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing.*

Paul brings this discussion to a conclusion by saying that a return to works of the law would render Christ's death meaningless.

## Chapter Three

### Arguments from Experience: (3:1-5)

The previous passages expressed the apostle's great doctrine of 'Justification by Faith'. Paul insisted that mankind has been reconciled to God by grace alone through faith apart from works and with great care he has defended the doctrine from the accusation that it promotes 'lawlessness'. (He will return to this issue in chapters 5-6.) From the false teachers' point of view, his doctrine (2:15-16) contained no moral imperative. In 3:1-18 he continues his defense with three carefully crafted and powerful arguments. The first is drawn from their experience and the second two are scriptural.

1. He defends his gospel by appealing to the conversion experience of the Galatians. (3:1-5)
2. Scripture is used to show the continuity of his doctrine with Israel's story. (3:6-14)
3. He retells the story of Abraham to demonstrate that he received the Promise on the basis of Faith four hundred years before Sinai. (3:15-18)

*You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before our very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you. Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believed what you heard? (3:1-5)*

The strength and impact of his first defense is made all the more evident by reviewing the conversion experiences of the early church as told by Luke. The first one is recorded in Acts 10:44-48. The narrative is a dramatic one that involves Peter's visit to a Gentile home after his unexpected life changing vision. It is interesting to note that Peter's experience is mentioned first by Luke even though it was Paul's accepted task to take the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Peter went into Cornelius' house and found a large gathering of Gentile people. He reviewed the restrictions of the law before asking Cornelius why he sent for Peter. Cornelius explained his complimentary vision in which he was instructed to send for Peter. Then Peter began to announce the story of Jesus explaining that there was forgiveness of sins for all (both Jew and Gentile) who trust in Christ. Suddenly and remarkably a reorientation in Peter's attitude towards non Jews had taken place because of his encounter with Cornelius.

Peter was still speaking when the Holy Spirit was poured out to everyone. They began to praise God and speak in 'tongues'. The outpouring persuaded Peter that the death of Jesus was God's gift to all of humanity. In the next chapter, Peter shared his experience with the apostles and various others. He said, "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' So if God gave them the same gifts as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God." (Acts 11:1-18)

The supernatural nature and impact of this event makes it difficult to explain Peter's withdrawal from the Gentiles later on in Antioch. The dramatic reorientation that took place at Cornelius's house makes Peter's behavior at Antioch difficult to explain. His withdrawal from the Gentiles during meals was probably caused by his distaste for criticism rather than a change in his theology. (2:11-14)

Acts 19 tells another more complex 'conversion' story that has been given great emphasis by the Pentecostal tradition. The setting was Ephesus. Paul met some disciples of John who had known only the baptism of repentance. (John's baptism) Paul shifted their attention away from John to Jesus and baptized all of them. When his hands were placed on them the Holy Spirit was poured out. Following the pattern of the previous accounts, tongues and prophesy accompanied their conversion. (Acts 19:1-7)

**NOTE:** The Pentecostal tradition concludes from the event in Acts 19:1-7 that complete conversion consists of two steps. The first step involves believing in Christ for salvation but this initial event is followed later by a second event - the 'baptism of the Spirit'. The sign of this second event is speaking in tongues. Pentecostals promote this gift with the same emotional intensity that is used by other Christian traditions to reject 'tongues' as the essential sign of the Spirit.

Readers may find it instructive to read John Stott's little pamphlet called "Baptism and the Fullness of the Spirit". He discusses the significance of Acts 19:17.

These two accounts provide the background for Paul's began argument in Galatians 3:15. The Galatians could not easily dismiss the apostle's questions because they were based on a common memory of genuine events that had nothing to do with law keeping.

*You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? (3:1a)*

These seven words contain a burst of emotion and we wonder why Paul used such harsh and strident language. Did he want to drive them into a permanent state of alienation from him and the one gospel? The apostle was full of emotion because he simply could not comprehend the appeal of the Judaizers. The Galatians were not foolish in the sense of being unintelligent but they were lacking in the discernment necessary to see that the false teachers were in total contradiction of everything Paul had taught and everything they had experienced. Paul does not really believe in bewitching. He simply used a metaphor to express his astonishment and disbelief. "Who has bewitched you?"

Paul could not understand why the Galatians would favour a law that required human achievement over a gospel centered on Christ's achievement. He could not understand the appeal of 'demand' over 'promise'.

*Before our very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. (3:1b)*

This sentence is a reference to Paul's initial preaching when he set before them the effectiveness of Christ's death on the cross. Several commentators have pointed out that 'portray' has the force of an announcement displayed on a billboard or placard constructed in plain sight. In spite of the clarity of his teaching, they were in the process of abandoning the gospel of grace by adding 'works of righteousness'. His clear preaching meant that they were to blame, not the preacher or his opponents.

Paul continues his defense of the gospel of grace by asking five questions based on a shared memory. Each question builds in momentum and forces them to see the enormous chasm between what they had received but were now abandoning.

*Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? (3:2b)*

There was no doubt in Paul's mind that their 'conversion' had been authentic. They had received the Spirit, the sign that confirmed their conversion. Observing of the law is contrasted with believing because the means of the Spirit is either

one or the other. Paul expected them to say, “It came by **believing** what we heard.” (See 1 Corinthians 10:14-17)

The modern reader need not assume that the apostle believed that a tongue speaking was **the** necessary sign for authentic conversion. He argues in 1 Corinthians 13 that ‘love’ is the essential sign of Christian conversion because love (agape) is the one gift that cannot be counterfeited. ‘Agape’ is primarily an action rather than a feeling. Christian love is not motivated by the lovability of the object and it acts without expecting the reward of returned love. God’s love is the pattern for Christian love. God loves because he is love! (C.S. Lewis has a wonderful discussion of ‘agape’ in his book “The Four Loves” as well as in “Mere Christianity”.) (1 Corinthians 12-14 contains Paul’s most complete discussion of how gifts function in the church.)

*Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? (3:3)*

This question is for emphasis. It calls for an answer identical with the previous question; the Spirit was not given because of human achievement. Paul was asking the Galatians to distinguish between a supernatural gift and a naturalistic accomplishment.

*Have you suffered so much for nothing? (3:4)*

The above question, according some Greek scholars, can be translated, “Have you **experienced** so much for nothing?” ( *sensu bono* vs *sensu malo* ) If this is the case, the question can be read as a reference to positive consequences rather than negative ones. Either way, the effect of the question remains the same. He is asking them why they wanted to turn their backs on something that brought so many benefits.

His question can also be read as a reference to the suffering and persecution they had experienced following their commitment to Christ. They accepted such suffering because they believed the gospel of grace apart from works. Their suffering confirmed their believing response to Paul’s preaching. Returning to works as a supplement to grace overturns their initial belief and renders their suffering pointless.

*Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believed what you heard? (3:5)*

The last question asks what saved them. Did the Spirit work miracles in them because they observed the law or because they believed Paul’s message? They cannot have it both ways!

**Consider Abraham:** (3:6-9)

After arguing his case at an experiential level, the apostle offers several Biblical and theological arguments. He wants to show that subjective experience is not illusory but grounded in the eternal purposes of God. Experience requires theological reflection and theology needs to be demonstrated by experience. It is possible, even likely, that the Biblical narratives and texts he selected were the very ones being used against him. His methodology was to show that these texts supported his position but not his opponents'. It was a question of exegesis.

Many of the Gentiles would not have been as familiar with this story. However, we can assume that there were many Jewish members and 'God Fearers' who were entirely familiar with the story of Abraham.

The apostle was faced with a formidable task. He had to demonstrate that there was continuity in the way God had been rescuing his creation beginning with Abraham. The Galatians needed to be convinced that God did not set in motion his saving work with the law but then changed his mind when the first approach proved unsuccessful. Alternatively, Abraham's story was used to illustrate that there has only been one kind of saving operation all along. The recovery of the creation from the disastrous consequences of Adam's fall begins and ends with the Creator Himself. Paul shows that God's call to Abraham was not a response to something Abraham did nor was it a reward for something Abraham possessed.

In this section of his letter, the apostle discusses the continuity between Abraham and Christ but the reader must not interpret Paul as implying that the Mosaic Law was just an unfortunate 'speed bump' or diversion. Paul's view of 'Sinai' was that it was an indispensable divine revelation that was not a contradiction of but an essential aspect of the Israel's covenant. The law did not function to alter the promise. On the contrary, the commandments gave shape and substance to Israel's relationship to God, but they were never intended as a vehicle to earn or sustain their covenantal relationship. The law, according to Paul, brought conviction that reconciliation had to come in another way that did not involve 'works of the law'. The law was also a lens through which the righteousness of God was made manifest in Christ. Christ was able to stand in our place because he was the one true 'law keeper'.

Paul began by turning to the story of Abraham; he quotes from Genesis 15:6 and Genesis 12:3.

*Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was accounted to him as righteous." Understand, then, that those who believe are the children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God, would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announce the gospel in advance to Abraham: "**All the nations** will be blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.*  
(3:6-9)

Paul is adding to his experiential argument with a story from Israel's past. He places high regard on their ability to learn from experience but experience is not enough. What is learned experientially needs the confirmation of scripture. Obviously, this argument would have had more appeal to the Jewish members of the community than the Gentile members.

The strategy is a stroke of genius for two reasons. It takes the Jewish believers back to the father of their nation and his encounter with God through which the covenant was first received. Secondly, it counters an argument likely used by the false teachers themselves. Paul's opponents may have used the story of Abraham to show that it was necessary to be a child of Abraham in order to share salvation with his descendants. In other words, Gentiles must become children of Abraham through circumcision. The apostle revisits this story and deals with how they should understand the Abrahamic covenant in a different way.

Paul began by saying that Abraham's faith was his spiritual disposition brought about by the call itself. He responded to the Promise without a sense of accomplishment and surrendered himself to God at that moment. Abraham simply trusted God knowing that he was able only to respond but not contribute to what was an offer of pure grace.

The apostle added that "*it was accounted to him as righteous*". Abraham was 'accounted righteous' even though he did not possess it. God conferred 'righteousness' upon him whereby he became free of guilt and punishment. Being placed by God outside a state of guilt, Abraham was put in a place of total harmony with God. His status with God had nothing to do with the law.

On this verse Allan Cole wrote, "In other words, Abraham entered into his particular blessing by realizing that he could do nothing himself, by confessing that fact to God, and by throwing himself on God, counting on God to do that which he could not do." (Galatians, page 135)

Who are the true 'spiritual' descendents of Abraham? Those who respond to God's call in the same way and on the same basis as Abraham. This was the conclusion Paul was asking for.

*The Scripture foresaw that God, would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announce the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All the nations will be blessed through you."*

Paul also reinterpreted the story of the Promise as a foreshadowing of the universal benefit of Christ's death. Gentiles (all the nations) will also be saved if they respond to God as Abraham did. Circumcision and biological relationships are entirely beside the point. The only difference between Abraham and them was that the process of justification, anticipated in the story of Abraham, had

been made plain in Christ. The principle of justification remained constant from Abraham until Christ. Nothing had changed!

*So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (3:9)*

Verse 9 serves as a summary. Abraham is “the man of faith” in that he stands as the example of how all of mankind, both Jew and Gentile, are reconciled to God by having faith identical with his.

*All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of Law”. Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, “The righteous will live by faith”. This law is not based on faith; on the contrary, “The man who does these things will live by them”. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree”. He redeemed us so that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the spirit. (3:10-14)*

A person reading these words for the first time may find Paul overly negative about human nature because modernity has a more positive view. It is willing to admit that mankind is riddled with imperfection but such an admission does not negate the desire or the possibility of acquiring more credits than debits. Modernity, with its doctrine of ‘inevitable progress’, sees itself as in possession of sufficient ‘goodness’ to impress God and earn His favour. The apostle responds with a resounding ‘No!’ Either we approach God completely without merit on the basis of grace or we approach Him according to our merit. Abraham is the ‘pioneer’ of the first approach.

*All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of Law”. Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, “The righteous will live by faith”. This law is not based on faith; on the contrary, “The man who does these things will live by them”. (3:10-12)*

After the first temple was destroyed detailed keeping of the law became the center of Jewish life. This understanding of the law was rigorously promoted by the Pharisees and it caused them to accuse Jesus of being insufficiently observant. Eventually, Paul became a prosecutor of the followers of Jesus because he was a devoted Pharisee himself. After his Damascus road encounter his understanding changed. He came to believe that the law was never intended as a means of ‘justification’ but for the sake of argument Paul decided to write from the perspective of the Judaizers. He was confident that he could prove them wrong by beginning with their basic assumption.

Paul's argument runs something like this.

"Let's begin from your point of view and see if what you are arguing can be sustained on the basis of Torah itself. You say that 'faith' alone cannot save. You say that 'grace' must be complimented by 'works'. Let's agree that our positions are mutually exclusive; we cannot both be right. Let's also agree that the only way to resolve our disagreement is to see what Torah actually says. Your position is that we can find favour with God by obedience to his law. Mine is that 'justification is by 'grace' alone apart from 'works'. If this is what you are saying then let's begin by considering two of our own texts. The first one is Deuteronomy 27:26 and the second is Habakkuk 2:4."

The first quotation is "*Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of Law*". The statement means that the law does nothing but condemn if it is not obeyed perfectly; Paul has assumed that even they would not claim to be perfectly obedient. The conclusion he wants them to draw is that favour with God through the law is elusive because no one obeys it perfectly. The apostle's argument seems to assume that it was at least theoretically possible to be justified through the law. The problem was that the law could not save apart from perfect obedience. The second quotation is from the prophet Habakkuk. "*The righteous will live by faith.*" The prophet adds weight to the previous argument because he states that only 'faith' justifies. The law, therefore, cannot justify because it demands 'obedience' rather than 'faith'. Paul has refuted their theological position by showing that it cannot be sustained by their own primary text. Obviously, it follows that if Jews could not be justified through the law neither could Gentiles be justified without it.

