# Bookmarks





## Galatians

## Introduction



Not many books have made such a lasting impression on men's minds as the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians, nor have many done so much to shape the history of the Western world. Galatians has been called the "Magna Carta of Christian liberty," and this is quite correct. For it rightly maintains that only through the grace of God in Jesus Christ is a person enabled to escape the curse of his sin and of the law and to live a new life, not in bondage or license, but in a genuine freedom of mind and spirit through the power of God. Because of this powerful truth, Galatians was the cornerstone of the Protestant Reformation. Luther especially loved it. He called it his Catherine von Bora, for, he said, "I am wedded to it." In Luther's hands the book became a mighty weapon in the Reformation arsenal. Paul regarded the thesis of Galatians--salvation by the grace of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ--as the indispensible foundation of Christian life and conduct,

while Luther, by rediscovering and teaching it, restored to the church its spiritual heart and freedom. The thesis of Galatians is no less important for our time than it was in Paul's day and in Luther's day.

## 1. The Historical Setting

In the decade or so surrounding the year A.D. 50, the infant church was drifting by degrees and at times almost unnoticeably toward its first great doctrinal crisis. When the gospel was being preached primarily to Jews by Jews, the development of the church progressed smoothly. But as the ambassadors of Christ pushed out into largely Gentile communities and the gospel began to take root there, questions arose regarding a Christian's relationship to the law of Moses and to Judaism as a system. Was the church to open her doors wide to all comers, regardless of their relationship to the particularized traditions of Judaism? Were her boundaries to be as wide as the human race? Or was she to be only an extension of Judaism to the Gentiles?

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In more particular terms, was it necessary for a Gentile believer to observe the law of Moses in order to become a Christian? Should a Gentile be circumcised? Questions like these must have been raised with increasing force throughout the Roman Empire, wherever the church of Jesus Christ camped on Gentile soil. Galatians is a record of the form this struggle took in one area of Asia Minor. But it is also a reflection of the way in which the issue was being debated and handled in Jerusalem and at Antioch in Syria. Acts supplements this information. Was it right for Gentile and Jewish Christians to eat together? And could they eat the same food? Was an orthodox Jew contaminated by such fellowship, as Jewish traditions declared, or was he not? For a time, debate seemed to move in a direction destructive of Christian unity and of the survival of the gospel of grace, but Paul almost singlehandedly withstood this trend and turned the tide. At Jerusalem the question was taken up formally in council, and Paul's approach was upheld (Acts 15:1-29).

As the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul had deliberately not brought up questions of conformity to Jewish law when presenting the gospel in non-Jewish communities. He had followed this practice in Galatia on each of two occasions when he had preached there (cf. 4:13). As Paul preached it, salvation is never to be achieved by any amount of conformity to rules and regulations, even God-given regulations. Law condemns. Consequently, if there is to be salvation for sinful men, it must come in another way entirely. God has offered this other way through Jesus Christ. Jesus died for sin. Now God offers righteousness freely to all who put their trust in him. Paul had taught this gospel to the Galatians, as he had to Gentiles in other places, and it had been well received. He had been detained in Galatia unexpectedly because of a repulsive illness, but instead of rebuffing him, as they might have done, the Galatians actually embraced both himself and the gospel willingly (4:13-15). These former pagans (4:8) were now baptized (3:27) and received the Holy Spirit, who began to work miracles among them (3:5). In accordance with his usual custom, Paul established churches in Galatia and then moved on. He visited the area again at least once afterward. Some time later, however, Paul received word that the Galatian believers were on

the point of departing from the faith they had previously received so openly. Conservative Jewish teachers who were legalizers had arrived from Jerusalem claiming to be from James, the Lord's brother, and had begun to teach that Paul was wrong in his doctrine. They contended that Gentiles had to come under the law of Moses to be saved. It was not enough for them to have Christ; they must have Moses too. To grace must be added circumcision. Paul was immediately filled with righteous indignation. He saw in a moment that if the views of the legalizers prevailed, grace and the cross of Jesus Christ would be emptied of all value (5:2-
4). Moreover, Christianity would lose its distinctive character and soon become little more than a minor sect of Judaism. In righteous anger, Paul wrote this letter to reprove legalism and regain the Galatian churches. *[1]*

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It is evident that Paul had heard of three distinct charges made by his Jewish opponents, the first being directed against him personally. He was an apostle. He had been called by Christ and had come speaking those doctrines that had been revealed to him by Christ. Now enemies were saying that he was not an apostle and that the gospel he preached had not been revealed by God. Paul had not lived with Jesus when Jesus was here on earth, as had the "true" apostles. He was not one of the Twelve. Actually, they asserted, he was merely an evangelist who, after he had received some knowledge of Christianity, turned to his own devices and, in order to please the Gentiles, taught an easy gospel that was opposed to that of the apostolic model (1:10). They said that Paul must teach as the disciples taught or be rejected. Paul answers the accusation by retelling the story of his life, particularly as it was related to the other twelve apostles (chapters 1, 2). He replies that (1) his teaching is not dependent on other human authorities--this is what makes him an apostle, for the teaching of an apostle must come directly from God, (2) his authority had been acknowledged by the other apostles on each occasion on which they had come in contact, and (3) he had proved his worth by remaining firm at Antioch when others, including even Peter and Barnabas, had wavered. It is the glory of Paul's reply in this section of the letter that he is able to assert his own authority as an apostle without diminishing either the authority or reputation of those who were apostles before him. The second charge directed against Paul by the legalizers was that his gospel was not the true gospel. Obviously, this charge was closely related to the first, for since Paul was a "false" apostle it followed to their way of thinking that his teaching was not true teaching. Paul taught that the law could be set aside, but this was wrong, they said. God's law is eternal and it can never be set aside. All who have ever been saved have been saved by keeping the law. Moreover, it is perfectly evident from all that is known of the life of Jesus that Jesus himself kept the law. The disciples did likewise. Who, then, was Paul to dismiss the requirements of the law for salvation? Paul answers this charge by showing that the issue is not one of who does or does not keep the law, but rather of the true basis on which God reckons a sinful man righteous. At this point of his letter (chapters 3, 4) Paul appeals both to the personal experience of the Galatians and to Scripture, showing, primarily

from the case of Abraham, that God accounts a person righteous on the basis of faith rather than works. This imputed righteousness obviously does not come either from the law or circumcision, for God had declared Abraham righteous on the basis of faith years before either circumcision or the law were given. Finally, the opponents of Paul charged that the gospel he preached led to loose living. By stressing the law, Judaism had stressed morality. Jews looked down on Gentile sin and excesses. But what would happen if the law should be taken away? Clearly, lawlessness and immorality would increase, the legalizers argued. Paul replies that this is not true (chapters 5, 6). It is not true because Christianity does not lead the believer away from the law into nothingness. It leads him to Jesus Christ, who, in the person of the Holy Spirit, comes to dwell within him and furnishes him with the new nature that alone is capable of doing what God desires. The change is internal. So it is from within rather

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than without that the Holy Spirit produces the fruit that is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (5:22, 23). Life in the Spirit is free from and above the kind of religion that would result in either legalism or license. It is true freedom--a freedom to serve God fully, unencumbered by the shackles of sin or regulations.

## 2. Who Were the Galatians?

There would seem to be few difficulties in relating a book with such a clear message to its time. But this is not true of Galatians. In fact, from the historian's point of view, few NT books contain so many problems. We do not know for certain when the letter was written, where it was written, or even (which is a more serious problem) to whom it was written. Each of these questions has been the subject of intense debate and has led to the production of much scholarly material. The people who first became known as Galatians came from the barbarian tribal stock known as Celts, one branch of which Julius Caesar knew in France as the Gauls. Some of these had invaded Macedonia and later Asia Minor in the third century B.C. in order to establish themselves there. In popular speech, these Gauls were distinguished from the West-European Gauls by the term "Gallo-Graecians," from which the name "Galatians" comes. At first the tribes were dramatically successful. They laid the whole country west of the Taurus river under tribute and, according to Livy ( *History of Rome* , 38:16), even forced the Syrian kings to submit for a time to their terms. However, in 230 B.C., the Gauls were decisively defeated by Attalus I, king of Pergamum, and then were increasingly confined to a small territory in the north. This region was the first to become known as Galatia. Its principle cities were Ancyra (now the capital of modern Turkey), Pessinus, and Tavium. With the coming of the Romans, conditions did not change markedly for these Galatians. True, they were conquered by the Roman Consul Manlius in 189 B.C., but even then they were permitted to maintain much of their independence and to be governed in part by their own princes. This system worked so well from the Roman point of view that later, upon the death of Amyntas, the territory of the

Galatians was incorporated into a much larger Roman province to which the old ethnic name, Galatia, was extended. This province, established in 25 B.C., contained the districts of Lycaonia and Isauria as well as portions of Pisidia and Phrygia. In particular, the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Derbe and Lystra--cities Paul visited on his first missionary journey--belonged to it. To the Christians in which of these areas was Paul writing? Or, to state the question another way, in what sense does Paul use the name Galatia? Was he writing to Christians in northern, ethnic Galatia? Or was he writing to Christians in the southern, Roman province? Paul can hardly have written to both areas, because the letter implies that the churches of Galatia were all founded at about the same time. But in the light of Paul's missionary journeys, this is impossible for both north and south Galatia.

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Until the eighteenth century, no commentator ever seriously disputed the idea that Paul's letter was written to Christians living in northern Galatia. Indeed, it was not until the nineteenth century that the contrary view began to make progress in the English-speaking world. *[2]* True, the Book of Acts contains no record of Paul's having founded churches in this area. But Acts 16:6 and 18:23 at least open the possibility, if not the probability, that he may have done so. The former verse says that Paul and Timothy, who were traveling together at the time, went through "the region of Phrygia and Galatia." When they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia, they passed by and came to Mysia and Troas. In Acts 18:23 we are told that Paul later went "throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples." The work in Galatia was therefore placed in this period by the early commentators. There was much to recommend this view. First, it gave the oldest and most obvious meaning to the word "Galatia." Second, it seemed to fit in with the Book of Acts, for by it Paul was allowed to make the two visits to Galatia implied in the letter before writing to these Galatians. Third, certain details of the book were explained by what was thought to be the warmhearted but fickle nature of the Gaulish people and by the vice these barbarians were assumed to be subject to. It was no small matter, moreover, that this had been the view of the early church and was thus almost sanctified by antiquity. In the last century, however, largely because of extensive textual work and the archaeological examination of Asia Minor by Ramsay ( *St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen* , London, 1895; *An Historical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* , New York, 1900), the view quickly gained backing that Paul had not written to Christians in the northern, ethnic Galatia at all--in fact, that he had never been there--but rather that he had written to Christians in the southern area of the Roman province, i.e., to Christians living primarily in those cities Paul had visited on his first missionary journey. A number of very impressive arguments were raised in support of this position. 1. The argument that had initially gripped Ramsay was that the southern Galatia theory made greater sense of Paul's travels than the hypothesis of a journey into central Asia Minor. Such a journey in itself was improbable for a man whose major desire was obviously to establish churches in the chief cities of

the empire. But even more importantly, it did not make sense of the moves Luke portrays Paul as having made during the second missionary journey. Paul had left the cities of Derbe and Lystra on this journey and had apparently turned northwestward along one of the great Roman roads that linked Syria with Greece. Being forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach either in Asia to the south or Bithynia to the north (Acts 16:6, 7), Paul and his companion, Timothy, pressed on through Iconium and Antioch of Pisidia to Troas, where for the first time on the journey they encountered an open door before them into Greece. On this journey they would have passed through areas of Phrygia and Roman Galatia, as Acts 16:6 indicates; but they would have had to take a most unlikely detour of about three hundred miles to have entered ethnic Galatia and to have preached there. The difficulty of assuming that Paul traveled three hundred miles to preach in Galatia is further increased when we take into account

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the probability that Paul went there originally as a sick man (4:13).

The next journey, indicated in Acts 18:23, suggests that Paul strengthened the disciples along a general route from Antioch to Ephesus. But, once again, this does not suggest a long journey deliberately taken across difficult mountain passages to Turkey's central plains. The major objection to Ramsay's handling of the passages in Acts is that in speaking of the regions of Phrygia and Galatia, Acts 16:6 seems to differentiate the two, and that if they are to be separated, in this verse at least Galatia cannot be the Roman province (which included Phrygia). Ramsay's reply (pp. 401ff.), followed by Askwith, was that both terms are adjectives, rather than proper names, and that the phrase should therefore properly be translated "the Phrygic-Galatic region." This he understood to mean the area of the Roman province of Galatia inhabited by Phrygians. 2. Ramsay also recognized that even if the references to Galatia in Acts could be interpreted as implying a visit by Paul to northern Galatia--which, of course, he disputed--this in itself would not necessarily mean that Paul wrote his letter to the people there unless it could be shown also that Paul used the terms "Galatia" and "Galatians" in the same way Luke used them. This means that if Luke used local, ethnic names (as he seems to have done), it would have to be shown that Paul used local, ethnic names, too. Did he? Apparently not, for Paul seems to have preferred provincial titles, especially when referring to groups of churches. Thus Paul writes of the churches of Macedonia (2Cor 8:1), Asia (1Cor 16:19), and Achaia (2Cor 1:1). He also speaks of Judea, Syria, and Cilicia, but never of Lycaonia, Pisidia, Mysia, and Lydia (which are not Roman names). The presumption that he is also using the Roman title in speaking of Galatia is therefore strong. Ramsay strengthened this argument by showing that if, as he maintained, Paul was writing to the churches of Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch, then there was actually no other name than "Galatians" by which Paul could have identified them collectively. 3. Ramsay's third major argument was that nothing we know about either the people or churches of northern Galatia supports the northern Galatia hypothesis. We know of no churches at all in the north at this early date, either as mentioned in the New Testament or outside it, and what information we do have

seems to point to the establishing of churches (which, moreover, remained relatively weak) fairly late in early church history. By contrast, we do have a record of the founding of the strong, important churches of the southern region, into which all that Paul tells us about his initial preaching to the Galatians fits nicely. *[3]* From his knowledge of the history of this period and of the Galatian people, Ramsay also argued that no special traces of the supposed fickleness, drunkenness, revelings, superstitions, or contact with Judaism by the northern Galatians can be documented. Other arguments have also been raised in support of the south Galatian theory.

4. If Paul established a series of important churches in north Galatia, it is a serious and most unnatural matter for Luke to neglect to say so, particularly when he mentions Paul's supposed passage through this region. The argument that in writing Acts Luke was anxious to get Paul on

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to Troas and therefore does not mention them is hardly convincing, because Luke could have told everything necessary about the founding of these churches in a single sentence. The reply that he fails to mention them because of the troubles that developed in Galatia is equally unconvincing in view of the fact that Luke reports troubles elsewhere. 5. It is more natural to suppose that the legalistic party would have pursued Paul first in the southern region of Galatia, where Paul had early established good churches, than that they would have bypassed these bastions of "Paulinism" in order to push on over the remote northern plateau to less important strongholds. We know from Acts that Paul had already met with Jewish opposition in the south of Galatia, which was not far from Jerusalem. What is more natural than that the legalists should first go there if Jews in any sizeable number were turning from Judaism to Christianity? 6. When Luke reports the list of those who accompanied Paul to Jerusalem with the long-awaited gift of the Gentile churches (Acts 20:4), there is one companion (Timothy), and perhaps a second (Gaius), from the south Galatian region. Paul had solicited funds in Galatia (1Cor 16:1-
4). It is generally assumed that those traveling with him were something like delegates to the Jerusalem churches. It seems reasonable to assume then, against this background, that Timothy and Gaius (from southern Galatia) were the Galatian delegates, particularly since no delegates are mentioned as having been present from the north. This argument is somewhat weakened by the fact that no delegate is listed as having come from southern Greece where Paul obviously also solicited funds (1Cor 16:1), but Titus could have represented this area. 7. In writing to the Galatians, Paul mentions Barnabas several times without bothering to explain who he is (2:1, 9, 13). This is natural only if Barnabas were known to the Galatians. Since Barnabas accompanied Paul only on the first missionary journey, when Paul visited southern Galatia, and not on the second or third journeys, nothing but an identification of the Galatians with Christians in the cities of the south seems possible. But some point out that Paul also mentions Barnabas to the Corinthians without explaining who he is (1Cor 9:6). However, the situations are not entirely identical. The Corinthian letter does not imply that the believers in Corinth knew Barnabas personally, while at least one of the

references in Galatians suggests that the Galatians did ("even [such a man as] Barnabas," 2:13). Besides, we cannot even be sure that Barnabas did not visit Corinth sometime after having separated from Paul, in which case the Corinthians would have known him. 8. Finally, in writing of the Jerusalem conference, Paul argues that he did not give place to the legalizers even for an hour so that "the truth of the gospel might remain with you [i.e., with the Galatians]." If this is to be understood literally, it means that Paul must already have preached to the Galatians by the time of the conference, i.e., on his first missionary journey, which involved southern (but not northern) Galatia. It might be assumed from a first presentation of this evidence that the arguments in favor of the southern Galatia theory are overwhelming as opposed to the traditional view, but it is only fair to state that while the south Galatia theory has captured the attention of what seems today to

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be a majority of scholars, not all have been persuaded by it. Those who are not persuaded follow in the steps of Lightfoot who presented a classic statement of the traditional view (pp. 1-
35) before the appearance of Ramsay's massive examination.

Today the arguments for the traditional view are as follows:

1. The southern Galatia hypothesis does not take Luke's terminology seriously enough. Luke does not refer to those living in the cities of Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch as Galatians when he describes Paul's work there. He used geographical titles--Pamphilia (Acts 13:
13), Pisidia (Acts 13:14), and Lycaonia (Acts 14:6). It is strange to think that he is not, therefore, still using geographical terminology when he refers to Galatia a few chapters later. 2. Paul assumes in his letter that all, or at least most, of the Galatians are Gentiles. But this does not seem to fit conditions in the south where, according to Acts, there was a large Jewish population. Moreover, if the churches of Galatia possessed large numbers of Jews, it is hard to see how the situation of a later drifting into Judaism by Paul's converts could have occurred at all, particularly in a manner that would have surprised him. Indeed, the issue of a Christian's relationship to the law of Moses would have had to be faced from the start. Against this view it is argued that we have no way of knowing how many Jews became part of the churches in the southern cities. Certainly many opposed Paul (Acts 13:43-52; 14:1-7, 19). It may even be, as Rendall maintains, that the work in Galatia was the first really Gentile-oriented work and resulted in the first truly Gentile churches. *[4]* 3. Paul's account of his work in Galatia does not tally with what Luke tells us of Paul's work in Derbe, Lystra, Icomum, and Antioch. So Paul must be speaking of another area. As an example, there is his reference to his sickness, which is totally disregarded in Acts. This argument is weakened, however, by the observation that Luke obviously does not include everything in his narration and that an argument from silence, which this is, is at best a probability. 4. It is said that Paul could not have spoken of Barnabas as he did, i.e., as less than an equal, if Barnabas had been a cofounder with Paul of the

Galatian churches. Since Barnabas was a cofounder of the churches in the south, the reference in Galatians must be to those in the northern area. 5. Finally, it is said that Paul does not necessarily use the titles of Roman provinces in speaking of churches in those provinces. E.g., in 1 Thessalonians 2:14 Paul speaks of "God's churches in Judea." Does this mean that Paul was restricting his references to churches in the strict Roman province? Is Galilee excluded? Is he not also thinking of a wider area? One may agree that perhaps this is true. But it may also be that Paul is thinking specifically of Judea, for he mentions the killing of the Lord Jesus by the Jewish rulers (which occurred in Judea) just a verse later (1Thess 2:15). In any case, a departure from Paul's customary usage in referring to this one area does not cast much doubt on a practice he almost invariably seems to follow elsewhere. Was Galatians written, then, to Christians living in the old, ethnic Galatia? Or was it written to Christians in provincial Galatia, in the cities of Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch? The answer

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is that the matter cannot yet be regarded as fully certain, though the weight of probability now lies on the side of the southern-Galatia hypothesis. Given the desire of Paul to visit the large Roman cities, the general movement of Paul and Timothy suggested by Luke in Acts, and the vast knowledge we have of the southern churches versus all lack of information about churches in the north, the likelihood that Jewish legalizers would come first to the southern cities, and Paul's general preference for Roman titles especially in referring to area churches, the theory of visits by Paul to the southern churches should be preferred.

## 3. The Jerusalem Council

What visit to Jerusalem is Paul referring to in the first part of chapter 2?

The difficulty is this. In Acts, Luke records three visits of Paul to Jerusalem prior to his final visit, at which time he was arrested and eventually sent to Rome. There is a visit referred to in Acts 9:26-30. This occurred shortly after his conversion. There is also a visit referred to in Acts 11:27-30. This is generally referred to as the "famine visit" because its purpose was to send material relief to those in Jerusalem who were suffering from a famine. Finally, there is a third visit, mentioned in Acts 15:1-29, when a church council decided the question of Gentile adherence to the law in favor of the gospel, taught by Paul and Barnabas, of freedom from law. Over against this testimony in Acts, however, Paul records but two visits in Galatians, the second of which seems to fit better with Luke's third visit than with the second. Consequently we need either to identify Paul's second visit with Luke's second, with obvious difficulties involved; or we need to identify Paul's second visit with Luke's third, at the same time explaining why Paul neglected to mention the second in writing to the Galatians. On the surface this neglect is difficult to understand, simply because Paul seems to be chronicling all contacts with the Jerusalem apostles in order to refute the charges of the legalizers. In the opinion of this writer, the case for identifying the

Jerusalem visit of Galatians 2:1-10 with the council meeting of Acts 15 is strongest, above all because of the striking coincidence of circumstances. A strong and classical treatment of this argument is that of Lightfoot (pp. 123-128). In the first place, there is the coincidence of *geography* . In both accounts, communications take place between Jerusalem and Antioch. The false brethren have their headquarters in the first city but cause trouble in the second. In both accounts, Paul and Barnabas apparently go to Jerusalem from Antioch and return to Antioch after the council. The *time* is the same, or at least not inconsistent. The *participants* are the same. There are the legalizers who are causing the trouble, Paul and Barnabas who are representatives of the church at Antioch, and the Jerusalem apostles primarily Peter and James. The *subject of dispute* is the same. The *character of the conference* is the same. Finally, the *results* are the same. In each case, the victory goes to Paul with the result that the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia are officially pronounced free from obligation to conform to Jewish customs and maintain the law. Lightfoot, who presents this evidence, concludes that a combination of circumstances so