Cole believes that the ancient rabbis did in fact realize that the law could not be kept perfectly which explains why they clung so rigorously to their physical descent from Abraham as an assurance that they were beneficiaries of the promise. (R. Allan Cole, Galatians, page 140)

Next Paul takes them to the only reasonable conclusion that can be drawn by asking a question. If the law cannot save, what can? Now he brings Christ's work of redemption forward as the only possible solution. The Promise given to Abraham can be realized solely through faith in Christ's death because the law brings a curse on all whose obedience is imperfect.

*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree". He redeemed us so that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the spirit. (3:13-14)*

The basic thought in the above passage is that Christ's death benefits us because he willingly accepted the judgment that rightfully belongs to us. He stood in our place and became "a curse for us". God's holiness and integrity



does not allow him to cast aside our law breaking as if it is a trivial matter. He must judge sin in a way that is consistent with His holiness. The cross, therefore, was an act of judgment as it was also an act of 'grace'.

*"Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree"* is a quotation from Deuteronomy 21:23. The original context refers to a man guilty of a capital offense. After being put to death, the body was hung on a tree for public viewing for no more than a day; the criminal had to be buried before night fall. The text in Deuteronomy says that a person "who is hung on a tree is under God's curse". This text does not mean that the man was cursed because he hung on a tree. (Deuteronomy 21:23)

Paul was expecting them 'to connect the dots' and see that the cross of Christ corresponded to the tree in Deuteronomy. Christ became a curse not because he was guilty but because we are. He became a curse for us and by so doing satisfied God's demand that violated justice be held to account. Herman Ridderbos puts it this way. "The curse, to which Christ yielded himself victim, is not an independently operative principle, but the personal judgment of God, in which He had Christ undergo the sentence instead of the condemned ones. (See Romans 8:3 and 2 Corinthians 5:21) Then he adds, "Such a redemption has not, therefore, the character of a transaction, a nice balance of the active and the passive, but is a mystery of salvation in which is manifested the integrity of God's justice and His grace, and the deep bonds of unity between Christ and His own. (Herman Ridderbos, St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, page 127)

"Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree" may have been a text used against Paul proving that God was displeased with Christ so he could hardly be the Messiah of God. Their exegesis required Paul to say that Christ himself was not cursed. Rather he stood in relation to God as we should stand. This is another way of saying that God did not make Christ a sinner on the cross; he made him 'to be sin for our sakes'. (See 2 Corinthians 5:21) This distinction is important.

*He redeemed us so that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the spirit. (3:14)*

Paul was not a 'universalist'. The benefit of Christ's substitutionary death is universally applied though not unconditionally; it must be received by faith and confirmed by the reception of the Spirit.

### **The Law and the Promise: (3:15-18)**

The contemporary reader may feel like saying to Paul, "Enough already!" But Paul, not wanting to leave even one stone unturned, takes the Galatians back to the story of Abraham once more. His basic argument is easy to follow so long as they understand the distinction between 'seed' and 'seeds'. The argument from Abraham may come across to the modern reader as an 'invention' that pushes the original story beyond its limits. Christian scholars have debated whether or

not the original story gives Paul permission to interpret it by placing such emphasis on the difference between 'seed' and 'seeds'. It is possible, however, to understand Paul's meaning without entering into the controversy ourselves. He interprets the promise as a guarantee that, from the very beginning, God intended to include non Jews in the covenant through the death of Christ. Paul's insight was in direct contradiction to what most Jews believed in the first century.

*Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to your seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and your seed' meaning one person who is Christ. What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his Grace gave it to Abraham through a promise. (3:15-18)*

Paul argues like a lawyer beginning with a premise anyone would accept. A human covenant, once legally established, cannot be modified in any way by anyone. "Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case." (3:15) It follows from this accepted premise that the promise given to Abraham is permanent and unalterable. Paul wants his readers to draw an obvious conclusion; what is true for a human covenant must also be true of one originating with God.

Paul continues his case by saying, "Let's agree that even by human standard the covenant made with Abraham was permanent in every respect. The covenant was binding on both sides." Are we agreed? Is it not perfectly obvious that the Promise was a gift right from the beginning? It was not given to Abraham on the basis of anything he did and it certainly was not offered to him as a reward for obeying the law since we all know that the law came 430 years later. Follow me carefully. The covenant is unchangeable; we both agree. Therefore, the law given through Moses made no change whatsoever to the permanence of either the covenant or the basis on which it was given?"

One task remained for the apostle. He wanted to convince them the unchanging promise made to Abraham had now been fulfilled in Christ. The contemporary reader may find Paul's argument rather forced and it may seem that he reads into the story what is not really there. He makes much out of the distinction between 'seed' and 'seeds' in order to show that faith in Christ confirms the promise made to Israel while at the same time integrating non Jews into that same covenant by means of faith. In Romans 11 Paul wrote, "[A]nd you, though a wild olive shoot (Gentiles), have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root (Israel) do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you." (Romans 11:17-18)

The apostle arrived at his conclusion by applying the Abrahamic promise to Christ. He reasoned that the singular word 'seed' referred to Christ not Abraham's descendants.

### **What Is The Significance Of The Law? (3:19-20)**

We can imagine Paul's accusers leaping to their feet and screaming.

"Objection your honour! This man is dangerous. Listen to what he is saying. He goes immediately from Abraham to Christ. What about our hero Moses at Sinai? Is there no room for him? Why did God give him the law to write on tablets of stone? Paul is saying that anyone who has faith in Christ is a beneficiary of the promise whether or not they are law keepers or law breakers. We demand that he answer our questions! What is the purpose of the law? On the basis of his argument we can see no purpose for it. Your honour! This man is teaching men and women to do as they like. It's an outrage." (See Acts 21:27-36)

Paul had faced this question before. He was ready. Even if his arguments and logic sound alien to our ears it is still possible for us to understand his essential message.

*What, then, is the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator. A mediator, however, does not just represent one party; but God is one. (3:19-20)*

The apostle's defense contains two propositions. The first makes reference to the law as preparation for the Seed which followed. (3:19a) The second proposition is contained in "The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator." Richard Longenecker says that there are more than two hundred interpretations of verse 19b so the best strategy is to interpret Paul in the most natural manner by considering the context of the letter as a whole.

In the previous passage (3:15-18), the apostle argued that the promise to Abraham was fulfilled in Christ because he is the 'seed'. (singular) "It (the law) was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come" means that the law was in effect (as bringing judgment) until the promise (Christ) came. The law was added "because of transgressions" indicates how Paul was forced to reexamine his understanding of the law's true function. Paul, the Pharisee, celebrated the law as a means of finding favour with God but now he realized that the real intention of the law was to bring humanity a consciousness of sin without bringing righteousness itself. The law makes the fact of sin self evident and it reveals 'sins' power over every person without exception. In this respect, the law is judgment and grace in a single act. The law was given to drive Israel (and us) to repentance and provide the nation with an understanding of the necessity of Christ's coming. "The function of the

law was not to bestow salvation, however, but to convince men of their need of it.” (John Stott, The Message of Galatians,, page 89)

C.K. Barrett commentary on 3:19-20 helps to illuminate the purpose of the law from Paul’s perspective. He disagrees with the traditional interpretation that the law was given as moral restraint and that it functioned to keep things from getting even worse. Barrett states that sin has been in the world since Adam. But sin, as a description of Mans’ broken relationship with God, is an abstract concept incapable of denoting the full range of individual sins such as murder, theft and adultery. Without the law there was no way of observing sin and therefore no way for mankind to recognize himself as sinner in need of saving. Barrett writes, “[The] law was necessary therefore if man was to recognize himself as sinner, the rebel against his Creator, that he undoubtedly was. Law was added to turn man’s revolt against God into specific acts of transgression”. (C.K. Barrett, Freedom and Obligation, page 33)

Barrett adds a further comment concerning the law’s function. :”Its (the law) affect was not to create a sinless world but to make sin everywhere observable in the form of transgression.” (C.K. Barrett, Freedom and Obligation, page 34) Therefore, the law, according to Barrett, establishes a barricade against any notion that right relationship with God can be earned. Since the law was incapable of establishing or maintaining Israel’s unique relationship with God the only means left was trusting faith in Christ.

Luther, commenting on this and other similar passages, wrote the following:

“The principle point ..... of the law .... is to make men not better but worse; that is to say, it sheweth unto them their sin, that by the knowledge thereof they may be humbled, terrified, bruised and broken, and **by this means may be driven to see grace**, and so to come to that blessed Seed.” (Galatians, Luther, page 316)

“The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator. A mediator, however, does not just represent one party; but God is one.” The meaning of 19b and 20 has been discussed widely amongst scholars. Richard Longenecker mentions that there are as many as three hundred interpretations of these verses. Nevertheless, what Paul is saying is clear. The law is inferior to the promise because Abraham received it directly from God whereas the law was given to Israel through an intermediary. The mediator was Moses accompanied by angels. In other words, the promise was received more directly than the law and is therefore superior. Admittedly, Paul’s reasoning may have had greater impact on his original readers than us.

The mention of angels, though not critical for an accurate exegesis, invites a brief discussion. Exodus 19:18 portrays God as coming down from Mount Sinai “in fire” accompanied by fire, smoke and a shaking mountain. No mention of angels is made however. Deuteronomy 33:2 says that God came “from myriads of

holiness” or “myriads of holy ones”. He came with a “fiery law” also. Psalm 68:18 refers poetically to chariots but again there is no mention to angels.

It is possible that Paul mentions angels because he knew the rabbinical tradition that associated angels with the giving of the law based on Psalm 68:18. Rabbinic Judaism assigned a role for angels to all major revelatory and redemptive events as a way of emphasizing the importance of each event. However, Paul’s reasoning seems to be that the presence of angels adds weight to his argument that the law was mediated in a way that the promise was not. There is no need to resolve the question of angels because the conclusion he wants drawn is that the law was given as preparation for Christ. Even though the law served a critical function, it is inferior to the promise; the law judges but it cannot save.

### **Is There Conflict Between the Law and the Promise? (3:21-22)**

Paul’s accusers have been listening intently and waiting for the defendant to contradict himself. At this point, they think they have heard one.

“Paul, we have been listening carefully to your defense and we find it full of contradiction. What you have reasoned says to us that the law has worked at cross purposes with the promise but you have argued that both the promise and the law have a single source. We conclude from your testimony that the law is opposed to the promise and God, by giving the law and the promise, has contradicted himself. How can this be?”

Paul’s response is immediate! “Absolutely not!”

*Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if the law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. (3:21-22)*

Lutheran theologians speak of “God’s strange (alien) work” and “God’s proper work” in reference to the law and its relationship to the promise. Having argued as he has, Paul addresses the question posed in verse 21. He repeats what he has already written saying that the law pronounces judgment (“God’s strange work”) on all of mankind in order to eliminate the possibility of salvation other than by faith in Christ (“God’s proper work”). Some commentators assume that the question is actually Paul’s not the Judaizers while others believe that the apostle is simply anticipating an objection he knows will be made. In any case, Paul saw the need to clarify the relationship between the God given law and the God given promise. His starting point is that God gave both so there can be no intrinsic contradiction between the two. Although Paul sees no contradiction between the law and the promise, he does see a coordinated difference in their purpose

Paul began by arguing that the law, though originating with God, did not bring life. It was capable for designating sin but it contained no power to resist. The law cannot, by itself, render mankind righteous in either a forensic (legal status) or ethical sense. The law, he states, brought an intensified knowledge of sin in order to bring mankind face to face with “God’s proper work”. In this way the law leads to the promise. The law brings us down and the promise lifts us up. “Thus God has made the law serviceable to His Purpose: the law dams up and closes off all escapes to life. By way of the law, therefore, the impotence of man to achieve salvation has become manifest.” (Herman Ridderbos, St. Paul’s Letter to Churches of Galatia, page 142)

“But as it is, the function of the Torah was to bring to humanity a clearer knowledge of the character and demands of God which would, in its turn, bring a deeper consciousness of sin.” “Seen in this light, the law was our escort to lead us to Christ so that we may be justified by trust. But once faith has come we are no longer under the authority of our ‘escort’; for we are all God’s children, through trust in Christ Jesus.” (R. Allan Cole, Galatians, page 150 and 152)

**Released From Bondage: (3:23-25)**

*Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. (3:22-25)*

This passage develops the theme introduced in 3:22 where the mankind is said to be prisoner of the law. The sentence being served has a twofold purpose; the prisoner becomes aware of his guilt and he is brought into the knowledge that there is no possibility of release unless he is forgiven and pronounced innocent. Mankind was being held in protective custody pending the arrival of pardon. It becomes self evident to him that he will walk out of jail a freeman only because someone else stands ready to take his place and bear his guilt. The doors of the prison will swing open as the words “Lord be merciful to me a sinner” are said. (Luke 18:9-14)

In the above passage, the apostle continues to speak of the two functions of the Mosaic Law. As before, one function condemns while the other supervises. “Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.” The pronoun ‘we’ refers to the entire human race. Everyone, Jew and Gentile stand similarly condemned. However, the second statement logically applies to Israel alone because the law was “put in charge” within Israel only.

Commenting on the above passage N.T. Wright wrote, “[His] (Paul) great emphasis falls on the fact that God has shut up all people in the prison house of disobedience in order that he may have mercy upon all”. (N.T. Wright, Surprised By Hope, page 183)

The law's divine purpose was to bring Jews to a faith that justifies. The faith of which Paul speaks is first the 'faithfulness' of Christ. His faith makes possible our response otherwise faith would be just another human achievement. Faith becomes a 'work' when it is understood as that which we offer to God as a basis of our reconciliation. For the apostle the gift of faith is demonstrated by the story of Abraham.

*Phroureo* is the Greek word translated 'held prisoner' or 'confined'. It could refer to something as being protected by military guards. When applied to a city it meant to keep the enemy out and the citizens in so they would not run away or desert. *Sungkleio* is a similar word and it meant to 'keep under restraint'. These two words paint a picture of a person confined to a high security prison with absolutely no possibility of escape.