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striking is not likely to have occurred twice within the space of just a few years. Besides, he adds, there is absolutely no correspondence between what Paul tells us of his visit and what Luke writes of the so-called "famine visit," which is the only other option (p. 124). There are, however, obvious difficulties in linking Galatians 2 with Acts 15, and these are so weighty in the opinion of some scholars that they prefer nearly any other solution. *[5]* First, there are apparent discrepancies. Acts gives the impression that Paul and Barnabas presented their case publicly before an assembled council of apostles and elders. But Galatians tells of a private meeting in which the dispute seems to be resolved between a small group of those who were considered leaders. Galatians says Titus accompanied Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem. But Acts does not mention Titus. Finally, in Galatians Paul writes that he and Barnabas went up to Jerusalem by revelation, whereas in Acts Luke indicates that they went there as a result of a decision reached by the leaders of the church in Antioch. Although discrepancies should not be passed over lightly, at the same time it is not difficult to see how they may be resolved. Every great public meeting is accompanied by private meetings. Titus is not mentioned by Luke because he did not become an issue, which is precisely the point Paul makes in Galatians ("not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised," 2:3). And concerning the revelation to send Paul to Jerusalem, this is no more than an alternate way of telling what happened, since the church at Antioch undoubtedly prayed about who their representatives should be and believed that they were responding to God in commissioning Paul and Barnabas. A similar contrast between two ways of narrating the same event is seen in a comparison of Acts 9:29, 30 with Acts 22:17, 18. More serious than these problems is the failure of Paul to mention either the decrees of the council or the visit to Jerusalem mentioned in Acts 11. Why should he not mention the decrees of the council? At first sight, this seems almost inexplicable, for, as Neil maintains (p. 14), it is most unlikely that Paul would have neglected to appeal to the council if, at the time of writing this letter, he held such a trump card in his hand. If the matter had already been decided, why did Paul not simply quote the council? When looked at a bit deeper, however, Paul's failure to quote the council's decrees is understandable. First, the

decrees were not so significant as this line of arguing implies. They were addressed to "the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia" to start with, not to Gentiles throughout the whole Roman world. Second, they were a compromise. They freed the Gentiles from adherence to the law, but they added certain restrictions for conscience' sake. Paul could very well have agreed with the decrees at the time they were devised but later, when writing to the Galatians, he could have considered the restrictions a dangerous concession likely to be misunderstood. The most impressive explanation of why he may have omitted reference to the decrees is that in quoting them he would have seemed to be conceding the very thing his enemies were insisting on--i.e., the authority of the Jerusalem apostles as greater than his own. In any case, Paul shows that the other apostles did agree with him regarding circumcision and actually supported him in his ministry.

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Finally, if the council of Acts 15 is to be identified with the council of Galatians 2:1-10, why is it that Paul neglects to mention the visit to Jerusalem that Luke records in Acts 11? Isn't this dishonest? Or, to put it another way, doesn't this play into the hands of Paul's enemies? It is probably impossible to say exactly why Paul neglected to mention this visit, if the visit of Galatians 2 is indeed the visit of Acts 15, but there may be an explanation in the circumstances. The time of the Acts 11 visit was a time of turmoil and political agitation against the apostles, in which James the son of Zebedee was killed by Herod and Peter was imprisoned. Because of that, it is probable that every Christian of any rank had fled the city. Some evidence for this is found in Acts 11 itself, because no mention is made there of the Twelve nor is any meeting between Paul and the apostles recorded. Instead, Luke writes that the money for famine relief was delivered into the hands of "the elders." It also seems that this would be a most inauspicious time, if not an impossible time, for the full-scale discussion of so momentous an issue as Gentile adherence to the law and to circumcision. Much of the difficulty inherent in this point vanishes when the student of Galatians realizes that Paul is not attempting to give a full account of all his activities during the early years of his ministry. Rather, he is attempting to answer specific criticisms directed against him by the legalizers. The first criticism is that he got his gospel from others and (the legalizers would add) got it imperfectly. Paul answers this by showing that in the early years he was not influenced by the Jerusalem apostles at all--either before, during, or after his conversion. This is the argument of the historical parts of chapter 1. On the other hand, Paul was not preaching something different from the gospel preached by the other apostles, as the legalists had also maintained. That criticism is handled in chapter 2. Neither of these points requires a rehearsal of events connected with the famine visit. There are certain advantages to the Acts 11 theory, set forth well by many who adhere to it. On the whole, however, it is better to identify Galatians 2 with Acts 15, imagining two views of the same incident (one public and one private) rather than identifying two totally dissimilar accounts in which two totally different objectives for the visits are given.

## 4. Date and Place of Writing

Under the northern Galatia hypothesis a fairly late date is required for the writing of the letter; that is, a date subsequent to the events of Acts 18:23. But if the southern hypothesis is held, the possibilities begin earlier and are of wider scope. Unfortunately, it is impossible, even after identifying the council of Galatians 2 with that of Acts 15, to date the letter precisely and determine the place of its writing. Several factors enter into an approximation of the date if the above conclusions are valid. First, the letter must have been written after the Jerusalem Council described in Acts 15, which in its turn is to be dated approximately fourteen or seventeen years after Paul's conversion. The usual dating of this council is A.D. 48 or 49. Hence, A.D. 48 becomes a terminus a quo for

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Paul's writing. Second, the visit of Peter to Antioch during which he was opposed by Paul (Gal 2:11-14) most naturally follows the council, though there are voices to the contrary. If this is so, then the earliest date is pushed back somewhat toward the end of Paul's stay in Antioch as described in Acts 15:35. Third, since Paul seems to be at liberty at the time of writing Galatians, the *terminus ad quem* is clearly the moment he lost that liberty during the final visit to Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 21 (approximately A.D. 58). Within these limits there are roughly eight or nine years in which Paul made two missionary journeys and in which the letter could have been written. This range can be narrowed somewhat by assuming that Paul had visited the Galatians twice before writing to them, once on the first missionary journey and once on the second (cf. Gal 4:13); for in that case, Galatians must have been written after Paul's arrival at Corinth on his second journey. The most likely possibilities for a more precise placing of the book, as Burton states them (p.
xlvii), are: (1) Corinth in the period of Acts 18:1-17, either before or after the writing of 1 Thessalonians, (2) Antioch in the period of Acts 18:22, (3) Ephesus in the period covered by Acts 19, or (4) Macedonia or Achaia in the period covered by Acts 20:1-3. Ephesus about the year A.D. 52 seems a likely possibility in view of Paul's lengthy stay there. Fuller discussions of the matters of dating occur in Burton, pp. xliv-liii; Lightfoot, pp. 36-56; Ridderbos, pp. 31-35; Tenney, pp. 58-63; Guthrie, pp. 27-37; Stamm, pp. 438-441; and others, as well as in the various NT introductions.

## 5. Authorship

Of the traditional Pauline books few have been so unquestioningly accepted as genuine as the Book of Galatians. Paul, as author, is mentioned by name not only at the beginning (1:1) but also toward the end of the letter (5:2), and the whole from beginning to end breathes such an intensely personal and unconsciously

autobiographical note that only a genuine historical situation involving the true founder of the Gentile mission within the Church accounts for it. Thus, even at the height of the highly critical period of NT scholarship in Germany in the nineteenth century, the Tubingen school and others consistently maintained the Pauline authorship of Galatians along with 1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans. The only noticeable exceptions are Bauer and the so- called "Dutch school" of the late nineteenth century, headed by Loman, Pierson, Naber, Van Manen, and the Swiss scholar Steck. But their views are now generally discredited. Quotations from Galatians or apparent allusions to it occur in 1 Peter, The Epistle of Barnabas, 1 Clement, the Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians, Justin Martyr Irenaeus Clement of Alexandria, and Origen. The book is listed as Pauline in the Marcionite and Muratorian canons. A full listing of early allusions to Galatians may be found in Lightfoot (pp. 58-62).

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**7. Outline** (References in outline are tied to commentary.)

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## Text and Exposition

### **Introduction** (1:1-10)

*A. Salutation* 1:1-5

An opening salutation consisting of the author's name, the name of those to whom he is writing, and (in most cases) an expression of good wishes on the recipient's behalf is characteristic of most ancient letters, Paul's included. But Paul's opening remarks also generally breathe something of the content and tone of the letter or, at the very least, employ explicitly Christian terms as greetings. None of Paul's opening remarks are more characteristic of the letter to follow than those in Galatians. The usual elements are present--the writer's name, the name of the recipients, and a wish for grace and peace on their behalf--but there are a brevity and vigor of expression that immediately plunge the reader into the heart of the Epistle and that reflect Paul's concern. Most surprisingly, there is no expression of praise for these churches--elsewhere a normal procedure (Rom, 1 and 2 Cor, Eph, Phil, Col, 1 and 2 Thess). Of particular importance is Paul's abrupt restatement of his claim to be an apostle, precisely the point that had been denied by those who were subverting the Galatians. In these few verses the three major themes of the letter--the source of authority in religion, the doctrine of grace, and the promise of full deliverance from sin's power--are tied together in a way that relates all solely to the sovereign and gracious will of God.

**1** By adding the word "apostle," Paul at once highlights his claim to be commissioned by Jesus to preach the gospel with authority and to plant Christianity. It was this commission that had been challenged by the Galatian

legalizers. In early use of Greek, the word "apostle" ( *apostolos* ) was used of a naval expedition, commissioned to represent Greek interests in foreign service. In Greek-speaking Judaism it was used of authorized representatives, either an individual or a body of persons. With the coming of Christ, the word was applied to those commissioned by Christ as bearers of the gospel. It is this sense, coupled with the idea of the full authority deriving from Christ, that prevails in all seventy-nine instances of the term in the NT. It would seem from the opening chapter of Acts (vv. 21-26) that two major prerequisites for being an apostle were: (1) to have been an eyewitness of Christ's ministry from the time of the baptism by John up to and including the resurrection, and (2) to have been chosen for the office by the risen Lord. At first the number of those so commissioned was twelve (Matthias having been chosen to replace Judas), but there is no indication either in Acts or elsewhere that the number was always so limited. Paul obviously claimed to have fulfilled the conditions as the result of his Damascus experience; and Luke, who clearly endorses Paul's claim, also speaks of Barnabas as being called to this office. Other examples are: James, the Lord's brother (suggested by the phrase "then to all the apostles," which follows mention of James in 1

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Corinthians 15:7), and Silvanus (1Thess 2:7, cf. 1:1).

The difficulty was not that the office could not be extended by the Lord to others in addition to the Twelve--this was possible--but rather that Paul, according to his enemies, did not meet the conditions. They could claim that he had never met Jesus. Certainly he had not been an eyewitness of Christ's ministry. They could claim that he had never received a commission. It would be easy, for instance, to contrast Paul's description of his Damascus experience with the very formal and official action of the Twelve in choosing Matthias. Paul answered by entirely overlooking the matter of his not being an eyewitness of the whole of Christ's earthly ministry, though undoubtedly he considered his Damascus experience to be the equivalent of this, and by denying that his status had relation to men or to the decisions of men at all. Instead, Paul's claim was that his apostleship came to him directly from and through God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's specific choice of words is of interest, for he employs two prepositions ( *apo* and *dia* ) to deny that his call to apostleship came either "from" or "through" man. Thus, as Lightfoot notes (in loc.): "In the first clause he distinguishes himself from the false apostles, who did not derive their commission from God at all [whereas] in the second he ranks himself with the Twelve, who were commissioned directly" by him. On the positive side, Paul stresses that his call came rather from God himself through the Lord Jesus Christ. Here the preposition *apo* is dropped, but the effect is not to eliminate the truth that the call is "from" God. That much is obvious. Rather, the single preposition anchors Paul's call in the historical experience on the Damascus road in which Jesus, through whom the call came, appeared to him. By linking both the Father and the Son under one preposition, Paul also stresses that there is no difference between them so far as the appointment of the apostolate is concerned. Reference to the resurrection stresses the important point that it was by the risen and glorified Lord of the church that Paul was commissioned. The gospel committed to Paul is a great gospel to possess. Anchored in history, it has been articulated and communicated to believers of all times by those who were specifically chosen by the risen Lord and were empowered by him for this task. It is the logical outcome of the

principles stated here that for the NT as well as for the OT, "prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:
21).

**2** From Paul's normal habit of including the names of his fellow missionaries at the beginning of his letters (1 and 2 Cor, Phil, Col, 1 and 2 Thess, Philem) as well as from the fact that he usually refers to the Christians in the place from which he is writing in different terms, it would appear that "the brothers" mentioned here are his fellow missionaries, though their actual identity cannot be known until the date and place of writing are determined. The interesting point is that Paul does not name these fellow missionaries, as he does elsewhere, not wanting to give the impression that his gospel requires additional support. It was, after all, received directly from

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God. At the same time, he wishes to remind the Galatians that the gospel that had been preached to them far from being a Pauline oddity, is actually the received doctrine of all the Christian church and its missionaries.

**3** Paul's nearly standard formula of Christian blessing and greeting--"grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"--seems particularly appropriate at the start of this letter. Normally, Paul alters the traditional Greek greeting ( *charein* , a verb) to the important Christian word "grace" ( *charis* , a noun). This is always striking. But it is doubly striking here, inasmuch as it occurs in a letter to churches where the sufficiency of salvation by grace was being questioned and perhaps even denied. In the same way, "peace" ( *eirene* , the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word shalom) is also especially appropriate, for it denotes that state of favor and well-being into which men are brought by Christ's death on the cross and in which they are kept by God's persevering grace. To choose law, as the Galatians were doing, is to fall from grace. To live by works is to lose the peace with God that was purchased for believers by Christ's atonement. It is characteristic of Paul to join the names of the Father and Son together in the statement that they are the source of grace and peace, as he does here. But the inversion of the order--"by Jesus Christ and God the Father" (v. 1)--to "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (v.
3) heightens the effect. It is a good equivalent of Jesus' words "Father, ... you are in me and I am in you" (John 17:21) and thus a good statement of the full divinity of Jesus.

**4** To the doctrines of the Christian faith already stated in germinal form--the source of authority in religion, the person and character of God, the divinity of Christ, the resurrection, grace, and peace--Paul now adds a statement affirming the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ and its outcome in the deliverance of men from sin. All this, he asserts, is according to the will of the Father. It is hard to imagine a statement better calculated to oppose any intrusion

of the will or supposed merits of man in the matter of attaining salvation. This phrase, which does not occur in other Pauline greetings, is undoubtedly added for the sake of the erring Christians in Galatia. Salvation begins in the eternal counsels of God. It is a matter of his will and not of the will of man. As Paul says elsewhere, "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy" (Rom 9:16). The will of God to save men leads next to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ with its focus in his substitutionary death for sinners. Finally, the goal is articulated; for the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, which originated in the will of the Father, was designed to "rescue us from the present evil age." The word "rescue" or "deliver" ( *exeletai* ) denotes not a "deliverance from" but a "rescue from the power of." Thus, it strikes the keynote of the latter, ethical section of the letter, peaking in the great challenge at the beginning of chapter 5--"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" (v. 1). The deliverance is conceived of here, not as a deliverance out of the present evil world (though that will also be true eventually), but as a deliverance from the

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power of evil and the values of the present world-system through the power of the risen Christ within the Christian.

**5** It is not customary for Paul to include a doxology at the beginning of a letter, but the doxology that occurs here serves an important purpose. It sets the gospel, centering in the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ and his work, above any human criticism or praise. The fact that the glory of God and the giving of glory to God will last forever (literally, "unto the ages of ages") contrasts markedly with "the present evil age," which is passing away.

*B. The Reason for the Letter* 1:6-9

At this point Paul would normally introduce an expression of praise for the Christians of the church to which he is writing, followed sometimes by a mild suggestion of that which is not so praiseworthy. But here, instead of an expression of praise, there is an abrupt and indignant cry of astonishment at what seems to be happening among the Galatians. Paul had delivered to them the one gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. They had received it. But now, according to reports that had come to him, Paul has reason to believe that the Christians of Galatia are on the point of turning from the gospel of Christ to embrace something that was no gospel at all, but only legalism. So in this brief expression of his feelings, Paul declares his astonishment at this almost inconceivable turn of events, pronounces a judgment upon any who would pervert the gospel of grace, and reiterates that there is only one gospel that makes salvation possible.

**6** The agitation Paul feels is shown by the tone and vocabulary of these verses. But his words also show why he is so stirred. He is agitated, first, because the Galatians are "deserting"

( *metatithesthe* ) the one who had called them to faith in Christ Jesus. It is not simply that they "had been removed" to another and errant, though partially valid expression of the Christian faith, as the KJV translation might suggest. The problem was that they were "deserting" the Christian camp altogether. The Greek word is "a colorful one," as Guthrie notes, "used both of military revolt and of a change of attitude" (in loc.). Moreover, since the verb is probably in the middle voice, rather than the passive, it is not even possible for the Galatians to claim that their conduct was the result of outside influences. This is something they were doing to themselves and were responsible for. The only ray of hope is that they were still only in the process of deserting and could possibly be reclaimed. Second, there is a tragic personal element in the way Paul describes their condition. It is not merely that they have deserted an idea or a movement; rather, they have deserted the very one who had called them to faith. This one is God the Father. Embracing legalism means rejecting God, according to Paul's reasoning, because it means substituting man for God in one's life. It is significant that once again even in the space of a few words ("who called you by the grace of

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Christ") Paul reiterates the true nature of the gospel: (1) it is of God, for God does the calling, and (2) it is of grace rather than of merit. Third, Paul explains his agitation by the fact that the Galatians were deserting God "so quickly" ( *houtos tacheos* ). This phrase could have several meanings, some of them bearing on the date of the writing of the letter, but it is probably best to see it merely as a general reference to the Galatians' deserting the faith soon after their conversion. Finally, Paul's agitation results from the fact that by embracing legalism the Galatians have actually turned their back on the gospel in order to embrace "a different gospel," which, however, does not even deserve to be called by that name.

**7** Here the opening clause implies a correction or explanation of what was previously written. Paul has just spoken of "a different gospel" the Galatian Christians were turning to, but if that phrase were left without any comment, it might suggest that there are after all various gospels among which a Christian may choose. This is the opposite of what Paul is saying. So he adds that though he said "a different gospel" actually there cannot be another gospel as long as the gospel is understood to be God's way of salvation in Christ. The gospel is one. Therefore any system of salvation that varies from it is counterfeit. In the Greek text of vv. 6, 7 the two words translated "another" in KJV are not the same and are used in a specific way to make this distinction. Paul now mentions the false teachers for the first time, though not by name, presumably because he does not want anyone to think his remarks were originating from a dislike of certain personalities rather than from concern for the truth. He objects to two aspects of the conduct of these teachers: (1) they were perverting the gospel and (2) they were troubling the church. These two always go together. Thus, as Stott notes,

To tamper with the gospel is to trouble the Church....Indeed, the Church's greatest

troublemakers (now as then) are not those outside who oppose, ridicule and persecute it,

but those inside who try to change the gospel....Conversely, the only way to be a good

churchman is to be a good gospel-man. The best way to serve the Church is to believe and

to preach the gospel (in loc.).

**8** The logical objection to what Paul has been saying is that the teaching he calls the gospel is not actually *the* gospel, but only the gospel of Paul. If this is the case, then the Galatians must evaluate the source of the teaching they had received, taking into account that they, the legalizers, were the official representatives of the Jerusalem apostles, while Paul was not. Paul wards off this accusation, arguing that ultimately the human source does not matter, nor would it matter even if the source were an "angelic" one. Satan can disguise himself as "an angel of light," as can his ministers (2Cor 11:14, 15). So the Galatians must learn to evaluate their teachers. Besides, they must learn that any attempt to alter the true gospel is culpable and that any who go

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about teaching another gospel will be condemned.

The vehemence with which Paul denounces those who teach another gospel (literally, he says, "Let them be damned") has bothered some commentators, as well as other readers of the letter. But this shows how little the gospel of God's grace is understood and appreciated and how little many Christians are concerned for the advance of biblical truth. The word translated "eternally condemned" ( *anathema* ) is related to the Hebrew word *herem* and is used of that which is devoted to God, usually for destruction. In spiritual terms it means damnation. We must not think, however, that in speaking in this way Paul is merely giving vent to an intemperate outburst or even merely to partially justified anger. For one thing, he is impartial in expressing his judgment. He has not named names. He has even included himself in the ban, should he do otherwise in his preaching than he has done thus far. Moreover, he is universal in his judgment. His words include "anybody" who should so teach (v. 9). How can it be otherwise? If the gospel Paul preaches is true, then both the glory of Jesus Christ and the salvation of men are at stake. If men can be saved by works, Christ has died in vain (Gal 2:21); the cross is emptied of meaning. If men are taught a false gospel, they are being led from the one thing that can save them and are being turned to destruction (cf. Matt 18:6).

**9** No doubt Paul repeats the *anathema* primarily for the sake of emphasis. But the restatement involves three alterations that tie it more closely to the situation in Galatia: (1) "The one we preached" is changed to "what you accepted"; (2) the element of improbability is lessened--"we or an angel from heaven" being changed to "anybody"; and (3) the thought of future possibility--" if we...should preach"--is replaced by present supposition.

*C. Transition* 1:10

Having given the reason for writing his letter, Paul now moves to a statement of his first important thesis (vv. 11, 12). But first, he makes a transition. The connective particle *gar* links the verse with the preceding, while the repeated use of "men" and the mention of "Christ" also join it loosely with what follows.

**10** Paul had been accused of being a pleaser of men by his enemies, who no doubt also implied that he was such at the expense of the truth (cf. 2Cor 10; Gal 6:12). Would his enemies dare to say this now, Paul asks, after he has written so sharply? Do men-pleasers pronounce *anathemas* against those who teach false gospels? On the other hand, Paul's words cannot be read as justification of the belligerent and fault-finding attitude so often found among religious crusaders. For one thing, he does not say that he is never concerned with pleasing men. Actually, he did strive to please men sometimes (1Cor 9:19-22), though not where the gospel was at stake. He is merely saying that he did not please men *as opposed to* pleasing God. Besides, the statement that he does not please men is related here to the present moment and

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subject, as the prominently placed "now" ( *arti* ) indicates. the sense is this: "Have I made myself clear enough about Christ's gospel? Can anyone now charge that I seek to please men in presenting it?" The incongruity of this thought is strengthened by the following sentence, in which Paul mentions being "a servant of Christ." Jesus had said, "No one can serve two masters" (Matt 6:
24). Thus, when faced with the necessity of making a choice, Paul chose to stand with him whose slave he had become. The choice of the word "slave" is interesting because the letter is about freedom. It is an early indication of the true though paradoxical teaching that real freedom is to be found in bondage--bondage to Christ.