Paul's second metaphor seems less negative at first. "So the law was put in charge" is a paraphrase of Paul's word *paidagogos* which literally means a guide or guardian for young boys. Usually in Greek society the *paidagogos* was a slave whose job it was to take young boys to and from school. The *paidagogos* was chosen for his harshness and ability to be cruel. He is often carrying a stick in ancient portrayals.

With these two metaphors Paul attempts once again to show that the law is both judgment and grace. It imprisons us and shows us that there is no human way of escaping the judgment brought by the law. Similarly, the *paidagogos* rebukes us continually and punishes us when we do wrong.

*Phroureo* and *paidagogos* lead the prisoner to the only place he can go to find release. He can be justified and declared innocent only as the judge says, "You are declared innocent. You are free to go!"

*"Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law."* (3:25)

With this verse Paul has provided a summary of what he has said so far. Richard Longenecker commented.

"For with the coming of the Christian gospel as effected by Christ, the law no longer has validity as regulating the life of faith. One may, of course, as a Jew continue to a Jewish nomistic life style for cultural, national, or pragmatic reasons. To be a Jewish believer in Jesus did not mean turning one's back on one's own culture or nation. Yet no longer could it be regarded that circumcision, Jewish dietary laws, following distinctly Jewish ethical precepts, or any other matter having to do with a Jewish lifestyle, were requisite for the life of faith. Certainly not for Gentile Christians in any sense, though Paul and the Jerusalem apostles for cultural, national, and/or pragmatic reasons allowed Jewish believers

in Jesus to live a Jewish lifestyle, but not as a requirement spiritually.” (R. Longenecker, Paul, Apostle of Liberty, page 245)

Cole agrees with Longenecker. “Again, there seems to be here recognition that it is possible for the church of God to be one without being uniform in custom, habit or sphere. Paul never seems to have compelled the Gentile churches to act like Jews; indeed, this is precisely the charge that he brings against the erring Peter. But it remains equally true that he does not expect Jewish churches to act like Gentile believers; he never says that it is wrong for them to be circumcised, or to keep the law, or to observe the festivals. All he insists is that these things have nothing to do with the gift of salvation. Not only so, but there is a glad recognition of differences of sphere appointed by God: Paul is to go to the Gentiles; James and the rest are to work amongst the Jews.” (Allan Cole, Galatians, page 10.)

### **The Broken Wall: (3:26-29),**

In the first century world ethnicity, social status and gender determined where a person stood socially and religiously. Either you lived as an advantaged person or you were assigned a permanently low social status. The possibility of upward mobility was yet centuries away. Paul’s statement in 3:26-29 was remarkable for its counter culture message. This paragraph broadens the argument that the apostle has been making as he appealed to the promise as binding Jew and Gentile into a single faith community. Below, he applies the promise to three categories two of which fall outside the Jewish/Gentile question but are of equal importance. All three are understood as representative; the list is not exhaustive. Common faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour obliterates the disharmonizing effects of differences even when they are biologically determined or socially constructed.

*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself in Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male of female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise. (3:26-29)*

*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself in Christ. (3:26)*

All along Paul has been making the case that we are ‘justified’ by faith rather than by what we do. Therefore, he cannot mean that we are united to Christ because we are baptized otherwise baptism would merely be a substitute for circumcision. He makes it plain that faith alone produces a common family; we are made sons (and daughters) by faith in Christ. Baptism is not the cause of our union but it is the essential outer sign that faith has secured union when nothing else could. Paul would have some difficulty with the Christian traditions that do not practice baptism.



No important distinction of race exists because everyone has the identical need of salvation by grace without the need for human achievement.

Class distinctions still exist but those bound together by common faith in Christ aspire to live in the knowledge that class, gender and religious distinctions are ultimately unimportant. Paul has made it clear that freedom in Christ has sociological implications that are theologically based. God pays no attention to the differences outlined in 3:28 and he calls the church to follow this same pattern.

*“There is neither ..... male of female ...”* asserts the equality of the sexes unequivocally. The accusation that Paul believed in the superiority of men over women is laid to rest by his statement. He does not believe in the right of a man to boss his wife around or any other person for that matter. This issue deserves a more detailed discussion to show that Paul stood in the same tradition as Jesus.

N.T. Wright’s comment on Galatians 22-29 is instructively helpful. He writes the following.

“[P]aul argues that God gave the Mosaic law for a specific purpose which has now come to fruition, whereupon the law must be put aside, in terms of its task of defining the community, not because it was a bad thing but because it was a good thing whose task is now accomplished. But, as the whole letter indicates, the people of God renewed through Jesus and the Spirit can never and must never forget the road by which they had travelled.” (N.T. Wright, The Last Word, page 57-58)

Earlier, Wright provides an illustration for what he means by the previous quotation.

“When travelers sail across a vast ocean and finally arrive on a distant shore, they leave the ship behind and continue over land, not because the ship was no good, or because their voyage had been misguided, but precisely because both the ship and voyage had accomplished their purpose. During the new dry land stage of their journey, the travelers remain – and in this illustration must never forget that they remain – the people who made *that* voyage in *that* ship.” (Page 57)

**Note:** The following discussion ends at page 54 of this document. It then returns to Galatians 3:26-29. The reader may prefer to go immediately to page 55.

### **Paul and Women: A Brief Excursion Based on Galatians 3:28 and Ephesians 5:22-33**

Jesus was the first feminist. He did what no rabbis would do in the first century; he spoke to women in public. The Samaritan woman, who came to the well by herself, was shocked when Jesus asked her for a drink. “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (John 4:9) According to the cultural norm, he should have avoided her because she was a woman and, even worse, a Samaritan.

Not only did Jesus speak to women in public, they were allowed and even encouraged to touch him. When his feet were washed by a woman who untied her hair, (the sign of a loose woman) Jesus accepted her actions, not as a scandalous, but as worship. He stopped when he felt the touch of the woman in the crowd and, instead of rebuking her, pronounced her forgiven. Here is how Luke reports the incident. “**Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet.**” (Luke 8:47) She knew that she had broken a taboo and, mistakenly, she anticipated a rebuke but it never came. Married and single women followed him everywhere because they were included in his band of disciples. And most revolutionary of all, it was women who made the discovery of the empty tomb.

Paul knew of Jesus’ attitude and he endorsed it enthusiastically. His letters mention women believers **by name**. Syntyche and Euodia were members of the Philippian Baptist Church and Paul described them as women who **worked beside him**. They were not his underlings; they were fellow workers on a par with him. His letter to the Romans ends with a mention of several church leaders and eight are women.

In Romans 16:1-2, Phoebe is described as both a ‘deacon’ and a ‘patron’ and, if we assume that Romans was written before Philippians, she is the first person in Christian history to receive such a title. In the same passage, Prisca and Aquila are introduced and the fact that Prisca is named before her husband suggests that she was the more dominate person. In any case, it is hard to doubt the prominent leadership role she must have played in the church. Paul, apparently, has no difficulty recognizing this fact. Later, in the same passage, Paul mentions two women named Andronicus and Junia. They are described as fellow prisoners and “**outstanding among the apostles**”, (in the sense that they do the work of an apostle) who were also in Christ before me.” These women are identified because they are particularly ‘hard working’. The term Paul uses is *κοπιαο* and it is a word he uses exclusively for those whose ministry and

leadership are exemplary. At the very least, it cannot be argued that the apostle had a low view of women because the weight of this preliminary evidence is convincingly to the contrary.

Paul understood that Christ has dismantle the barriers that exist between people because of a notion of self evident superiority; Jews are not superior to Gentiles, masters are not superior to slaves, and men are not superior to women. These categories, while real, are of no eternal significance so it is unthinkable that he believed in the superiority of some individuals over others as the natural state of affairs and the intention of God. Men and women stand on level ground. In Christ, there is no basis for male domination or female subservience. Gender differentiation exists but the notion of gender superiority is groundless and sinful. (Galatians 3:28)

Ephesians 5:22-33 is often used to demonstrate that Paul was the biggest oppressor of women ever. In some translations there is a break after verse 21. Quite rightly, the Good News Bible places this verse in the same paragraph as verse 22 because it serves as the theme for the rest of the chapter. It is critical to see this verse as foundational for everything that follows. Paul does is not offering a suggestion nor is he merely stating a preference. He is issuing a command that results in worship when it is obeyed. It reads: **“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”** Clearly, Paul wants this statement to be the operating principle for his teaching on marriage.

*“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing of water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or another blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church – for we are members of his body. For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.* (Ephesians 5: 22-33)

Admittedly, this passage is highly controversial in today’s politically correct world. Paul’s words cause the hair on some people’s necks to bristle and others are aroused to such anger that they accuse Paul of extreme sexism. His modern day critics view him disdainfully as an oppressor and exploiter of women and they warn us that his teaching, if taken seriously, would counter-act the multitude of advances made during the last century by women.

Here are the key questions. Is Paul recommending a paradigm for the distribution of power within marriage as a key to its success or is he really writing

about the attitude of mutual submission that holds for all human relationships, including marriage?

### **Christian Marriage According to Paul (Ephesians 5:22-33)**

By placing Paul's words in their social and cultural context, the modern reader can't help but to draw the conclusion that his teaching on marriage was a great advancement from the norms of the day. A proper exegesis requires attention to the analogy Paul develops in addition to the theology of the letter as a whole.

The first thing to note is that the passage consists of two parts. The first consists of the woman's responsibilities to the husband and the second to the husband's responsibilities towards her. Interestingly, the man's responsibility receives the longest discussion. (8 verses as opposed to 4 verses) Obviously, Paul thought that a marriage required both the husband and the wife to act in ways that benefit the other but he decided to emphasize the man's role. (I make this conclusion on the basis that he lingers over the man's role.) It is difficult to imagine such a concept or emphasis existing in the Jewish, Greek, and Roman cultures. In this respect, Paul's teaching is radically revolutionary.

As this passage is read, the major theme of the letter must provide the context. Paul has been presenting the case that the entire event of Christ was for the purpose of reconciling "all things in heaven and earth". (1:10) His teaching is that God has always intended to create harmonious relationships between groups of disparate people (Jews and non Jews) and individuals as well. Therefore, any relationship that involves exploitation or dominance is not the intention of God nor is it the teaching of Paul. Whatever difficulties we have with Paul's teaching, we cannot read him as if he is promoting a husband's right to dominate and selfishly exploit his wife. Throughout the letter, Paul develops the notion of mutual submission and this fact must be kept in mind.

The main difficulty in verse 22-24 comes from the word 'submit' (hupakouo) because it carries with it a highly negative connotation in today's society. Submission requires a person to see themselves as powerless and lacking in status. The submissive person is one who recognizes another's right to make decisions for them on all important matters. But this is not what the apostle means.

The first thing to notice is that the word 'submit' is defined by an analogy. Paul compares the marriage relationship to Christ's relationship with the church and this comparison defines what 'submission' means. Submission is not made in recognition of a hierarchal power structure designed for the advantage of one of the partners. It has another function entirely.

When the church submits to Christ it does so in order to receive a benefit that only Christ can provide. God, in Christ, saves the church, makes it His own, and

empowers it to become what He intends it to be. Christ's death on the cross is an act of condescension and service whereby He experiences the loss of his intimacy with God as means of giving the church what it needs but cannot do for itself. Christ is the church's Saviour and servant. Carrying Paul's analogy forward, the reader of Paul can conclude that the purpose of the wife's submission is not so she can be permanently 'bossed around' by the husband; it is so that the husband can be her servant and protector and do for her what she is unable to do for herself. In other words, the wife submits and gives permission to her husband to serve her as Christ served the church and gave himself for it. The wife's submission to the husband allows him to become vulnerable for her sake. In this way, the wife recognizes the uniqueness of the wife/husband relationship.

There is another aspect to the analogy that Paul has drawn. Christ's sacrificial death on the cross means that we are compelled to recognize his claim upon us. Similarly, the Christian wife is required to accept her husband's claim upon her. Like her, he is a person in need of those resources only she can provide. Her obligation is to give of herself for his sake just as Christ has done for the church. The wife's submission makes possible the complementary relationship between husband and wife to function as it should. Her willingness to submit is not a euphemism for blind unquestioning obedience to a higher authority. Her submission allows her husband to serve her as she serves him.

The husband's role is complimentary to the wife's 'submission'. The first thing he must do is love his wife **"as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her"**. (5:25) Here, the husband's role in the marriage is to freely give his wife everything he has that will enable her to become 'holy'. He does not have permission to be her drill sergeant shouting orders to be blindly followed. Instead, what Christ did for the church, he is to do for her.

There is a second imperative. The husband must love his wife as his own body and he must keep in mind that his wife is part of Christ's body, the church. (5:29-30) He is her partner, not her owner. The notion that Paul believed in the superiority of men over women and that he gave permission for husbands to assume a dominant and dictatorial role in marriage cannot be read into Paul's teaching. This passage was written for the benefit of married women where her well being is her husband's main responsibility just as his well being is hers. Paul believed that God revealed in Jesus Christ is a reconciling God. By his life, death, and resurrection, Christ has broken down the barriers that separate us from God and from each other. He believed that God created us to live in harmonious relationships where each submits to the other and this is His instrument to make us 'holy'.

When Paul's teaching on marriage is contrasted with first century culture, it becomes all the more 'enlightened'.

## **Women in Jewish Culture**

When Paul was alive, his own Jewish community had a low view of women. During Morning Prayer, a Jewish man would often thank God because he was not a Gentile, slave, or a woman. Under Jewish law a woman was bereft of rights and, if married, the husband could do as he liked with her. Women, on the other hand, could not divorce their husbands for any reason. The wife was listed as the one of the husband's possessions along with his animals. In Paul's day, a man could divorce his wife simply by issuing a write of divorce and no just cause needed to be given. (depending on the rabbi that was followed) Woman, however, had no right of divorce under any conditions so many Jewish women refused marriage for fear of being abused.

## **Women in Greek Culture**

Here the situation was even worse. Prostitution was an integral part of Greek life so women were seen as objects of pleasure and their non status as persons was a reflection of this practice. Greek men saw their wives as the bearers of their children and the manager of their day to day household affairs but they looked to other women for pleasure, intimacy, and companionship. Women of the upper classes lived very isolated lives, taking no part in public affairs. Married women did not have enough status to allow them to go out alone. Wives never ate at family meals nor did they appear at important social functions. They lived alone in an apartment that no other person was allowed to enter with the exception of the husband. Greek women of the upper classes had little companionship or fellowship in marriage and to make matters worse, there was no possibility of divorce. Her home life was devoid of friendship, fidelity, and security.

## **Women in Roman Culture**

Paul lived during a time when the institution of marriage was breaking down in Roman culture. The Romans were noted for their careful record keeping and during the first five hundred years of the Republic there is no record of a single divorce but eventually things changed. The first recorded divorce occurred in 234 B.C.E. and it involved Spurius Carvilius Ruga.

Seneca, the Roman historian cynically wrote that women were married to divorce and divorced to marry. He also recorded that women dated their years by using the names of their numerous husbands. Divorce occurred so frequently that Juvenal wrote that one Roman woman had married twenty three times and her last marriage was to a man whose marriage to her was his twenty first. Roman marriage did not involve fidelity so the marriage bond was well on its way to a complete breakdown. This sad state of affairs must have victimized women more than men and contributed to their powerlessness within Roman society.

## **End of Discussion on Paul and Women**

*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself in Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male of female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (3:26-29)*

A Jew during Paul's era would have associated 'heir' with the nation of Israel. Therefore, a full realization of the promise given to Abraham's seed (the Jewish people) would involve a complete restoration of Israel as a nation. The diaspora would end when the messiah came to conquer all of Israel's enemies. All Jews looked forward to the messianic era in eager expectation that Israel's enemies would be defeated, the Diaspora would end and Israel would be vindicated and established again as a nation under the reign of God. They longed for this event and they believed that the messiah of God would bring it about though not in the pattern of Christ. Until the empty tomb and the subsequent appearances of the risen Lord, the apostles' messianic expectation was identical to the rest of Israel.

Paul also waited for the time when God's kingdom would be fully inaugurated but faith in Christ changed his view radically. Now he saw that benefits of the promise were available to all of mankind through faith in Christ without regard to ethnicity, social status or religious tradition. For the apostle, freedom and equality are theologically not sociologically or politically based. Abraham's true descendents are those who receive the promise in the same way as Abraham. Instead of an earthly kingdom, Abraham's seed become members of a spiritual kingdom where God's voice is heard and obeyed without controversy. Never again did the apostle associate the kingdom with the re establishment of Israel. However, it is important to recognize on the basis of 1 Corinthians 15, that the apostle did not understand the final inauguration of the kingdom as 'spiritual' (ie. non material) rather than 'physical'. Paul understood Christ's bodily resurrection as the sign (first fruit) that God will act to restore, perfect and recover this creation. He did not believe that God intended to replace his original creation with a non physical reality called heaven where bodiless souls enjoy non physical existence outside of space and time. It is quite clear that 1 Corinthians 15 promises that every individual will enjoy a perfected bodily existence that carries forward each person's personal history and uniqueness. Unfortunately, the church has embraced an understanding of eternal life that contains more Plato than Paul. Paul's new heaven is this world perfected; death and decay will be no more. Meeting Jesus in the sky before being whisked away to another place is not Paul's eschatological vision and it should not be ours either.

For a scholarly discussion of the above by N.T. Wright see Surprised By Hope.

## Chapter Four

### From Slave to Heir: (4:1-7)

Paul continues his counter attack by revisiting several themes such as law, slavery and redemption. These three are brought back as important elements of his rebuttal. At times his arguments are directed primarily to the Jewish members while in other places his lens focuses on his Gentile converts. Since some non Jewish members had more than a passing knowledge of Judaism, there is reason to believe that his Biblical and theological reasoning would have had an appeal for them as well. There is no doubt that Paul wrote with both groups as his audience because the hearts and minds of both Jew and Gentile had to be won otherwise the church would seriously fragment. Jews would go one way and Gentiles another.

John G. Gager argues that chapter four was intended for Gentiles in particular but his basic argument falls short of being entirely convincing. He finds Paul's phrases more appropriate for Gentiles than for Jews. Briefly Gager's argument is as follows.

1. "... *we were in slavery under basic principles of the world...*" (4:3)

The last six words of this statement apply most naturally to Gentiles.

2. "... *you did not know God...*" (4:8)

He would not have made such a 'black and white' statement if he meant his fellow Jews.

3. "... *you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods...*" (4:8)

This is a more likely description a description of Greek religion.

4. "... *to redeem those under the law...*" (4:5)

This phrase applies more naturally to Jews but Gager says that it could easily apply to Gentiles who had close associations with the synagogue. (Luke calls them 'God Fearers'.)

(John G. Gager, *Reinventing Paul*, page 91)

Other commentators believe that the Jewish Christians at Galatia comprised the most natural audience while others suggest that the passage applies equally to all members, both Jew and Gentile. The reader has no need to settle the question of audience in order to understand the meaning of Paul's analogy. The



text contains enough familiar elements to make it perfectly transparent for all Paul's original readers.

The illustration of 4:1-7 restates what he has been saying in a form that would have been readily understood by his Gentile listeners. Even though many of them had been drawn to Judaism, they were still more at home in the Gentile thought world. Therefore, the situation he described was quite familiar and easy for them to comprehend. The Gentiles, aware of how their own inheritance laws functioned, would have made sense out of Paul's allegorical use of a familiar situation. They were quite capable of understanding the theological point Paul was making; men and women of all social stations, whether moral or immoral, whether Jew or Gentile were enslaved by sin until God acted to bring freedom by making them heirs of His promise.

*What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of the sons. Because you are the sons, God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but a son, God has made you also an heir. (4:1-7)*

The portrait painted is that of a very immature boy whose exceedingly wealthy parents had died. The main character in the analogy is unquestioningly the legal heir so the day would inevitably arrive when the entire estate would be handed over to him. In the meantime, the boy is too immature to receive his inheritance. His present status is effectively that of a slave and this situation will remain unchanged until a certain date that is not of his own choosing. That is what Paul means by "He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father". (4:2)

It is unclear what particular ancient culture Paul has drawn from but there are aspects of his story that correspond to the Greek, Roman and Jewish tradition.

In Jewish culture a boy was taken to the Synagogue on the first Sabbath after he turned twelve. Prayers were uttered by the father and the son as a sign that the boy had accepted responsibility for observing Torah.

In the Greek world a boy was under his father's care from the age of seven to eighteen. At eighteen he became an *ephebos* (cadet) and for two years he was managed completely by the state. As in Jewish culture, there were definite steps in growing up for Greek males.

Under Roman law the date a boy became a man was not fixed but it always occurred between the ages of fourteen and seventeen. Sometime between

these two ages there was a special ceremony when the boy was given an adult toga and introduced to the public as a man.

Each culture differed in some way but for each there were definite predetermined steps that led to adulthood. Paul's allegory appeals to this common feature of the ancient world.

The analogy draws a contrast between Israel's situation under the law with its condition in Christ. The guardianship of the Mosaic Law was for the time when God's people were in their spiritual childhood but now, with the coming of Christ, they were free to live maturely by faith in Christ. They were no longer under the laws supervision. Therefore Paul asked, "Why would anyone want to exchange what they have now for something that belonged to childhood?"

The picture Paul painted was not sentimental because caregivers were often purposefully harsh. The word translated 'guardian' and 'trustee' is the Greek word *paidagogos*. *Paidagogos* did not necessarily refer to a gentle guide or kindly babysitter. The person hired to fulfill the role of *paidagogos* may have been an unpopular household servant chosen for their ability to gain and sustain control by harsh means if necessary. Once more, Paul is encouraging the Galatians to ask, "Why would anyone want to exchange what they have now for something that belonged to childhood?" His question invites the answer. "No one!"

*"So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under basic principles of the world."*

The apostle referred to the law as "basic principles of the world" and later in verse 9 he calls them 'weak' and 'miserable principles'. The word used is *stoicheia* and eventually it was associated with elementary principles learned by the very young. (The ABC's) Paul's meaning is clear. The Galatians, by faith in Christ, had outgrown the need for the ABC's. The reader needs to keep in mind that Paul is referencing the law from his accuser's point of view. He no longer believed that the law was ever given as a basis for self vindication and neither did ancient Israel.

*"But when the time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, **born under the law**, to **redeem** those under the law, that we might receive **the full rights of the sons** (adoption in some translations)."*

"Born of woman" and "born under the law" has sometimes been read as merely saying that Jesus was Jewish. However, the seriousness of the issue demands a more profound meaning. Jesus was born of a Jewish mother into a Jewish nation in which he was subject to the law. As a part of creation Jesus, like the rest of humanity, owed obedience to God. He succeeded in his obedience by doing what no one else could; he obeyed it (the law) perfectly and was righteous. The suffering of his death was therefore not because of his own law breaking; it was because of ours. The perfection of Jesus' law keeping made it possible for

him to 'become sin for us'. On the cross he stood in relation to God as guilty sinner so that we can stand in relation to God as an innocent person. Paul is always careful to say that Christ was never a sinner himself; he became sin for us.

The concept of 'adoption' probably came from the Roman world. A Roman male without a son could adopt one and pass on to him an estate as if the adopted son was biologically related. The effect of Christ's death, by analogy, is to give us the status of adopted sons whereby we inherit the Father's wealth and become His true sons and daughters. John Wesley said that before his conversion he served God as a servant but after his conversion he served God as a son.

Paul's modern critics love to use this text as a way of suggesting that the apostle knew little of the 'Jesus tradition'. They argue that the apostle's brief biography was all Paul knew of the earthly Jesus. However, several New Testament scholars such as N.T. Wright and Craig Evans find in Paul's letters numerous implicit and explicit references to Jesus' teaching. Furthermore, they unearth much evidence that Paul's basic theological concepts find their parallel in the action and specific teaching of Jesus in the Gospels. For example, the parables found in Luke 15 connect very naturally with Paul's doctrine of justification by faith because both picture the rescue of individuals as entirely an unmerited act initiated by God.

The apostle's theology of man's fallen nature is assumed by Jesus at the very beginning of his sermon in Matthew 5-7 where the Lord teaches that entry into the kingdom requires the admission that kingdom membership cannot be earned. In this respect, the apostle and his Lord are on the same page.

Paul presents Jesus' death on the cross in terms of Israel's sacrificial system. He proclaims Christ's death as a substitutionary one on behalf of all mankind. The apostle's theological insight recalls Jesus' words at the Passover Seder where he speaks of himself as Israel's true Passover lamb.

Paul writes that Jesus became sin for us. His words find a parallel in the Baptism story especially as told in the first Gospel. Matthew portrays Jesus' baptism as the Lord's identification with sinful humanity and as such the event anticipates the cross as fully endorsed by the Father. "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased". (Matthew 3:17 alludes to Isaiah 42:1)

The notion that Paul created a theological vision of Christ that went far beyond the Gospels' account of a simpler more earthly Jesus is plainly false. His understanding of Jesus the messiah is consistent with both the teaching and actions of Jesus recorded throughout the Gospels.

It is quite possible that after his 'conversion' Paul's knowledge of the 'Jesus tradition' found opportunity to develop further. Although Paul spent a limited

amount of time with the apostle Peter, it is not unreasonable to assume that Peter shared with Paul his own knowledge of the earthly Jesus. Similarly, Paul spent a significant amount of time with his traveling companion Luke so it is absurd to suggest that the two of them never discussed the earthly Jesus. Since Luke was one of the Gospel writers that recorded the birth story of Jesus it is difficult to believe that this story was never a subject of conversation between them.

Paul seldom directly quotes from the oral tradition (The written Gospels did not yet exist as Paul wrote his letters.) concerning Jesus because it was already known to his converts. Secondly, the subject matter of Paul's correspondence was driven by the problems he was addressing. It did not serve his purpose to review the details of the historical Jesus to an audience that knew it already.

Lastly, Paul must have known a great deal about what the early church was preaching. It was their message that drove his attempt to obliterate a movement he saw as a serious threat to Judaism. During the first century there were several Jewish sects that the apostle could have opposed but he chose 'the Jesus movement' because it was the most menacing threat yet. He became a 'terrorist' precisely because he knew much about the message of the early church. His knowledge provided the reason and the determination to wipe it out. All of his opposition changed however when he met the risen Christ unexpectedly on the road to Damascus.

*"Because you are the sons, God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, God has made you also an heir."*

The law has done its work by preparing the Galatians to live as mature sons. The sign of their maturity was that God had sent the spirit of the Son into their hearts and allowed them to address God as "Abba Father". This cry is that of a child calling out to its father using the most intimate term possible. The spirit, by calling out "Abba, Father," provides the evidence that they are no longer slaves but sons. The apostle never defined faith as the mere acceptance of historical facts. Neither was faith a human construct brought about by the facts. Faith for the apostle was the divinely given assurance and trust that he belonged to God. In a parallel passage Paul wrote, "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." (Romans 8:16)

The cross had changed their status and God confirmed its benefit by the experience of the indwelling Spirit. The fundamental freedom of every Christian therefore is to approach God as a small child approaches his/her father. God is accessible for everyone at any time. There is never a need for mediation.