## **I. Paul's Defense of His Apostleship** (1:11-2:21)

### *A. Thesis: Paul's Gospel Feceived Directly From God* 1:11, 12

Important points have already been made in the introduction to Galatians, but with these two verses the reader comes to its first important thesis. Paul has spoken of the gospel (vv. 6-9), stating clearly that there is only one gospel. But certain questions might be asked: "Why should your gospel be normative, Paul? Why not another gospel? Or, if it is true that there can be only one gospel, why should not some entirely other teaching be normative?" Paul's answer is to stress the origin of his teaching, which did not have human origins as did other religious teaching. On the contrary, it was divine in origin, having been received by Paul directly from God. Throughout the remainder of this chapter and all of chapter 2 Paul defends this thesis by an appeal to his own religious experience.

**11** The verb introducing this verse ( *gnorizo* ) means "to make clear," "to certify," and has the effect of suggesting a somewhat formal statement to follow. Indeed, this is what does follow. For just as v. 1 advanced Paul's claim to apostleship by

denying alleged inadequate sources for that apostleship and affirming the true one so this section denies inadequate sources for the gospel, while affirming that the gospel Paul preached came directly from God by revelation. Paul denies three possible sources for his teaching. First, he denies that it was "according to man" ( *kata anthropon* ). This phrase may mean that the source of the gospel was not according to man or to human authority. But it is more likely that the phrase is more general and simply means "human" or, as NIV has it, "something that man made up." This is patently true, for the centrality of a cross and a resurrection do not figure in man-made religion. Man seems always to prefer what flatters him and affirms human goodness.

**12** Paul also denies that his teaching was "received from man." This is a different denial from that in v. 11. Both *para* (the preposition) and *paralambano* (the verb) refer to the transmission of religious teaching. According to Gerhardsson and others of the Scandinavian school, these even

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belong to a set of technical words used of the process of memorization by which rabbis passed along rabbinic traditions to students. Paul uses the verb in this sense in 1 Corinthians 15:1, 3 to indicate that the basic facts of Christ's life--his death, burial, and resurrection--were received by him and passed on intact to his hearers. Important as this type of transmission may be, however, this was simply not the way Paul received his message. Finally, Paul adds that he was not "taught" the gospel either. This phrase denies instruction as the channel through which he came to the truth. This may be the way the vast majority of Christians come to receive the gospel, ourselves included. It was certainly true of the Galatians, since Paul had himself instructed them. But it was not the way Paul himself had received the truth. He now adds the positive side of his thesis, saying that the gospel came to him by revelation. The revelation of the Christian gospel to Paul, an unexpected unfolding of what had been secret, was a distinctive experience, paralleled only by the experience of those who were apostles before him. It can never be ours. Nevertheless, the gospel that was the product of that experience is unique and is ours; in fact, it is ours precisely because its source was not Paul but God himself. And Christians value it properly only when they make it an integral part of their lives and share it with others.

*B. Paul's Personal History* (1:13-24)

*1. Paul's early years and conversion* 1:13-17

Paul has written that his gospel did not have its source in men. But how is he to prove this to the Galatian churches? The answer is by appeal to his personal history. Hence, in the remainder of the chapter Paul `shows that the conditions of his life before his conversion, at his conversion, and within a reasonable period after his conversion were not such that he could have received the gospel from

others, particularly the Jerusalem apostles. On the contrary, the very isolation of his life at this period (criticized by the legalizers) shows that the gospel must have come to him directly from God, as he has indicated.

**13** The first part of this cumulative argument concerns Paul's former life in Judaism, before his conversion to Christianity. At this point, so far was he from coming under Christian influences that he actually was opposing the church and persecuting it. The word Paul used for his former "way of life" ( *anastrophe* ) is singularly appropriate to the Jewish faith. Judaism was not a mask to be donned or doffed at will, as was the case with so many of the pagan religions. Judaism was a way of life, involving all of life, and Paul is correct in describing it as his exclusive sphere of existence before his conversion. His brief reference to his former life is somewhat augmented by his lengthier descriptions elsewhere, particularly in Philippians 3:4-6. There Paul shows that he was (1) a Jew by birth--indeed, of the best stock of

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Israel; (2) by choice, a Pharisee, i.e., of the strictest sect of Judaism; and (3) in conduct, exceedingly zealous, a zeal demonstrated by his persecution of the church and his rigid adherence to the law. "You have heard" suggests that these facts were known to the Galatians long before any question had been raised about Paul's teaching. Two aspects of his former life are specifically brought forward in his review of it. First, he persecuted the church (v. 13). Second, he advanced in the traditions of Judaism well beyond those of his own age among his countrymen (v. 14). In both of these aspects Paul was fanatical. He demonstrated his fanaticism against the church by the violence of his persecution (literally7, *kath' hyperbolen* , "to an extraordinary degree" or "beyond measure") and by his actual endeavor to destroy it (cf. Acts 8:1-4; 9:1, 2, 13, 14; 22:4, 5). The same word for "destroy"

( *portheo* ) is used of Paul in Acts 9:21 and later on in this chapter (v. 23).

**14** The zeal that fired Paul in his missionary efforts also existed before his conversion. It was an aspect of his personality. But before his Damascus experience this zeal was devoted to advancing as a Pharisee in Judaism. This he did beyond his own contemporaries. To advance in the "traditions" of his fathers would have meant much time spent in memorizing the Torah and the rabbinical traditions accompanying it. "Traditions," strictly speaking, are the latter. With such a background no one could claim that Paul did not know Judaism or the OT. Nor could one claim that during this period he had subtly received his instruction in Christianity from others.

**15,16** No man possessing such characteristics and engaged in zealous persecution of the church is about to be converted by someone else or by human testimony. God himself must accomplish his conversion. This is precisely what happened in Paul's case. Thus, Paul begins to speak of his conversion, pointing out that God did it entirely apart from any human agent. The reference is to Paul's Damascus

experience described in Acts 9:1-19; 22:1-16; and 26:9-18. The contrast in subjects between vv. 13, 14 on the one hand, and 15, 16 on the other hand, is interesting. In the first section Paul himself is the subject. The pronoun is "I." " *I* persecuted the church," he says. " *I* was advancing in Judaism." In the second section, God is the subject, and his grace is emphasized. There are three things Paul says God did for him. First, God *set him apart from birth* . Paul's words parallel Jeremiah's description of his own calling (Jer 1:5) and may, indeed, consciously reflect them. The emphasis is on God's grace in electing Paul to salvation and to the apostleship. Second, God *called Paul by grace* . This is a reference to his conversion, the moment in which Paul became aware of God's work in him. Third, God *revealed his Son in Paul* (v. 16). This phrase may have two senses. It may refer to Paul's sudden realization of what God had done in his life, namely, that God had placed the life of the Lord Jesus Christ within him. In this case, it seems merely to repeat point two from a slightly different perspective. Or it may refer to the revelation of Jesus Christ through Paul to others. In this case, there is a three-step historical progression, ending with Paul's actual entering

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into his ministry in fulfillment of his call (so Lightfoot, in loc.). In spite of the weighty testimony of Lightfoot and the obvious appeal of a three-part progression, the first of these two possible meanings should probably be preferred. Thus, though Paul does speak of his ministry of preaching to the Gentiles, his phrasing indicates that God revealed his Son in him "in order that" this might take place; i.e., Paul was converted so that he might become the apostle to the Gentiles. Besides, in the context of this chapter the sequel to the call is not preaching but rather a departure from Damascus for a time of inner searching and meditation in Arabia. God's revelation of Jesus in Paul was essentially an inner revelation concerning who Jesus was and what his life, death, and resurrection signified. This became so much a part of him, even at this early stage of his Christian experience, that he immediately began to make the revelation of Christ known to others. What grace this demonstrates! Paul, the chief opponent of Christianity in the apostolic era, now turned preacher of what he once tried to destroy! Was this change accomplished by men? No! Hence, even in his conversion (as in the period before his conversion) Paul could not have received from others the gospel that he preached.

**17** Finally, just as Paul did not receive his gospel from men before or at the time of his conversion, so neither did he not receive it from them afterward. The second half of vv. 16, 17 shows that he did not consult men, particularly the Jerusalem apostles, but went instead into Arabia. It was not until after three years (v. 18) that he went up to Jerusalem and met Peter.

*2. Paul's early years as a Christian* 1:18-24

**18** Three years passed, but it is hard to be specific about the time. The Jewish mode of reckoning does not indicate precisely how long this period was. It may

have been only one full year plus parts of two others. Nor does Paul's wording indicate the point from which the three years or parts of three years are to be reckoned. Is it from the time of his return to Damascus? Or is Paul reckoning from his conversion? The importance of the conversion plus the fact that it has just been mentioned probably means that the three years are to be counted from that time, in which case (if Paul's conversion occurred in A.D. 32, as there is reason to believe), the visit to Jerusalem referred to here would have been near A.D. 35. This is the visit mentioned by Luke in Acts 9:26-29. But again it is impossible to be certain of the dating. What is certain is the general drift of Paul's argument. He has been stressing that none of the apostles were in touch with him in order to impart the gospel to him either before, during, or immediately following his conversion. Now he is adding that in addition to that a considerable length of time passed before he even met one of the disciples in Jerusalem. What is more, even then he stayed no more than a fortnight and met only Peter and James. Why did Paul go to meet Peter? It has been said that the two great apostles probably did not spend the entire fifteen days talking about the weather. No doubt they talked about Christ, and Paul used the occasion to enrich his already firm grasp of the gospel by the stories Peter could

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tell of the life and actual teachings of Jesus. There is no reason to think that Paul denied the importance of knowing these things. On the other hand, the wording of the text in Galatians suggests that Paul went up primarily to get acquainted with Peter (cf. Burton). The Greek verb ( *historeo* ) is the word from which we get our word "history." It suggests the telling of a story. Paul would have told his story, Peter his. So the two leading apostles--Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, and Peter, the apostle to the Jews--became acquainted and encouraged each other in their forthcoming work. For the point of Paul's argument, it is important to note that this was a private visit and not one designed to secure the support of any human authorities.

**19** Perhaps Paul's legalizing opponents would take advantage of this admission of a visit to Peter to attempt to show that Paul was dependent on the Jerusalem apostles after all. Well, let them! Paul will even admit that he also saw James, the brother of the Lord, who was later to play such an important part in the Jerusalem Council. A reading of Acts 9:26-29 might suggest that Paul was introduced to all the apostles by Barnabas, but he is affirming that, in point of fact, he met only two.