## Don't Fall Back Now! (4:8-11)

*Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God – or rather are known by God – how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you. (4:8-11)*

The reader must continue to keep in mind 'the case' Paul was presenting; Gentiles and Jews have been redeemed solely by the grace of God made manifest in the atoning death of Christ. Trusting in this event alone has made them heirs of the promise. There was no need for them to take on the massive details of the Jewish Law of which circumcision was the sign. Undoubtedly, the non Jewish members would never have thought, as Paul did, that taking on Torah observance was identical with returning to paganism. Perhaps the Gentile Christians thought that the choice to obey Torah offered them real protection against a return to their former paganism and its ethical perversion. Paul may have realized that their "turning back" was a well intentioned choice nevertheless he did not mince his words. "Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?"

Luther thought anyone wishing to substitute 'works' for 'grace' is like "... the dog who runs along a stream with a piece of meat in his mouth, and deceived by the reflection of the meat in the water, opens his mouth to snap at it, and loses both the meat and the reflection." (The Freedom of the Christian, Luther's Works, 31.356)

Paul contrasts the present with the past. Formerly they had no knowledge of God but now they do because God has made Himself known to them. He has chosen them - not the other way around. The logic of his sentence speaks for itself; it makes no sense for them to return to a time when they were ignorant of God.

One may wonder how Paul, a Jew, could refer to the law as "weak and miserable principles". The reader must remember that Paul was speaking of the law from the point of view of his accusers, not his own. From this stand point, the law is "weak and miserable" in that it could convict but not forgive or empower. The law is 'miserable' because it cannot save. (Remember that Paul, after his 'conversion' came to realize that the law was never intended to save in the first place.)

*"You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!"*

Paul was horrified that his converts had decided to replace free grace with a legalistic scheme. These two he saw as irreconcilable. Again, the reader must

bear in mind that the observation of religious days and seasons were not the real issues. The real dispute was the ground on which men and women are justified/reconciled to a holy God.

Paul's disappointment and fear spontaneously bubbled to the surface causing his language to become unrestrained. He was distraught over their actions and he wondered if his time with them had been wasted. (4:11) Whereas the Prodigal Son had returned to his father saying, "I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants," they were saying, "You made me a son but I would rather be a servant." (See The Message of Galatians, John Stott, page 108)

### **Become Like Me: (4:12-16)**

In the next paragraph Paul switches back to autobiography where he expresses his personal pain. He does not really care if the Galatians have a more kindly feeling towards his opponents than him. What he does care about, however, is who is telling the truth. The Galatians were confronted by two mutually exclusive theologies. They had to decide which was true.

*I plead with you, brothers, become like me, for I am like you. You have done me no wrong. As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the Gospel to you. 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 himself. What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?*

In 4:21 Paul will return to theological argument but in the above passage his deep emotions erupt as he recalls a time when the Galatians treated him as 'an angel of God'. Paul's recollection rendered him dumbfounded! He could not account for the radical change in their feelings for him. Before they were willing to 'tear out their eyes and give them to him' but now he had become their adversary. Plainly, Paul's pain was not merely intellectual or theological; it was intensely personal.

Perhaps Paul thought he could end the deterioration in their relationship with him and recapture their goodwill by revisiting the past. He hoped that a shared recollection would make the Galatians willing to pause and reconsider their decision to embrace Torah as a necessary supplement to the gospel.

*I plead with you, brothers, become like me, for I am like you.*

Paul does not elaborate on this statement so we are left to speculate about its meaning. It is possible that Paul was referencing 1 Corinthians 9:19-21.

"Though I am free and belong to no man, I made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews. To

those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but I am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings." (1 Corinthians 9:19-21)

He pleaded with them to become like him because he was like them. "I plead with you, brothers, become like me, for I am like you" read in the context of 1 Corinthians 9:19-21 suggests that he had, for their sakes, become a Gentile in order to win them for the gospel. They, on the other hand, should not seek to add 'works' to 'grace' by becoming Jews. The truth of his message was at stake. If they insisted upon being circumcised the church would divide along ethnic/religious lines and the gospel of grace through faith would be irretrievably lost.

*You have done me no wrong. As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the Gospel to you. Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn.*

Paul continues to recall the past by reminding them of the event that led to his encounter with them. He had arrived with an illness so serious it was a trial for them. The nature of the illness is not known and his reference to it so vague we are unable to know its exact nature. Paul refers to his illness as a 'thorn in his flesh' and after much pleading he accepted it as means of perfecting the power of weakness.

"To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surprisingly great revelations, there was given to me **a thorn in the flesh**, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' (2 Corinthians 12:9a)

At least five theories have been proposed but none rise above the level of pure speculation.

1. The thorn could have been an ongoing physical temptation that haunted Paul throughout his life. He never succeeded in suppressing it entirely.
2. It could have been his unattractive physical experience. "For some say, "His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive his and his speaking amounts to nothing." (2 Corinthians 10:10) Perhaps his unattractive physical appearance and poor speech did little to commend his message.
3. The oldest tradition is that Paul suffered from excruciating headaches. This may account for the phrase "... you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me."

4. Another suggestion is that Paul was an epileptic. “[Y]ou did not treat me with contempt or scorn” can be translated ‘you did not spit on me’. In the ancient world it was customary to spit on an epileptic in order to resist the evil spirit believed to be residing within. It is unlikely that Paul suffered from this disease since his fellow Jews would have regarded him as demon possessed.
5. The final theory is that Paul suffered from malaria which commonly caused raging headaches. Paul traveled to Galatia because of the common belief that high altitude would cure him.

*Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?*

With this statement Paul’s deep disappointment overflowed as he realized that he may have lost the debate. He feels the excruciating pain of child birth.

### **The Pains of Childbirth: (4:17-20)**

*Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us so that you may be zealous for them. It is fine to be zealous, provided that the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you. My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you! (4:17-20)*

The intent of 4:17-20 is easily understood. Paul is questioning the motives of the false teachers and comparing them with his own. His zealousness has as its goal the formation of Christ in them but his opponent’s goal is to alienate the Galatians from him as a means of establishing control. Paul has his convert’s spiritual maturity in mind but they are only interested in establishing personal power and prestige.

“It is fine to be zealous, provided that the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you” seems to suggest that Paul’s zeal remained constant. The sincerity of his concern is evidenced by the fact that his feelings did not change even when he was not physically present.

The depth of the apostle’s personal agony is expressed by an analogy. The pain he suffers is like that of a mother giving birth and it is intensified because the final outcome is in doubt. A mother is able to endure the pain of childbirth because she anticipates the joy of being a parent. She longs to love and be loved. Paul, on the other hand, endures his pain without the assurance that Christ will be formed (born) in them.

Finally, he admits the limitations of the written word. He realizes that his thoughts and arguments would be better served if he could deliver them with just the right emphasis, tone of voice and emotion. He fears that his words will be given a tone that does not convey the intensity of his anguish, the depth of his love or the sincerity of his feelings.



### **An Allegory/Typology: Hagar and Sarah (4:21-31)**

Paul has offered the Galatians more than a dozen arguments in defense of his thesis stated previously in chapter two. Now he offers a typically rabbinical one based on a familiar narrative. His culminating argument consists of an allegorical interpretation of the Sarah/Hagar story. The contrasts in the story provided Paul with the allegorical evidence he needed to defend and illustrate his major thesis and call them back to the gospel. (See 2:15-16) No doubt this illustration would have had its greatest impact on the 'new teachers'. Paul chose a story which was a familiar battleground for Jewish exegesis so he began by reviewing the details of the story for the sake of his Gentile readers. Apparently the meaning of the story was a contentious issue amongst the rabbis. Paul's intention is to show the Galatians that there is a divine permanent truth contained in the story. His exegesis (interpretation) of the Hagar and Sarah story functions as an illustration rather than a proof. The story is interpreted as a 'typology' in that two contrasting attitudes towards God are demonstrated – faith and unbelief

A surprising line of reasoning is used because Paul compares Jews to Ishmael instead of Isaac as the Judaisers would have done. This unexpected 'switch' occurs because Paul associates the desire for self vindication by works with slavery. As long as the law is viewed as a means of self justification slavery to the law is inevitable. The chart that follows itemizes the contrasts contained in the original story.

<b>Hagar</b>	<b>Sarah</b>
1. Son's name was Ishmael.	1. Son's name was Isaac.
2. Hagar was a slave.	2. Sarah was born free.
3. Ishmael was born according to the flesh.	3. Born through a promise.
4. Ishmael's birth is associated with Sinai.	4. Isaac's birth is associated with the promise given to Abraham.
5. Son became a slave.	5. Son was free.
6. Ishmael persecuted Isaac.	6. Isaac was persecuted.
7. Ishmael must be cast out.	7. Isaac will inherit the promise.

*We who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Christ Jesus. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. (2:15-16)*

Paul's reasoning can best be understood by assuming that opponents had previously allegorized the story of Hagar and Sarah to establish their counter claim that faith in Christ alone was inadequate as a means of salvation. In support of their position, they probably argued that Paul's preaching contained an

'Ishmaelian' form of truth. Paul's opponents recognized that Ishmael was a son of Abraham in the physical sense but only Isaac was considered to be a true son of Abraham. The false teachers wanted the 'jury' to draw the conclusion that Paul's Gentile converts were analogously related to Ishmael but not to Isaac and as such they were not true "sons of Abraham". Gentiles, therefore, required circumcision in order to gain Isaac's status.

Paul allegorized the story of Hagar and Sarah but he gave it an entirely different 'slant'. Relative to their interpretation, he turned the meaning of the allegory 'on its head' by associating the Judaizers and the law with Ishmael, not Isaac. The story of Hagar and Sarah becomes Paul's forceful counter claim and closing argument.

There is no question that the story of these two women is taken out of context by Paul and the Judaizers and given a meaning not contained in the original narrative. The contemporary reader may be inclined to accuse both groups of placing a 'hermeneutic' (application) on top of a faulty 'exegesis' (interpretation). However, William Barclay and others have pointed out that the rabbinical tradition recognized the fact that Scripture had more than one meaning. It is possible, even likely, that both Paul and his opponents drew from this tradition. (See William Barclay, Galatians and Ephesians, page 40-41)

Jewish Rabbis believed that Scripture had four possible meanings and they recognized the allegorical meaning as the superior interpretation.

1. **Peshat** referred to a passage's simple or literal meaning.
2. **Remaz** its suggested meaning.
3. **Derush** the meaning deduced by investigation.
4. **Sod** was the passage's allegorical meaning.

The narrative the apostle recalls involves Abraham, his wife Sarah, his slave girl Hagar and his two sons Ishmael and Isaac. (Each son had a different mother.) The story is found in Genesis 16, 17 and 21.

Abraham was promised that he would have many descendants but as the story begins Abraham and Sarah were too old to have children so, from a human point of view, their childlessness endangered the promise. Sarah recognized the crisis so she took matters into her own hands by sending Abraham to Hagar the slave girl hoping that she would bear Abraham's son and carry the promise forward. Hagar became pregnant and bore a son named Ishmael. In the meantime, God was faithful to his promise and Sarah gave birth to Isaac in spite of her advanced age. Ishmael's birth was by ordinary means whereas Isaac was born by the intervention of God. (This intervention does not imply a virgin birth.) Ishmael, because his mother was a slave, was born into 'slavery' but Isaac was born 'free'.

Hagar saw herself as superior to Sarah because of the social shame associated with barrenness. Feeling a similar sense of superiority, Ishmael mocked Isaac but Paul defended him by quoting the Scripture. "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son". Then in verse 21 Paul prepared the Galatians to interpret the story in a surprisingly new way. "These things may be taken figuratively, for the two women represent two covenants." Again a word of caution is required. The reader must keep in mind that Paul did not really believe in two covenants but he speaks of two here in order to contrast his understanding of the promise with the Judaizers'. (4:24)

*Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of the promise. (4:21-23)*

In 4:21-23 Paul sheds additional light on his great theme; the law (works) vs. the gospel (grace). In effect, he calls into question their understanding of the law by indicating that their reading is confined to the law as command only. (4:21) He tells them that a more careful reading will result in a more expansive vision of the law than the one they are currently espousing. This is why he asks, "[A]re you not aware of what the law says?" He reasons that an expanded understanding will incline them to his point of view and lead them away from the Judaizers'.

He draws attention to Abraham's two sons by pointing out that one was the son of a slave and the other a son of a free woman. This contrast forms the substance of his argument; embracing the necessity of circumcision will align the Galatians with Ishmael the son of a slave and not Isaac the son of a free woman. Furthermore, Ishmael's birth, Paul reminds them, was the result of human activity whereas Isaac's birth resulted from the promise. The former (human activity) will make them slaves but the latter (promise) will bring them freedom. Freedom is self evidently superior to slavery because the slave is destined to labour in his own strength while the free man is justified by the unmerited favour (grace) of God.

*These things may be taken figuratively, for the two women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves; This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. (4:24-27) For it is written:*

*"Be glad, O barren woman,  
who bears no children;  
break forth and cry aloud,  
you who have no labour pains;  
because more are the children of the  
desolate woman*

*than of her who has a  
husband.” (Isaiah 54:1)*

In 4:24-27 Paul writes that the two women represent two covenants with one superior to the other. Sarah is associated with the promise and Hagar is associated with Sinai. It bears repeating that Paul did not believe that there were two distinct covenants since both were evidence of God’s gracious concern for Israel. At Sinai the Lord accepted Israel, formed them as a people and defined their relationship with him through the law. However, the law presented Israel with obligations without empowering them to obedience. This situation Paul saw as producing subservience to the law because of its emphasis on human achievement. The reference to Jerusalem might be Paul’s way of linking the heretical teachers with the earthly Jerusalem and its abstracted legalism whereas the ‘Jerusalem above’ functions as a divine source doing what the law never could – empower towards obedience.

*For it is written:*

*“Be glad, O barren woman,  
who bears no children;  
break forth and cry aloud,  
you who have no labour pains;  
because more are the children of the  
desolate woman  
than of her who has a  
husband.” (Isaiah 54:1)*

Then Paul moved from the Genesis story to Isaiah’s prophecy based on a word common to both texts. Both women were ‘barren’. The prophet promised that a barren abandoned woman, by the intervention of God, will have more children than a woman with a husband. According to the apostle, this promise was now being fulfilled as both Jews and Gentiles were being gathered together into one community. The growth of the church, says Paul, was the result of God’s gracious action, not human achievement.

*Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are the children of the promise. At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same way now. But what does the Scripture say? “Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman’s son.” Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman. (4:28-31)*

Paul brought the story to a conclusion by reminding the Galatians that they are the children of Sarah, not Hagar. They are like Isaac in that they owe their spiritual existence to the freely given promise of God. Ishmael and Isaac represent two contradictory understandings of the law. The former, advocated by the false teachers, involves self vindication while the latter involves faith. The stumbling block that Gentiles need not become Jewish is once again underlined.

The apostle saw in the prophet's words an anticipation of the mistreatment of Gentiles by the Judaizers. He draws a parallel between Ishmael's treatment of Isaac and the Judaizers treatment of Paul's Gentile converts. "At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit."

"Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son," is quoted as a command. The Gentiles must discern that a religion of self vindication will threaten them constantly. The only proper response is to separate the child of the slave from the child of the promise.

C.K. Barrett maintains that 4:30 involves much more than separation from Paul's converts. "He (Paul) was stating the fact that by taking the line they had chosen they had excluded themselves from the eternal inheritance of the people of God." (C.K. Barrett, Freedom and Obligation, page 29)

## Chapter Five

### Freedom in Christ: (5:1-15)

The theme of freedom contained in the next four paragraphs follows logically from the apostle's previous discussion of Hagar and Sarah. The words 'free' or 'freedom' occur four times and both are contrasted with the "yoke of slavery". It is as if Paul has exhausted his theological resources and brought the Galatians to a point of decision where they are forced to make an unambiguous choice. Paul admonishes them to "Stand firm" but he also fears that they will "burden" themselves with the "yoke of slavery".

The concept of 'freedom' in modern western culture differs in essential ways from Paul's understanding. Modernity thinks of freedom in terms of choices. That is to say, the free person selects from a variety of possibilities by exercising their free will. However, most modern people recognize the fact that freedom is not absolute. In reality, the exercise of the will is limited by a finite selection of choices and biased by the influences that result from past experience. Nevertheless, people in western societies see themselves as 'relatively' free in that they are able to make choices and thereby determine their own future. A free society is one in which individual freedom is protected by limiting the power of institutions and groups who would otherwise impose their will on the individual.

Paul loved freedom but he had a different kind in mind. Freedom for modernity means the opportunity to travel any track with a minimum of obligation and restraint. Paul, on the other hand, thought of freedom as a single path that leads to "the righteousness for which we hope". (5:5b) For the apostle, freedom from

the burden of human self vindication makes a person free to love their neighbour and be loved in return. The truly free person abandons the notion of radical individualism in favour of the mutuality of all human relations. He is willing to share burdens not his own in the realization that one day the roles may be reversed. For Paul, obligation is not freedom's restraint; obligation is freedom's purpose.

Martin Luther, commenting on freedom and obligation in Galatians wrote, "A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone." (Quoted by C.K. Barrett, Freedom and Obligation, page 3)

Both Paul's and Luther's teaching finds its parallel in the teaching of Jesus where he insists that his followers are obligated to love their enemy and their neighbour as an expression of God's inclusive love. Generosity, done in secret, is the hallmark of the kingdom of God. The generous person is acknowledging the generosity (forgiveness) that has been given to him by means of Jesus' atoning death. (See Matthew 5:43-48; 6:1-4)

*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. (5:1)*

With this verse, the apostle sets before them two clear but mutually exclusive choices. Either they chose the way of grace or the way of the law. Choosing the law means that their salvation will be dependent on human achievement and self vindication but by choosing 'grace' they are casting themselves and their sin upon the mercy of God. The former choice is slavery but the latter is freedom.

Paul was not a perfectionist. He knew that sin remained a powerful force within every believer until its final defeat when Christ returns. Therefore, the freedom of which he speaks cannot mean absolute freedom from sin. Paul freely admitted the effect of sin on his own life but he also believed that it would finally be defeated. Like us, he battled with his sinful nature in the knowledge that one day the ultimate victory over sin will be won. "So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? **Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord.**" (Romans 7:21-25)

Christian freedom, for Paul, meant that:

1. We are free from the burden of earning our own salvation by means of the law.
2. We are free from the curse of the law (judgment) because Christ became a curse for us.
3. We are free from the guilt of sin.
4. We are free to grow in Christian maturity through our union with Christ and his indwelling Spirit. The freedom of the Gospel combined with the gift of the 'Spirit' results in a change of character that the law had failed to produce.
5. We are free to embrace the mutuality of all human relationships.
6. We are free to be servants of all but masters of none.

Notice that Paul does not regard freedom as an end in itself because it leads to obligation. (See 4-6 above.) The believer is obligated to develop Christian character by the power of the Spirit and be willingly to embrace the mutuality of all human relationships. Lastly, the follower of Jesus stands in relation to other men and women as a servant not a master.

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

"Mark my words" places Paul's apostolic authority front and center again. He simply tells them that if they agree to circumcision the entire work of Christ will be denied. It will become as valueless as a cancelled cheque. Secondly, their circumcision will give them an impossible task; they will be obligated to obey the law in its entirety. Such an obligation Paul could not bear himself. Thirdly, the choice to combine circumcision with grace will mean that they "have fallen from grace".

It is important to remember that the real issue was not circumcision itself as if to say that a circumcised person could not be saved. Neither does it mean that Jewish men should abandon circumcision as a sign of their ethnicity and unique tradition. He was speaking of this rite from the point of view of the Judaisers who insisted that it was an indispensable requirement for Gentile salvation. Paul believed that Moses was not needed to finish what Christ had begun. (John Stott)

A word of warning! Rejecting the law as a means of self vindication does not mean that we are free to do as we like. Just because legalism is removed doesn't mean that our morals evaporate into an invisible mist leaving us rudderless and bereft of objective values.

Our experience of salvation is never completely realized in the present so we live with our eyes on the future. We long for the day when we will be what we are meant to be. In the meantime, our aspiration is to express our faith “through love”. There is an assumption throughout this paragraph that we are becoming righteous “through the spirit of righteousness”. That is to say, the Spirit is bringing into the present the moral righteousness that will be perfected in future. What began as a change in our status before God will end with the perfection of our ethical behavior; our justification involves much more than a change in our legal status before God. We are ‘saved’ because of a ‘foreign’ righteousness (ie. Christ’s righteousness imputed to us as it was to Adam.) for the purpose of becoming actually righteous. (This is the meaning of sanctification.)

John Piper’s comment on 5:6 is constructive. He writes.

“Therefore, love as an expression of faith is not the instrument of justification—it does not unite us to Christ who is our perfection. Only faith does. But this faith is the kind of faith that inevitably gives rise to love.” (John Piper, **The Future of Justification**, page 206)

*You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.” (See Mathew 13:33; Paul is probably quoting a familiar proverb) I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be. Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves! (5:7-12)*

Paul reminded his converts of the past when they “were running a good race”. The athletic metaphor would have really aroused his Jewish readers and caused them to pay attention because no Jew would have entered a Greek athletic competition because it involved nudity and was associated with Greek paganism. He hoped that the expression would be sufficiently arresting to cause a rethinking of their position. The apostle wanted them to revisit the time when they had accepted his gospel of grace alone. The athletic metaphor also suggests that their ‘race’ consisted of more than orthodox belief. At the beginning they were actively seeking to conduct themselves according to the ethical imperatives contained in the gospel. Again he reminds the Galatians that the call they had responded to was from God not men.

“A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough” (See Mathew 13:33; Paul is probably quoting a familiar proverb) is a warning. The false teaching that was spreading amongst them was no trivial matter. Like ‘yeast’ it had the potential to contaminate the entire church.

Paul had not lost all confidence in them; he believed that ultimately they would “take no other view” than the one he was offering. He was confident also that the



false teachers would eventually be defeated and held responsible for their false teaching.

*“Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished.”*

The question above may indicate that Paul’s opponents had been spreading the false rumour that previously he had been preaching the need for Gentile circumcision but had changed his mind. They may have founded the rumour on Paul’s circumcision of Timothy in Acts 16:3. The purpose of such a rumour was most likely an attempt to draw a wedge between Paul and his Gentile converts. He responded by pointing the absurdity of this malicious accusation. Paul could not be fairly accused of preaching a gospel of grace and a gospel of works at the same time because doing so would ‘abolish the offence of the cross’.

John G. Gager has an interesting discussion of 5:12b in his book “Reinventing Paul”. He writes:

“Three things are clear in this question: Paul feels persecuted over the issue of circumcision; he no longer preaches circumcision; and, at least by implication, at some prior time he did preach circumcision (of Gentiles). What is not clear is what that prior time refers to. Does it mean that before his conversion, as a Pharisee, he had been a Jewish missionary to Gentiles and had insisted on circumcision? Or had he, even after his conversion, at an earlier stage of his work as an apostle, continued the practice of circumcising Gentile converts, later changing his mind? We cannot know. All we can know for certain is that Paul felt persecuted by his opponents and argued that their gospel of circumcision threatened to undermine the scandal of the cross. In this context, *‘skandalon’* must refer to the fact that Gentiles were now redeemed by Christ, without circumcision.” (John G. Gager, Reinventing Paul, page 99)

*As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves! (5:12)*

The statement above is utterly shocking especially when it is read in the context of Deuteronomy 23:1-2. “He whose male member is cut off shall not enter the assembly of the Lord.” Whereas circumcision was understood as a sign of membership in the nation of Israel, castration was disqualification. If this is what Paul was referring to then his meaning is “Let them disqualify themselves instead.” He might also be implying that if circumcision accomplishes a person’s reconciliation to God then it makes sense to cut off more than is required.

*You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” If you keep biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. (5:13-15)*

Paul has not accused his opponents of being immoral people but he has clearly stated that even the most moral are unable to earn God's favour on the basis of their ethical accomplishments. The moral person and the immoral person are, according to Paul, equidistant from God. Neither is capable of saving themselves. We are sinners because of our desire to take charge of our own lives by defining our own existence not because we are necessarily immoral. This is precisely the point of Jesus' parable in Luke 18:9-14 where he responds to some who were "confident of their own righteousness". The tax collector and the Pharisee are contrasted. The former appealed to the mercy of God and went home justified because he said, "God, have mercy on me a sinner". (Luke 18:13-14)

His opponents have been accusing Paul of preaching a dangerous gospel that undermines the ethical force and specificity issuing from the Jewish law. They feared that his gospel lacked enough moral substance and direction to prevent his Gentile converts from returning to their former pagan normlessness. It seems a reasonable criticism. Paul saw their point so he warned his converts that they must not abuse their new found freedom in Christ "to indulge the sinful nature". (flesh)

The actual word Paul used for 'sinful nature' is 'flesh'. This particular expression is used in a variety of ways in his writing so the reader has to get Paul's meaning from the context. In this context 'Sinful nature' (flesh) means our 'fallen nature'. The 'flesh' refers to mankind's innate tendency to egocentricity and it is evident from his statement that our fallen nature remains operative in the present.

The expression 'sinful nature' (flesh) does not imply that there is an aspect of human nature that is not sinful. Paul did not believe that there was a counter balancing good side to every human being. 'Sinful nature' is Paul's expression for the entirety of human nature. In other words, 'sinful nature' means 'fallen nature' and both render mankind incapable of saving itself. Jesus agrees with Paul since the first and second Beatitudes assume a theology identical to Paul's. Moreover, Jesus spoke of his anticipated death as 'a ransom for many'. This expression implies that Christ understood his task as accomplishing something only he could accomplish. Clearly, Paul's doctrine of reconciliation is thoroughly grounded in Jesus' own self understanding. In every respect the apostle was a follower of Christ not an innovator!

Their freedom in Christ must not become an excuse for self indulgence so he reminds the Galatians that they are not free to do as they please. Instead, they must express gratitude for the gift they have received by obeying the entire substance of the law contained in the great command. "Love your neighbour as yourself." Freedom without love will only result in 'a feeding frenzy' where they 'devour' each other by selfish acts driven by unrestrained self concern in search of personally defined goals.

## **The Flesh and the Spirit: (5:16-26)**

In this part of his the letter the apostle wants to say that authentic Christian life is nurtured by the 'Spirit' rather than by the 'flesh' because no person can reverse his/her egocentricity by a simple decision. 'Flesh' and 'Spirit' are opposed to each other. The 'flesh' is life driven by the desire for self gratification (not only physical gratification) and as such it is completely inward looking and self concerned. To live according to the 'flesh' is to be a slave of one's own selfish desires. On the other hand, a person who is "led by the Spirit" lives according to a new external reality in which the ego has been supplanted by the Spirit who produces new desires foreign to the 'flesh'. C.K. Barrett explained the contrast of 'flesh' and 'Spirit' as follows. "[I]f a man's life is to be centered no longer on man himself it will need a new center, and the divine center available to reconstruct human life as the basis and for the practice of love is what Paul means by the Spirit, the divine activity by which the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts." (C.K. Barrett, Freedom and Obligation, page 74-75)

The apostle began the chapter by insisting that the 'freedom' in Christ was not license. Countering the criticism that he was promoting and encouraging sin required Paul to articulate a moral imperative that did not descend into a new legal system. He accomplishes his goal with his discussion of two divergent ways of living.

*So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. (5:16-18)*

The next ten verses answer the accusation that Paul's teaching was lacking in moral imperative and specificity. The first thing to notice about his ethical teaching is that it is as demanding as that found in the Sermon on the Mount. (See Matthew 5-7) The second observation is that he did not think of the Christian life as devoid of inner moral conflict evidenced by the description of his own inner conflict described in Romans 7:21-25.

There are two realities (5:17) and "They are in conflict with each other". The believer, therefore, must constantly choose between two alternatives. Either he will choose to satisfy his sinful nature (flesh) or choose to be led and empowered by the Spirit. Happily, the believer is able to make this choice in the knowledge that the Spirit will do for him what the law never could. That is what he means by "If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law."