**20** The foregoing are facts, whatever anyone else may say, and here Paul affirms quite solemnly that the account he has given is accurate (for other instances of similarly strong assertions, see Rom 9:1; 2Cor 1:23; 11:31; 1Thess 2:5; 1Tim 2:7). The assertion can be made to apply in a general way to the entire account preceding it, but it is best explained as Paul's answer to a specific charge that he had been misrepresenting his relationship to the Twelve. That Paul seems to be answering specific charges should be borne in mind when we meet some difficulties later in fitting his remarks into a full chronology. Machen observed years ago in the Sprunt lectures that here in Galatians each historical event seems to be related in order to answer a specific argument raised by Paul's opponents and not to provide a full chronology of the preceding years ( *The Origin of Paul's*

*Religion* , [1921. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947], pp. 85, 86).

**21** Strict chronology is not the main concern in this verse either; if that were so, the correct order of the areas Paul visited would be Cilicia and then Syria, as indicated by Acts 9:30; 11:25,
26. Actually, he is merely indicating that in the next period of his life he worked, not in the immediate area of Jerusalem--in Judea, where one might suppose him to have been under the authority and subject to the review of the other apostles--but far away from Jerusalem in the regions of Syria and Cilicia where he was by necessity his own authority. Tarsus, Paul's hometown, was in Cilicia. According to Acts 11:25, Barnabas went there to get Paul when he needed his help for the work in Antioch. Antioch was the capital of Syria. Here Paul carried on a long and fruitful ministry after Barnabas's call.

**22** As a result of his work in the north and of his paying no new visits to Jerusalem, Paul was personally unknown to the Christians who lived in Judea. "Unknown"! It is a striking word to use

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of the man who, after Jesus himself, has probably influenced the world more than any other who has ever lived. No doubt, Paul could have been an instant celebrity. Instead, he worked for long years in relative obscurity. It was only after a very long period that Paul began his famed missionary journeys in response to the call of the Holy Spirit through the Christians at Antioch.

**23,24** The word "only" (v. 23) warns us that we are not to take this sentence as a summary of an exciting and well-attended report that we might assume to have been on the mind of everyone in Judea during the years of Paul's Cilician and Syrian ministry. The opposite is the case. The Christians had heard of Paul's conversion--at the time it happened. But after that he apparently dropped so completely from sight that he was almost forgotten. The only report heard was that the one who long ago was persecuting the church is now preaching the gospel. This sense of the verse is also demanded by the flow of Paul's argument, which is to stress his isolation from everything happening in Jerusalem. Would that there were more such contentment among Christians today--the contentment to be unknown! There would be, if this were the goal--to have God glorified (v. 24). Too often those in prominent places within the church seek their own glory in Christian service rather than the glory of God.

*C. Paul's Relationship to the Other Apostles* (2:1-21)

*1. The council at Jerusalem* 2:1-5

Chapter 2 begins a significantly different section of Paul's argument. There is a connection, of course. Paul is still speaking of his apostolic authority. But now he wants to demonstrate the essential unity existing between himself and the Twelve,

whereas in chapter 1 his focus was on his independence from them. There are four important differences between the first ten verses of this chapter and those preceding it: (1) There is a new subject--not the source of Paul's gospel, but the nature of the gospel itself centered in the issue of circumcision for Gentiles; (2) there is a new aspect of Paul's relationship to the Twelve--not independence from them, as during the early years of his ministry, but harmony and cooperation; (3) there is a new period of Paul's ministry and of early church history; and (4) there is a new conclusion--namely, that in the essential content of the gospel and of the plan for missionary activity, Paul and the Twelve were one. This is also the first point historically at which Paul came into sharp conflict with the heresy now troubling the Galatian churches. What was to be done about this distinct point of view? Was it a minor matter to be passed over quickly? Was it an issue on which to seek compromise? Should a battle be fought? It would seem that few besides Paul and perhaps Barnabas recognized the full importance of the issue at the time. So it is to Paul's steadfastness in conflict that Christians owe, humanly speaking, the continuation of the full gospel of grace in

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subsequent church history. The issue is important today because many would claim that doctrine is not of great importance, that compromise should always be sought, and that the value of human works alongside the reality of grace should be recognized.

**1** In spite of Paul's seeming to date the period of three years from the time of his conversion, rather than from his return to Damascus (1:17, 18), it is most probable that the fourteen years mentioned here are to be reckoned from the end, not the beginning, of the first three years. Lightfoot rightly notes that the argument seems to demand this interpretation and the language suggests it. The point is obviously not how long after his conversion Paul made this visit, but how long after last seeing the apostles he went up to Jerusalem. Besides, Paul undoubtedly thought of the years of labor in Syria and Cilicia as a block of time or a set period of his ministry, and his point is that these years were broken only by the trouble from the legalizers and by the revelation to go up to Jerusalem to argue the cause of Gentile liberty. The most probable dating would place Paul's conversion at approximately A.D. 32; the visit to see Peter, in A.D. 35; and the council, in A.D. 49. (The correctness of these dates depends, of course, on the actual date of Christ's crucifixion.) Barnabas and Titus accompanied Paul, though Luke does not mention the presence of Titus in his account of the council. There seems to be an order in the delegation from Antioch. Paul went up, accompanied by Barnabas, and taking Titus along. The order would therefore be: Paul, Barnabas, and Titus. The presence of Titus is best explained by Paul's desire for a test case, as shown by vv. 3-5.

**2** Luke says that Paul and Barnabas went up to Jerusalem as the result of a decision by the "brothers" at Antioch. Yet there is no real contradiction between Luke's account and Paul's statement about his having gone up by revelation. Either the church at Antioch itself prayed about what should be done and then

commissioned Paul and Barnabas in response to what they believed God revealed they should do, or else the revelation was a parallel and confirming one to Paul. It makes little difference whether the revelation prompted or else confirmed the church's decision. Undoubtedly, Paul mentions the matter only to emphasize once again that at no time, either earlier or at this late point, was he at the call of the other apostles. On the contrary, his movements as well as his gospel are to be attributed directly to the revealed will of God. The discussion of Paul's experiences in Jerusalem will go on as far as v. 10 but the essence of the matter and its outcome are already suggested in the second half of this statement. Paul spoke privately to those who were the apparent leaders of the Jerusalem church, for he wished to avoid public remarks or a decision, whether valid or not, that could harm the work he had already done or was planning to do among the Gentiles. The phrase "for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain" must be taken in this sense, for the only other possibility--"for fear I had been mistaken about the gospel"--is inconceivable in view of Paul's previous insistence upon the divine source and truthfulness of his teaching. Here was a great issue, and Paul recognized

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that the decision reached could have terrible consequences for the church's missionary outreach--if the doctrine of grace were not boldly and clearly upheld. What happened at the council, then? Obviously, Paul's point was upheld; for the present tense of the verb "to preach" shows that the gospel preached by Paul in the early years was the gospel still being preached by him years later.

**3-5** In the context of relating his contacts with the apostolic leaders at Jerusalem Paul now introduces an instance in which he claims to have defended the purity of the gospel from the encroachments of those who would have mixed aspects of the Mosaic law with grace as the way of salvation. This incident was the attempt of the Jewish legalists to force the rite of circumcision on Titus. The outcome of the struggle, as Paul said, was a successful defense of the gospel. It would seem that the facts of such an event would be beyond question, but this is not the case. Either because of Paul's care in handling a difficult and delicate situation or merely from the fact that the grammar of the passage has suffered in his dictation, commentators from the time of Marcion to the present have been puzzled about what Paul was actually trying to say. Does Paul say that he refused to yield to the demands laid upon him, as most of the translations indicate? Or does he maintain that for a short time he did in fact yield? To whom is Paul referring in v. 5, to the apostles or to the false brothers of v. 4? Finally, can we even be sure that Titus was not circumcised, since even such careful commentators as Bacon ("The Reading *hois oude* in Gal 2: 5," JBL, 42, 1923, pp. 69-80) and Lake ("Was Titus Circumcised?" Exp., 7th series 1, 1906, pp. 236-245) have maintained that he was? These questions have immense bearing on the relationship of Paul to the apostles at Jerusalem, the character of Paul himself, and the general defense of Christian liberty against a reactivation of law. One source of these problems lies in the fact that the Greek MSS of Galatians vary greatly in rendering v. 5. Some omit the words "to whom" and also the negative. In these MSS the sentence reads very smoothly: "But on account of the false brothers...we yielded for a time." That would mean that Paul allowed Titus to be circumcised, either giving in to the legalizers who demanded that he yield (so Tertullian and Zahn) or to the

apostles who requested him to yield (Bacon), in order that in some way the truth of the gospel might continue with the Gentile Christians. In favor of this reading are the authority of some MSS and good syntax. On the other hand, there are major difficulties. First, it is hard to see how Paul could admit that he yielded to the demands to have Titus circumcised and still maintain that he had defended the "truth of the gospel." Paul speaks of the gospel again and again in these chapters (1:6, 9, 11; 2:2, 5). How could he have been so certain that he had defended the gospel if, in fact, Titus had been circumcised? Again, Paul's description of the legalistic party is so vehement that it is hard to believe, if only for this reason, that he submitted to them even for a time. Paul says that these men were traitors, "false brothers," and that they had sneaked into the Christian camp to "spy on" the liberty of Christians. Their intention was to bring the Galatians into slavery to the law.

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The other possible reading of the text is to retain both the words "to whom" and the negative. This gives the translation "to whom we did not give the subjection demanded even for an hour." With this approach, the phrase itself is clear enough and seems, at least on the surface, to be in keeping with the tone of the Epistle. But by doing this, we create another problem. For if one begins the phrase with the words "to whom," it is impossible to complete the sense of v. 4, and the entire verse stands as an anacoluthon, that is, as a series of phrases without a grammatical relationship to the passage. What are we to do in such circumstances? It is the contention of this writer that the more difficult reading should stand in spite of the anacoluthon. This view is supported by the best principles of textual criticism and by a reconstructed syntax for the passage. Four factors require the decision to retain the words "to whom" and the negative: (1) They have the best support, being found in most of the Greek uncials and the Chester Beatty papyri.
(2) There is absolutely no reason for demanding perfect grammar when approaching a text of Scripture. Difficult grammatical structure is an explanation of the variants resulting from attempts to amend it, but it is not susceptible to rejection solely on grounds of being nongrammatical. (3) Paul's writings give evidence of other cases in which we may observe the results of scribes or commentators who eliminated a negative, thereby supposing themselves to be improving the text (cf. variants on Gal 5:8 and Rom 5:14). (4) The most difficult reading of a text is most likely to be the correct one, for variants are then best explained as attempts to improve the text and eliminate the difficulty. It follows that the reading "to whom" and the negative may be accepted as that of the original autograph and that the variant readings must be explained as alterations aimed at eliminating the problems raised by its interpretation. To retain the words "to whom" and the negative is, however, also to retain the difficulty of relating v. 4 to the passage. In general, there have been three major approaches to doing this: (1) attempts to relate the anacoluthon of v. 4 to some following word in the passage, (2) those attempting to make it limit something that precedes, and (3) those which make it limit something to be supplied from the preceding (cf. Burton, pp. 79-82, for full details). The best interpretation is that v. 4 is related to

the thought of pressure being applied to Paul by the leaders at Jerusalem in deference to the false brothers, yet successfully resisted by Paul in defense of Gentile liberty. Here the weight of the historical context is impressive. There is the picture of the apostles at Jerusalem, wavering on neutral ground, tending to advise compliance on Paul's part, and then finally coming out for Paul by declaring openly for freedom from the law. This attitude is suggested in the following verses, both in the attitude of reserve Paul seems to have encountered at Jerusalem (2:6, 9) and in the related wavering of Peter at Antioch. Moreover, this fits in with the fact of greatest certainty; namely, that the conflict was primarily between the false brothers and Paul and that in the end (whether wavering before that time or not) the apostles stood solidly with Paul and Barnabas. Such a view would permit us to translate v. 4 nearly as it stands, though introducing the word "that" to indicate the relationship of the verse to something understood from the preceding--"And that for the sake of the false brethren." The NIV takes

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this general approach when it translates, "[This matter arose] because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks." Paul's references to the false brothers in v. 4 entail a military metaphor, used to indicate the subversive and militant nature of the evil that Paul was fighting. The term "false brothers"

( *pseudadelphous* ) is used only twice in the NT (here and in 2Cor 11:26). In each case Paul uses the term of those who are not in fact Christians, though pretending to be so. The overtone is that of a traitor or spy. "Infiltrated" ( *pareisaktous* ) is used in the same way, as in 2 Peter 2:1, where we are told of those who will "secretly introduce" destructive heresies to weaken and ruin the church. In the LXX reading of 2 Samuel 10:3, "spy" ( *kataskopeo* ) is used of the servants of David who, according to his enemies, had come "to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it." Similarly, Paul speaks of the desire of the legalizers "to make us slaves"

( *katadoulosousin* ), in the manner of those who would take a city by stealth or force in order to place the inhabitants in chains. Paul's defense of the gospel he had received from God was not made for any personal or selfish reasons, but "so that the truth of the gospel might remain" with believers (v. 5). The word "truth" has a decided emphasis in contrast to the falseness mentioned in the preceding verse. Therefore, it cannot mean only "the truths" of the gospel or even "the true message" of the gospel; it must mean "the true gospel" as opposed to "the false gospel" being taught by the false brothers. There is also a possibility that Paul is thinking of his earlier reference to that other gospel, which is really "no gospel at all" (1:6, 7). The idea of the true gospel is prominent and very significant, so much so that many have seen the necessity of rounding out the phrase in their commentaries. Ridderbos has "its true, unmodified content." Lightfoot says, "the gospel in its integrity." Calvin writes, "its genuine purity, or, which means the same thing, its pure and entire doctrine." This is the issue! The gospel in its entirety, or that which is no gospel at all! It is the importance of this issue that made Paul adamant in his relationship to all others, Christians and non-Christians, and that must make all who know the Lord Jesus Christ and who love the gospel

equally adamant in their thought, speech, and writings at the present time.

*2. Paul and the pillar apostles* 2:6-10

**6** As in v. 4, the construction is again broken, with the result that the first six words of the Greek text (followed by an interjection concerning God's refusal to judge by appearances) are left hanging. Undoubtedly, Paul wished to revert to the subject of v. 2 in order to point out that, having laid before the pillar apostles the gospel he had been preaching, he found they had nothing to add to his message. If he had continued v. 6 in this way, without the interrupted thought and the new beginning, the words "and from those who seemed to be important" (Gr.) would have been followed by a phrase like "I received nothing." Instead, Paul's thought is interrupted, and he hastens to add that whatever the historical advantages of the original apostles might have been in that they had known Jesus after the flesh (this is the force of the imperfect

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"were"), this was not important either to him or to God--and they added nothing to his message.

Four times in this chapter--once earlier (v. 2), twice in this verse, and once later (v. 9)--Paul refers to the three major figures at Jerusalem in an unusual way. The persons in question are James, Peter, and John, as is apparent from v. 9. They are described as "those who seemed to be leaders," "those who seemed to be important," and "those reputed to be pillars." Why this unusual and perhaps even differential way of referring to them? Most commentators are reluctant to admit that Paul may be deprecating in any way those who were apostles before him. Some, like Burton, deny it outright, pointing out (quite properly) that Paul's obvious intention in these verses is to show his unity with the apostles both in spirit and doctrine. He argues that it is not likely that Paul would speak poorly of them in the same context. Other commentators admit the slightly deflating tone of these expressions but refer them to something other than Paul's own opinion of the apostles--that is, either to the exaggerated claims concerning them made by the legalizers or to the exaggerated views entertained by the Galatians or both (cf. Lightfoot, Guthrie, Ridderbos, Stott, and others). Over against these views needs to be placed the fact that a very good case can be made for the existence of a real though balanced note of disparagement on Paul's own part and for this in itself being the best explanation for the grammatical difficulties throughout the passage. First, while it is true that the phrase "those of reputation" ( *hoi dokountes* )--"those who seemed to be important," NIV--is not necessarily deprecating, nevertheless it can convey this meaning. Lightfoot (in loc.) gives several examples from Plato. More pertinent is the fact that this sense of the word occurs again in Galatians--"If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself" (Gal 6:3). Second, the very repetition of the phrase in the Greek text seems ominous. It is hard to explain exactly why this is so, but the effect of the repetition is much like the effect of Antony's repetition of the word "honorable" concerning Brutus in his eulogy at the funeral of Julius Caesar in Shakespeare's play. The more he speaks the word, the less honorable Brutus and the other conspirators appear. Third, the expression Paul uses grows fuller and

slightly stronger with each repetition. The apostles are at first called "those who seemed to be leaders." Next, they are "those who seemed to be important." Finally, they are "those reputed to be pillars," at which point the veiled reference is dropped and those of reputation are named--James, Peter, and John. Cole, who notes this progression, observes that it is as if "Paul's rising indignation is finding the studied courtesy of 2:2 impossible to maintain" (in loc.). Fourth, the story of Peter's conduct at Antioch, which immediately follows this section, lends credence to the feeling that Paul's disappointment with the conduct of those who should have been leaders in this great crisis of faith and doctrine but who failed to take the lead is increasingly spilling over into the letter as he retells and (to some extent) relives the events of the council. According to this interpretation, Paul felt that the Jerusalem apostles did not perform on a level commensurate with the reputation they held, either at the council or (in Peter's case) after it. If

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they had been alert to the issue, the legalizers would not have succeeded even to the degree they did.

Fifth, the delicate situation lying behind these verses alone explains the grammatical difficulties. To understand them, one must see Paul as torn between a desire to stress the basic unity that did exist between himself and the Twelve and the need to be honest in indicating that, so far as he was concerned, the apostles did not perform well in the crisis. Thus, his initial allusion to the apostles in v. 2 seems to him on second thought to be too vague. He breaks in with the Titus incident, but again not indicating clearly enough that it was the apostles who for the sake of harmony were urging that Titus be circumcised. Finally, Paul picks up the matter of the apostles again (v. 6) and eventually names them (v. 9), this time indicating that those who were reported to be "pillars" almost failed to do the work of supporting the gospel. Looked at grammatically, the entire passage from v. 2 to v. 10 is a problem. But if these verses are considered against the historical context just outlined, they not only make sense but also greatly increase admiration for the apostle Paul. How many men would be able to strike such an emotional balance in as highly charged a situation as this and at the same time make the points they need to make in writing? Paul has done the following: (1) recognized the position and authority of the Jerusalem apostles without diminishing his own authority in the slightest; (2) indicated, in opposition to the exaggerated claims about them made by the legalizers, that the apostles were men after all and hence not always perfect in their initial reactions or conduct; (3) decisively separated the gospel and policies of the Twelve, for all their weaknesses, from the gospel and policies of the legalizers; and (4) taken note of the fact that he and the Twelve, rather than the legalizers and the Twelve, stood together. Eventually, he will even show that the agreement between himself and the Twelve was cordial both in relation to their respective spheres of ministry ("James, Peter and John ... gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship") and in regard to the special obligation of the Gentiles toward the Jerusalem poor ("the very thing I was eager to do"). So far as the gospel Paul preached was concerned, the Jerusalem conference had two results. Negatively, the Twelve

"added nothing" to Paul. Paul's gospel was complete because received by revelation. Positively, however, the "pillars" extended to Paul the right hand of fellowship-- that is, they recognized that all of them had been entrusted with the same gospel and that they differed only in respect to the different fields they had been assigned to preach it in.

**7** There is minor support for this interpretation of the conference in Paul's use of the aorist participle "having seen," or "when they had seen." It implies a change of mind by the Twelve as a result of Paul and Barnabas's having reported on all that God had done through them among the Gentiles (cf. Acts 15:4). At first they were skeptical and uncertain, but later they came to stand with Paul. The participle gives the reason for the step taken in v. 9--i.e., having seen the results of their ministries, the Twelve gave Paul and Barnabas "the right hand of fellowship." KJV contains an unfortunate rendering at this point in the letter, because the phrases "the

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gospel of the uncircumcision" and "the gospel of the circumcision" suggest two different gospels, which was a thought not at all in Paul's mind. The NIV guards against this error by rendering the same words "the gospel to the Gentiles" and "the gospel to the Jews." But in this case, Paul's direct allusion to the underlying issue of circumcision vanishes.

**8** Just as the gospel is one gospel, no matter to whom preached, so also are the commissioning and enabling of those who preach it one. The reason is that the one who commissioned and empowered both Peter and Paul is God.

**9** The exact use and order of the names of the leading apostles in this verse should not escape notice. First, the order obviously corresponds to the relative positions and work of James and Peter as recorded in Acts. Peter was the great missionary. Hence, when Paul is speaking of the ministry to the Jews, Peter is prominent and James is not mentioned (vv. 7, 8). In dealing with a particular and official act of the Jerusalem church, however, James (who apparently presided at the council) is mentioned in the first position with the names of Peter and John following. Lightfoot (in loc.) also points out, no doubt rightly, that the fact that James is first called "James, the Lord's brother" (1:19) but here only "James" is explained clearly by the Acts narrative. At the earlier visit to Jerusalem there were two prominent Jameses in the city--James, the Lord's brother, and James, the son of Zebedee. So, in describing that visit, Paul identifies the proper James. By the time of this visit (the visit of Acts 15), James, the son of Zebedee, had been put to death by Herod.

**10** Paul had already shown a concern for the poor at the time of the famine visit when he traveled to Jerusalem with Barnabas as a representative of the church at Antioch (Acts 11:27-
30). At the time of the council he was reminded of this good work and encouraged to pursue it. Out of this request, with which he was in great

sympathy, arose the collection from among the Gentile churches that occupied so large a part in Paul's later thought and writings (cf. Acts 24: 17; Rom 15:26; 1Cor 16:3, 4; 2Cor 8 and 9). The change from the plural first person ("we") to the singular ("I") may reflect Paul and Barnabas's parting company by the time the collection was actually taken up.

*3. Peter comes to Antioch* 2:11-14

The account of the Jerusalem Council is followed immediately by another historical incident, the last in Paul's series, in which he dramatically supports his claim to possess an authority equal to and independent of that of the other apostles. In the opening part of this chapter, Paul has demonstrated his essential unity with those who were apostles before him. Now he shows that he stood so firmly grounded in the gospel that he opposed even Peter, contradicting him publicly when Peter's conduct at Antioch threatened to compromise that gospel.