These verses may suggest to some readers that the person of faith is condemned to a life of oppressive self examination which does little else but weigh them down with an over powering sense of self concern and preoccupation with guilt and moral failure. The answer comes later in the

passage where Paul writes “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature its passions and desires” (5:24). He means that the cross assuages the guilt of our past, present and future. We live in a constant state of repentance made possible by Jesus’ atoning death on the cross. Finding ourselves forgiven over and over again, we are able to press on in the hope that God will one day end our inner conflict when the power of sin is finally conquered.

*The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witch craft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not enter the kingdom of God. (5:19-21)*

Paul lists fifteen indicators of our sinful nature. Some, because of their physical nature (carnal), are public but some are private and therefore unobservable. All are self centered. The first three are sexual in nature, the fourth and fifth are associated with pagan religion and the remaining ten are social sins that destroy community. We need not assume that Paul thought of sexual sins as worse than any other. For him sin was sin but he decided to begin the representative list in the area of sexuality because promiscuity was so rampant in Greek society. (See page 54 of this document for a discussion of women in Greek, Roman and Jewish culture. Greek sexual mores went hand in hand with the low status of women.) This aspect of his converts’ moral reasoning had to be dealt with ‘right up front’. Similarly, when the church struggled to arrive at an agreement concerning Jews and Gentiles at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15) sexual faithfulness was again placed at the top of the list. At the council, James spoke for the entire church. “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.” (Acts 15:19-20)

Paul’s list does not focus on the obvious observable sins to the exclusion of the invisible ones. Each sin has a common characteristic; self centeredness and egocentricity run through them all. Entry into the kingdom of God are denied to those who actively seek gratification of their sinful nature above all else. Their non entry into the kingdom is not because of their moral imperfection per se. If that is the reason then no one is qualified and Paul is self contradictory. Membership in the kingdom is withheld when the desire to gratify sinful nature indicates that a person is not an authentic believer in the first place. Unlike believers, the individuals Paul has described experience no inner conflict whatsoever. They are committed to their own pleasure and self gratification.

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. (5:22-26)*

It is interesting that Paul never identifies the gifts of the Spirit with authentic spiritual life. Gifts can be pretenders but 'fruits' cannot. Also worth noting is the fact that Christian character is not described as if it results from the acceptance of various religious dogmas. Paul did not believe that Christ like behavior follows naturally from the acceptance of particular theological constructs; he believed that Christian maturity, consisting of the believer's attitude towards himself and others, flowed from the relationship he described as 'keeping in step with the Spirit'. This relationship, because it is "the power of God unto salvation", produces 'fruit' that cannot be acquired in any other way.

Paul's list of virtues is reminiscent of Jesus' Beatitudes. (Mathew 5:3-10) The eight Beatitudes also comprise a representative set of moral virtues that describe the kingdom of God and as such they define the aspiration and final outcome for every follower of Jesus. Lastly, the Beatitudes function as a promise; God, by his effectual presence, intends to make each virtue a reality in the life of every believer. The first four Beatitudes relate to mankind's orientation to God and the last four concern the believer's orientation towards his neighbour.

Similarly, Paul's list of twelve representative virtues are like the Beatitudes, they are not natural human endowments; they are fruits that come from the Christian's union with Christ by the Holy Spirit and they develop as the believer lives by the Spirit and aspires to receive His gifts. Love heads the list because every virtue that follows is its expression. There is a relationship between the virtues in that each carries with it an underlying orientation of selflessness and outgoing concern for others. Finally, each virtue looks to God rather than to self.

Care must be taken as we read Paul's teaching here. We must not turn him into a moralist. He is not saying that the possession of these virtues, even if they are fruit, justify us before God. They do not! Such an interpretation would make Paul in contradiction with everything he has written and it would place him in the 'same camp' as the Judaizers. Every believer, no matter how moral, is reconciled to God by the saving action of God in Christ. (Solus Christus) However, the aspiration to possess the fruits of love, joy, peace and patience is a sign of saving faith in Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Humility's companion is 'gentleness or meekness'. The word used is the *praotes*. Again, he has used a word to describe the content of Christian character that is given little value in a culture that admires strength and personal power as the most desirable of personal characteristics. In today's world, individuals take courses in 'assertiveness training' but they do not study to become meek. Modernity associates meekness with a willingness to become a door mat or shrinking violet. People who are meek are destined to be dominated by others and 'shoved to the back of the line'. These negative connotations are not at all what the apostle is referring to in this passage.

In the ancient world 'praotes' was associated with a trained animal. Imagine a horse before it is 'broken' by a trainer; the power of the horse is uncontrolled. The only reason to train the horse is because of the powerful physical attributes of strength, speed and stamina but these are of little use until they are brought under control of the rider's bit and rein. The purpose of the training is to bring the horse's strength, speed, and stamina under control without diminishing the horse's main features. Once trained, the horse's rider is able to take full control without erasing the animal's strength and ability to run great distances.

Therefore, a meek person is one for whom every instinct and every passion has been brought under control. This person is not without anger in every circumstance; the meek person will become angry, but only under the right conditions. They may seethe with anger at the wrongs committed against another person but will not be moved to anger when wrong is committed against them. In other words, meekness is the personal quality that brings the natural passion of anger under control by transforming and restraining a person's natural desire to assert their rights.

Patience made Paul's list as well. In Ephesians, he speaks of 'patience' (*makrothumia*) and 'bearing one another in love' as identical inner qualities that have an outward expression. The patient person is willing to bear insult and personal injury without developing a bitterness that seeks redress. 'Long suffering' emerges from the realization that one has been treated with a divine patience that seeks to save rather than destroy.

Love (*agape*) involves the will more than the feelings. Paul is speaking of a love that is offered when the object of love is unlovable and unwilling or unable to return love. This kind of love desires the highest good possible for other men and women without the expectation of reward.

The fruits of the Spirit are those which promote harmonious relationships in the community. Each virtue requires a person to value the needs of others more than their own. The attainment of these representative characteristics is possible only as the believer lives 'by the Spirit'. Simply put, the apostle is asking those who claim to live by the Spirit to evidence that fact by a life style controlled by the Spirit and directed towards the well being of their neighbour.

*Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. (5:26)*

Perhaps there is more to 5:26 that meets the eye. Paul has already let his readers know that both legalism and license are equal threats to the freedom brought by the gospel. Legalism sets the table for unrelenting self analyze and personal evaluation. By embracing legalism the individual is caught between the need to find enough evidence for self vindication and the reality that they continually fall short. On the other hand, license drives a person to seek their

own desires as a primary goal. Both legalism and license place the 'self' where it does not belong thus breaking the first commandment.

Paul may have had in mind another threat to freedom as he wrote these words. It was a threat he had known in other circumstances. Perhaps some Galatians, like their Corinthian brothers, had raised the ecstatic experience of tongue speaking, miracles and prophecy to the center of their 'religious' life as expressions of their spiritual maturity. Paul saw their zealotry for ecstatic experience as a threat to freedom because it was just another way of establishing a sense of self importance and superiority. Paul responded to these perceived threats by reminding the Galatians that 'living by the Spirit' required them to seek the welfare of others as the essential goal. "Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other" takes them in another more mature direction. (5:26)

Paul never views the ethical behaviour of the believer apart from the Spirit's work nor the Spirit's ethical direction and enablement apart from the believer's active expression of his or her faith. (See Richard Longenecker, Galatians, page 266)

## Chapter Six

### **Reciprocal Relationships within the Community: (6:1-10)**

It was characteristic of Paul to end his letters with a series of ethical exhortations because his theological arguments are not abstractions divorced from real life. The apostle's theology always sought concrete expression in the everyday life of his converts. For this reason, his Galatian letter ends with some ethical teaching that flows very naturally from his theological reasoning. In chapters 3 and 4, the apostle has argued that Gentiles have been 'freed' from the oppression of a works based religion. Now he argues forcefully that this new found freedom brings no permission to do as they like. Instead, the grace of God made manifest in Christ, brings with it a new self understanding and obligation to take loving responsibility for one's neighbour. Paul believed that both license and legalism are enemies of 'freedom'. Christian freedom includes obligation. (For a wonderful study of this relationship see C.K. Barrett, Freedom and Obligation)

Paul never wearied of telling his converts that they could not earn their salvation by doing good but equally he never wearied of telling them of their Christian duty to do good.

There has been a variety of opinion as to the relationship of the final chapter to what preceded it and some scholars have even suggested that there is no intrinsic relationship between what has been argued in the rest of the letter. The claim that chapter six is unrelated to chapters one to five is unjustified. There are

at least three ways of looking at chapter six as emerging naturally from the other five chapters.

1. As Paul may have decided to conclude his letter by revisiting an earlier theme identified in 2:17 where he wrote, "If, while we seek to be justified in Christ it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not!" If this is the case then Paul may have been addressing a 'libertine group' within the community who concluded that they had been given permission by Paul to do as they liked. What better way to underline "Absolutely not!" than to say it again at the end of the letter by way of several clear ethical exhortations.
2. He may have ended the letter with a defense against the false accusation that his gospel contained no ethical demand. The objection may have been stated in the following way. "Paul what you are teaching is very dangerous because it will cause men and women to sin. You say that faith in Christ alone justifies us. We believe that your gospel lacks moral responsibility; it has no norm. If we are reconciled to God without works from where comes the motivation to do good. Paul, you are encouraging us to break the law. If God justifies people apart from works it follows that there is absolutely no reason why anyone should desire to be righteous. You are simply telling us to do as we like." Chapter six says a resounding "No" to this accusation.
3. The last chapter spells out in practical terms the meaning of "live by the Spirit" (5:16, 25a) and "keep in step with the Spirit". (5:25b) Therefore, Paul was summoning the church to live according to the Spirit by assuming the personal and corporate responsibilities necessary to bring harmony to two disparate groups and the church as a whole.

*Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself with somebody else. For each one should carry his own load. (6:1-5)*

Paul was a realist. He knew that there would be occasions when authentic believers would be overtaken in sin. He also knew that individual sinful acts are often visible and easily detected. The expression "caught in a sin" does not give permission for believers to focus relentlessly on the sins of others to the exclusion of their own. However, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently" assumes that sin cannot be ignored because of its disharmonizing affect on the individual and the church community. What Paul has said here stands in vivid contrast to the modern church where faith is assumed to be a private matter. Paul's teaching in 6:1 does not 'sit well' in today's church culture because judgment of another person for any reason



whatsoever is simply 'out of bounds' because judgment is regarded as inherently self righteous. Paul believed that the spiritual health of the community brings the obligation to judge what is and what is not "Godly". However, Paul would quickly emphasize that judgment of others is never for the purpose of establishing moral superiority. The contemporary church often uses the pretext of privacy as an excuse to be uninvolved in all aspects of community life.

William Barclay points out that the word for sin is *paraptoma* and he suggests that this Greek word refers to sin which is not deliberate. However, it matters not whether the sin is intentional or deliberate; the spiritual person is called to 'restore' the sinner. This work of 'restoration', according to Paul, is the work of those "who are spiritual". This phrase does not describe believers with a heightened sense of personal perfection. On the contrary, the spiritually mature are aware of their vulnerability to similar moral failings. Consequently, they are prevented from becoming self righteous and full of contempt for the person in need of restoration. The spiritually mature do their restorative work in the knowledge that their own imperfection will bring temptation to them sooner or later. The spiritually mature are 'gentile' because they see themselves as 'beggars telling other beggars where to find bread'. Furthermore, the spiritually mature willingly embrace the notion that one day they may be the one in need of restoration. The work of reconciliation, therefore, has a reciprocal dimension that must be recognized in order for the community to mature.

Paul has used a common Greek word in 6:1. The word he used is *katarizo* in common usage meant to 'put in order' or to 'restore to its former condition'. It was used in reference to a broken bone that had been reset and it is the word used in Mark 1:19 where the apostles are 'mending' their nets. Restoration occurs when a brother is 'mended' so as to enable him/her to continue in their spiritual journey with the support the entire community. The restored person is made whole again.

Several commentators have insightfully point out that the last verse of the previous chapter provides a critical description of the 'spiritually mature'. Paul wrote, "Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other." (5:26) This statement indicates clearly that our conduct towards others is determined by our opinion of ourselves. A self image that renders others inferior will lead to provocation (*prokaleo*) because the conceited person seeks to confront and challenge others as a means of demonstrating his/her superiority and personal power.

Paul, with his superb understanding of human nature, knew that feeling oneself inferior is as destructive as feeling superior. This is the reason he links 'provocation' with 'envy'. These two characteristics are equal partners; both are capable of destroying harmony and good will in the church. The envious person's jealousy compels them to seek the other person's possessions rather than their well being.

The apostle refers to burdens twice within the space of five verses but two different words are used. The distinction between the two words is critical for a proper understanding of Paul's teaching. *Baros* are burdens so enormous they cannot be carried by one person alone. These sorts of burdens are not defined in the text because they are known by experience. Paul is simply recognizing the fact that there is an inescapable rhythm to everyone's life that brings with it experiences and circumstances that are enormously difficult. Life is not always a 'mountain top' experience; there are many unexpected twists and turns that lead to dark places we would never choose as a destination. Burdens of this enormity cannot and should not be borne alone.

When Paul wrote, "Carry each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ," he was not making a suggestion. His exhortation has the force of a command. Notice also that a person helps to carry the burden of another in anticipation of the time when their roles will be reversed. When the church community recognizes the absolute necessity of reciprocal relationships in church life it is fulfilling "the law of Christ". What he means by "the law of Christ" is defined by what he has written previously in chapter 5:14. "The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbour as yourself." His words immediately recall the words of Jesus. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no greater command than these." (Mark 12:30-31)

The burden mentioned in 6:5 relates to the burdens that everyone must carry on their own. *Phortion* refers to the back pack carried by every soldier into battle. It need not be shared with anyone else; it is light enough to be carried alone so those who 'walk in the Spirit' are required to distinguish the difference between *baros* and *phortion*.

*If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself with somebody else. For each one should carry his own load. (6:3-5)*

Willingness to share burdens requires honest self evaluation. The burden bearer must not exaggerate his own sense of importance otherwise he will exaggerate his neighbour's faults and underestimate his own. What Paul has written here echoes Jesus' teaching where he says, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye, when all the time there is a plank in your eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see more clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.'" (Matthew 7:3-5)

*Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor. (6:6)*

On first reading the above statement seems out of place. Interestingly, it implies that as Paul wrote there were already members of the community engaged in 'full time' teaching, otherwise there would be no need for 'sharing all good things'. His statement is entirely appropriate within the context because it simply points out another kind of reciprocal relationship that existed in the church. There was then, as there is now, a reciprocal relationship between the teacher (pastor) and his students.

In modern times pastors require and deserve financial support from the church so they can devote themselves to their pastoral, preaching and teaching duties. Pastors, on the other hand, are required to devote themselves to the essential work of ministry. In so many contemporary churches the congregation expects the minister to be the equivalent of a CEO and unfortunately too many ministers willingly accept this role.

### **About Sowing and Reaping: (6:7-10)**

*Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will receive eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (6:7-10)*

Paul's metaphor is well chosen because almost everyone was involved in agriculture in the first century. The importance of sowing and reaping was known to every member of the church so Paul applied an agricultural metaphor to issue both a promise and a warning. His words would have been addressed to the entire community but they may have also been directed specifically towards his new converts in the fear that they were abandoning his teaching and replacing it with some 'libertine' tendencies that produced quarrelsomeness (5:15, 26), conceit (5:26), envy (5:26), lack of concern for others (6:1-2), and pride (6:3-4). With this metaphor the apostle reminds his converts that actions have natural consequences. The Gospel of grace did not offer them protection from the consequences of bad behavior nor did it provide an excuse for behaving as they liked. It is helpful to take each statement one at a time.

*Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. (6:7a)*

If the reader assumes that Paul was responding to a set of behaviours characterized by quarrelsomeness, conceit, envy, selfishness and pride, then his warning consists of a reminder that there is a relationship between behaviour and outcome. The outcome is not an arbitrary punishment; it is the result of the behavior in consummation. Living as if this relationship did not exist is the equivalent of 'mocking God'. Every farmer knows that what is harvested can only

be what is sown. The farmer will not harvest wheat if he sows barely. Similarly, Ungodly actions cannot produce Godly results.

The metaphor contains a promise as well as a warning. When love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness (5:22), gentleness and self control (5:23) are sown the harvest is the best that God can give. The development of these virtues promotes harmony everywhere and it prepares each person for the future when the kingdom of God will be realized. Without these virtues life with God will be intolerable.

*The one who sows to please his sinful nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will receive eternal life. (6:8)*

The proverb quoted takes the reader back to the flesh/spirit antimony of 5:1-25. Sowing according to “please our sinful nature” leads to the natural consequence of destruction but sowing “to please the Spirit” results in eternal life. Again, it is critical to read the apostle here within the context of his letter. Paul is not teaching ‘works righteousness’ and calling it by another name. He cannot be saying that our behaviour earns the reward or the punishment in and of itself. One who “sows to please the Spirit” does so as a sign that they have been reconciled to God by grace and not by works. Faith, not works, is the seed that results in the harvest of eternal life. On the other hand, sowing “to please our sinful nature” is an indication of unbelief. Therefore, our destruction is the logical consequence of unbelief not our moral failures per se. Understanding this distinction is critical otherwise the apostle’s thought loses its coherence and renders him self- contradictory.

*Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. (6:9)*

What the apostle feared was that his converts had begun well but were beginning to lose their enthusiasm for a way of living that sought the welfare of others as the ultimate concern. He decided to encourage their continued response to the Spirit’s work within them.

The thought expressed in 6:9 was directed towards Paul’s Greek converts. Many of them had had associations with the synagogue and temple because they were attracted to the high ethical standards and monotheism of Judaism. Even so, the life style demanded by the gospel involved a personal self discipline alien to their ‘native’ culture and to human nature in general. The behavioural standards Paul taught were not ‘easy’. Self denial and concern for others was at the ‘heart’ of his teaching and both of these are in conflict with every person’s ‘sinful nature’. (flesh) The apostle had given witness to his own inner conflict so he was able to identify with their ‘weariness in doing good’. He uses the pronouns ‘us’ and ‘we’ because he wanted them to know that their struggles were also his.

Furthermore, he wanted to assure them that he was asking something difficult for him as well as for them.

Paul recognized the fact that in the 'life in the Spirit' fatigue is never far away so he encouraged them to persist by keeping a wonderful promise in mind. That is why he wrote, "for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up".

Paul's teaching here has another wonderful implication. It means that the good work done now is carried forward to the occasion when the creation will finally be perfected. In other words, the reason for not wearying is that Godly behavior has eternal significance. In some mysterious way our acts of love are being used by God to restore creation. Believers 'will reap a harvest' by discovering the significance of their actions when the kingdom is fully inaugurated. This the reason why Paul, after writing so intensely about the perfection of creation in 1 Corinthians 15, does not tell the church to wait around until God finally acts. Instead he writes, "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour is not in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:58)

The apostle's teaching that 'doing good' will 'reap a harvest' is thematically connected with Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:19-21.

*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (6:19-21)*

The theme of the first half of chapter Matthew 6 is the secrecy of his followers' inner life as an indication of pure motive but in 6:19-21 he turns to the arena of public life. His subject matter is money, possessions, material need, and earthly ambition. At this point, Jesus' teaching breaks down any distinction between the religious and secular life. Jesus was urging his followers to center their attention on the life to come. Earthly treasures do not deserve to be a disciple's ultimate concern because they are transitory and subject to decay whereas the treasures of heaven are eternal.

Paul agrees with Jesus. Members of the kingdom of God live in the present 'by pleasing the Spirit in order to centre their hearts on the future. They look forward to the day when they will discover the eternal significance of their good deeds. They will delight by the discovery that their heavenly treasures have been used by God to defeat the decay of death.

*Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (6:10)*

Paul has plainly announced God's universal love for all people including his accusers. He believed that the purpose of the cross was to overcome all the

divisive forces provided by culture, nationality, religion, ethnicity, gender, and social position. (See Galatians 3:28) If God's redemptive plan in Christ is universal then it follows that the community of faith must also disregard those same distinctions especially in the life of the community. Jesus echoed Paul's teaching when he taught that God causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. (Matthew 5:45) This same impartiality must be theirs as well and of special concern is the welfare of other believers.

### **A Final Word about Circumcision: (6:11-18)**

*See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand! Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh. May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God. (6:11-16)*

*Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen. (6:17-18)*

*See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand! (6:11)*

Scholars have debated the reason why he took the pen himself. Some have suggested that Paul always employed a 'secretary' so his penmanship reflected a lack of practice in letter formation. Another theory is that the large letters indicate a serious decline in his eyesight but a more plausible explanation is that he wrote the last section in large letters to emphasize the critical nature of his closing comment. J.B. Lightfoot wrote, "The boldness of the handwriting answers to the force of the Apostle's convictions. The size of the letters will arrest the attention of his readers in spite of themselves". (J.B. Lightfoot, Galatians, page 221)

*Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. (6:12)*

This text raises a question but offers no definitive answer. Who were the Judaizers trying to impress and what was the nature of the persecution they were attempting to avoid? It is clear that Paul knew that the primary goal of the 'circumcision party' was not the well being of his converts; their goal was completely self serving. They wanted to secure the circumcision of the Gentile Christians to impress some group whose approval they cherished. If they were able to win the argument they would have established an influence over the Galatians greater than Paul's. If successful, they would be able to claim victory and enjoy the sense of self gratification that derived from imposing their will on the Gentile Christians.

Richard Longenecker mentions a theory proposed by Robert Jewett. According to Jewett, there was a rising tide of Jewish nationalism in Palestine that resulted in considerable persecution directed against any group that had Gentile sympathies or close associations with Gentiles who had not been proselytized. (That is to say they were not joined to Judaism by circumcision.) Jewett wrote, "If they could succeed in circumcising the Gentile Christians, this might effectively thwart any Zealot (a Jewish nationalistic movement within Judaism.) purification campaign against the Judean church!" (Quoted by Longenecker in Galatians, page 291)

*Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh. (6:13)*

Paul adds fuel to the fire by pointing out the hypocrisy of his opponents. They were asking the Gentiles to accept a burden even they could not bear. Therefore, the victory they sought had nothing to do with living righteously according to the law. They wanted, for their own selfish reasons, to impose their religious bias on Paul's Gentile converts. By recognizing the truth of the apostle's critique the non Jewish members of the church could find a reason to resist.

An important lesson for the contemporary Christian is contained in 6:13. Christian people must resist the desire to impose their denominational distinctives on other believers. Christians of differing traditions can find agreement at the center of the Gospel without demanding total consensus over non essentials. Unwillingness to accept Christian brothers and sisters because of 'minor' theological differences is analogous to imposing circumcision on Gentiles as a necessary condition for their reconciliation to God.

*May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (6:14)*

Paul contrasts his motivation with that of his opponents. They are motivated by the desire to be accepted and approved by others whose opinion they valued. He boasts only "in the cross of Christ". It is difficult for modern people to comprehend the repugnance in which the cross was held by Jew and Gentile alike. In modern terms Paul has said, "May I never boast except in the electric chair, the hangman's noose or the gas chamber." Placing a cross around one's neck would make as much sense to Paul as pinning an electric chair or a noose to one's clothing.

"The world has been crucified to him and he to the world." Paul was not saying that he has repudiated earthly life as if nothing about it brings satisfaction. The cross has not led him to seek disengagement from the physical world and its legitimate pleasures. Paul did not believe as the Greeks did that the physical

and the spiritual were in opposition to each other. A faith that witnessed to the incarnate son (The word became flesh) could never view the physical as being at war with the spiritual. The cross had, however, given him a new relationship with the world. He embraced fully his physical nature but he no longer sought the rewards and treasures that were obstacles to Godliness. The cross, for Paul, was the antithesis of ego centric existence with its desire for power and the right to be served. Paul's understanding of the cross moved in the opposite direction. He believed that Christ "came not to be served but to serve, and to give himself a ransom for many". (Mark 10:45) What he has said here leads naturally to the next verse. (See Mathew 6:19-34 as Jesus' parallel teaching where he contrasts earthly and heavenly treasure.)

*Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God. (6:16)*

Paul was not against circumcision as a culturally relevant physical expression of ethnic identity but he was against it when viewed as a spiritual necessity. The 'new creation' that develops in the life of believers as they live in close proximity to the risen Lord by means of the Spirit is of prime importance. Circumcision has no power to save in and of itself. Mankind can be made a new creation only by the action of God in Jesus Christ. This was exactly the point of Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus in John 3.

Accepting his teaching on the place of circumcision is encapsulated in the phrase "all who follow this rule". The rule is his message. By faith in Christ without the addition of works, Gentiles are joined to the Promise as members of "the Israel of God." The cross has grafted the branch (Gentiles) to the root (Israel). (See Romans 11:17)

Paul never says that Gentiles become Jews nor does he say that Jews become Gentile. He does say, however, that by faith in Christ both become members of 'the Israel of God'. (6:16)

*Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. (6:17)*

Paul bore the marks of suffering on his body and he used the word *stigmata*. In everyday language this word referred to the mark placed on a slave's body by his owner. The marks on a slave meant that he was not his own master but belonged to the one whose marks he bore. Paul chose this word to show that he did not belong to himself but to Christ whose 'slave' he was. His suffering indicates that he deserved to be allowed to continue his ministry without the interference of his opponents.

In 2 Corinthians 11:23-29 the apostle provided the church with a list of his sufferings on behalf of the gospel and they include countless beatings, several lashings, three beatings by rods and one stoning. At the end of the passage



Paul states that his worse suffering was his anxiety over the church. When they were weak so was he. When they sin he 'inwardly burns'. (2 Corinthians 11:29)

As Paul wrote 6:17 he was including this church as a reason for his continued suffering. He had never been abandoned them in his suffering so neither should they abandon him.

*The grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen. (6:18)*

The apostle ended his letter as abruptly as it began. He did not view them as enemies; they were his 'brothers' and for this reason he remained hopeful that the Lordship of Christ and the sufficiency of his sin bearing death would remain their prime directive and serve as a bastion against the false teaching that assaulted them on a daily basis. As we come to the apostle's closing words we wonder if his letter accomplished its desired purpose. We do not know. However, his writing demands that we apply his teaching to the present. The contemporary church must continually revisit the apostle's proclamation otherwise some version of works will be added to the Gospel of grace through faith. Men and women are reconciled to God by the justifying death of Christ and by no other means. Studying the Biblical text is the primary means to hold the church faithful to the apostle's fundamental truth.

Looking back at Paul's letter as a whole enables the reader to see that 'freedom' and its relationship to 'obligation' is at the epicenter of the apostle's teaching. He has said that the grace of God operating in the atoning death of Jesus frees us from the oppression of earning our reconciliation with God. We are free from the guilt of sin as we live in a constant state of repentance by nailing our sins to the cross. We are free from the anxiety that comes from determining our own destiny. The freedom that grace brings also provides the energy to be other directed and desirous of harmonious relationships everywhere. Freedom allows us to live in the confident hope that we will be conformed to the son and made ready to live in complete harmony with God. The indwelling Spirit compels us to reject the enslaving egocentricity of the flesh by embracing the mutuality of our relationship with our neighbor. We live freely in the glorious expectation that God will one day perfect us as he brings perfection to his entire creation. This future informs the present by uniting freedom with obligation.

Completed August 2009  
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Completed July, 2009  
For the Berean Class  
Peter C. Ferguson