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For some reason, Peter had left the Jewish community at Jerusalem and had gone to the Gentile city of Antioch in Syria. If this event took place after the council, the visit may have originated in Peter's desire to see what Paul had reported concerning the work of God there, but it is impossible to be certain. Whatever the reason, at Antioch Peter discovered a community of Jewish and Gentile Christians living together and, in particular, eating together in apparent disregard of Jewish dietary customs. This was probably against the practice then prevailing in Jerusalem even after the council, but God had already shown Peter what he was to do in such situations. God had told Peter in the vision of the great sheet, "Do not call anything impure that God had made clean" (Acts 10:15). So Peter, no doubt remembering this and being impressed with the example of Jewish/Gentile harmony, joined with other Jews in eating with his Gentile brothers. According to Paul, Peter did this for some time, because the imperfect tense of the verb implies that he ate with the Gentiles not once, on a single occasion, but on a regular basis, habitually. In this decision, Peter went beyond the letter of the decrees of the council, for though the council had acknowledged the right of freedom from the law for Gentiles, it had nevertheless retained the observance of the law for Jews. Now Peter was declaring that the Jew as well as the Gentile was free from Mosaic legislation. After a time, some influential Jews arrived in Antioch from Jerusalem, giving out that they were representatives of James. They were the legalists or, at the very least, strict Jews. Peter's practice shocked them. Not only was his conduct not required by the Jerusalem agreement, they might have argued, it was actually contrary to it; for Peter was encouraging a disregard of the Mosaic law by Jewish believers. These persons brought such pressure to bear on Peter that though he was unconvinced by their views, he nevertheless gradually detached himself from the Gentile fellowship and began to eat with Jews only. Moreover, his conduct drew others away with him so that when Paul returned (it is hard to understand how he could have been present during these events and have let them go as far as they did without protest), he found a church divided and the Gentiles under an unwarranted pressure either to accept the division or to conform to the legalistic standards of Judaism as the means of avoiding it. What did Paul do? Since the schism was

public, Paul confronted Peter publicly, charging him with inconsistency and stating once again that the works of the law have no place in God's plan of salvation through the death of Christ. From this response, the Galatians were to realize that Paul was not a self-appointed apostle, nor even a worker appointed and approved by the Twelve. He was rather a full apostle in his own right, who could therefore speak with full authority even, if necessary, in opposition to another apostle.

**11** It is not known exactly when Peter came to Antioch, but the flow of events suggests that it was after the council. It is true that the verb "had come" allows the view that Paul is here reverting to an earlier incident; if this is so, then Peter's defense of Paul at Jerusalem in Acts 15 naturally reflects their earlier confrontation and conversation at Antioch. Some have defended this view on the basis that Peter could not have acted as he did following the council. But this

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overlooks both the reality of human inconsistency (even among the best people) and the fact that the Antioch incident reflects an entirely new situation. There was: (1) a new issue--foods rather than circumcision; (2) a new area of the faith--Christian living rather than the basis of salvation; and (3) a new subject-- Jewish liberty rather than the liberty of Gentile Christians. This dispute could have followed naturally upon the compromise reached at the council.

**12** Here is the reason why Peter was in the wrong or stood condemned. It was not, it must be noted, a case of Peter's simply making an honest mistake. The Peter who had received the vision prior to going to the house of Cornelius and who had defended Paul at the council was not fooled by the arguments of the legalizers. The difficulty was that he gradually gave in to pressure exerted by the legalizers, even though he knew what was right. In other words, Peter played the hypocrite. "The same Peter who had denied his Lord for fear of a maid-servant now denied Him again for fear of the circumcision party" (Stott, in loc.).

**13** Unfortunately, conduct such as Peter's is not inconsequential, neither in his day nor now. So one is not surprised to read that other Jews, including Barnabas, were led away by his dissimulation. If Peter had been a lesser man or less prominent, the defection might have been less serious. But this was Peter, the pillar apostle, the companion of the Lord during his earthly ministry! What Peter did moved others. It is obvious that any Christian must give heed to his actions and the greater the position or responsibility, the more important those actions become.

**14** Paul has already shown that he opposed Peter to his face because he was wrong (v. 11), but we are not to think that he did this because he loved exposing error or, even less, because he loved an argument or wanted to enhance his own

prestige. Paul's real concern was for the truth of the gospel. It was not a matter of personalities. To the Corinthians he wrote, "What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul?" (1Cor 3:5). It is not a matter of trivial forms or ceremonies. What was at stake was the gospel itself. Hence, Paul acted out of the very concern that Peter lacked. This is the second time that Paul has spoken of "the truth of the gospel" (vv. 5, 14)--the good news that men and women do not become accepted with God because of anything they have done or can do but solely on the basis of God's grace shown in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Moreover, on the basis of this death all who believe become fully accepted by God and are accepted equally. Peter's conduct compromised this principle, for it implied that there could be a superiority in some Christians based on race or traditions. It is not enough merely to understand and accept the gospel, as Peter did, nor even to defend it, as he did at Jerusalem. A Christian must also practice the gospel consistently, allowing it to regulate all areas of his conduct.

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*4. Justification by faith alone* 2:15-21

The verses that conclude this chapter contain capsule statements of some of the most significant truths of Christianity. In particular, Paul clearly states the doctrine of justification by grace through faith and defends it over against the traditional objection that justification by faith leads to lawlessness. The words "justify" and "justification" occur in these verses for the first time--the verb, three times in v. 16 and once in v. 17; the noun, in v. 21--as Paul now begins to develop the message that is central to the letter, to his gospel, and indeed to Christianity generally. This statement flows out of the situation at Antioch and anticipates the fuller argument of the same doctrine occurring in chapters 3 and 4. "After working through the rest of the Epistle, one turns back to [these verses] and finds in [them] the whole truth in embryo," as Ramsay states.

**15** It is impossible to say precisely where Paul's remarks to Peter on the occasion of Peter's hypocrisy at Antioch leave off and Paul's direct remarks to the Christians of Galatia begin. In trying to answer that question, one is faced with the same kind of problem faced by interpreters of some parts of John's Gospel. Some commentators end the direct quotation at v. 14. Others, like the NIV, carry it to the end of the chapter. Most likely, the truth lies in Paul's gradually moving away from the situation at Antioch but doing it so naturally that he himself was unconcerned with and perhaps even unaware of the transition. At the beginning, he speaks of "you" (meaning Peter) and "we" (meaning himself, Peter, and other Jews), undoubtedly with the situation at Antioch in mind. Later he is probably thinking of the broader situation that faced the Gentile churches. The argument is addressed to Jews at this point, and the words "who are" must be supplied--"we *who are* Jews by nature." Paul is speaking of natural-born Jews; that is, those who possessed the advantages of a privileged birth and a revealed religion. These are great advantages, as Paul admits elsewhere (cf. Rom 3:1, 2; 9:4, 5). But even so great advantages as these are inadequate for achieving a state of righteousness

before God. Even Jews must be saved through faith. It is folly, therefore, to attempt to reestablish Judaism as a base for Christianity. In Jewish speech the phrase "Gentile sinners" was used seriously as an opposite concept to all that being Jewish implied. In Paul's mouth, the phrase has an ironic ring.

**16** This is one of the most important verses in the Epistle. As already noted, it contains the first mention of the words "justify" or "justification." "Law" is mentioned for the first time. This is also the first place in the letter in which "faith" is brought forward as the indispensible channel of salvation. "Justify" ( *dikaioo* ; noun, *dikaiosune* ; adjective, *dikaios* ) is a forensic term borrowed from the law courts. It means "to declare righteous or innocent." The opposite of "to justify" is "to

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condemn" or "to pronounce guilty." Such a term involves an objective standard, and since righteousness is understood to be the unique characteristic of God, that standard must be the divine standard. In themselves, all persons fall short of this standard--"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). But in Christ, God declares all righteous who believe, imputing divine righteousness to them. In this sense, justification does not express an ethical change or influence (though ethical changes follow); rather, it expresses the judicial action of God apart from human merit according to which the guilty are pardoned, acquitted, and then reinstated as God's children and as fellow heirs with Jesus Christ. This experience does not happen automatically to all men. It is true that God justifies, but he does so only as he unites a man or woman to Christ, a union that takes place only through the channel of human faith. Faith is the means, not the source, of justification. Faith is trust. It begins with knowledge, so it is not blind. It builds on facts, so it is not speculation. It stakes its life on the outcome, so it is not impractical. Faith is trusting Christ and proving his promises. The expression in the middle of v. 16, literally "we have believed into Christ," implies an act of personal commitment, not just assenting to the facts concerning Christ, but actually running to him for refuge and seeking mercy. It is also implied in this commitment that a person will turn his back on the only other apparent possibility--the attempt to be justified by works done in obedience to formal statutes from whatever source. It is important to note that the article is not present in the phrases "observing law" or "works of law." This means that Paul's emphasis is not on the Jewish law, the law of Moses, at all, though it includes it, but rather on any system of attempting to please God by good deeds. "Works of law" are "deeds of men." The introduction of the article into the KJV, RSV, and NIV texts is a defect in these versions. The threefold repetition of the doctrine of justification by faith in this one verse is important, because it shows the importance the apostle gives to the doctrine. Besides, the three phrases increase in emphasis. The first is general. Paul says, "A man is not justified by observing ... law, but by faith in Jesus Christ." A man is *any* man, anyone. The second phrase is particular and personal. "We, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law." This phrase involves Paul himself, as well as

all who stand with him in the faith. The final statement is universal: "By observing the law no one will be justified." The words are literally "all flesh," i.e., mankind without exception. This universal application of the teaching is heightened by the fact that Paul apparently quotes from Psalm 143:2 (as he also does in Rom 3:20), thereby, adding the stamp of a more general, biblical principle to his statements.

**17** In Paul's day, as today, arguments were directed against this way of salvation. So in this verse and the ones following Paul begins to answer these objections, first noting the main argument of his opponents and then revealing the argument by which he refutes theirs. There have been many interpretations of this sentence, because the wording contains several

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ambiguities. Is Paul speaking hypothetically or is he referring to actual experi ence? He obviously denies the conclusion that Christ is the minister of sin, but does he also deny that "we ourselves
... are found sinners" (KJV)? In what sense is sin men tioned? The importance of these questions is seen in the various interpretations that have grown out of an attempt to answer them. 1. A very ancient view, held by many of the early church fathers and by most of the Reformation theologians, is that the words "sinners" and "sin" must be taken in the same sense and that, as a result, the words "absolutely not" ( *me genoito* ) deny both of the phrases in which the two words occur. According to this view, Paul is answering an objection based on two premises: (a) that it is necessary to abandon the law in order to be justified by faith, and (b) that abandoning the law is sin. Moreover, he must be arguing that to abandon the law is not sin; so Christ is not a minister of sin. The major difficulty with this view is that it does not do justice to Paul's regular usage of the phrase *me genoito* , a phrase regularly employed to deny a conclusion falsely based on a true premise. It also forms an awkward introduction to the verse that follows, as Lightfoot notes. 2. Lightfoot takes "sinners" in the same sense as "sinners" in v. 15, with the conclusion that Paul is referring to Jews taking a place with "Gentile sinners" in the desire to be justified by faith; that is, taking a position with them outside the law. According to this view, Paul would be admitting the first point--that Jews become "Gentile sinners" in seeking to be justified by faith ("there is no difference," Rom 3:22)--but would be denying the conclusion that the legalizers sought to derive from it; namely, that Christ thereby becomes the encourager of sin. This is a possible interpretation, but it is slightly academic and is well removed from the situation at Antioch. 3. A third interpretation is that Paul is referring precisely to the situation at Antioch, indicating that he and Peter (as well as other Jews) became violators of the law, sinners, by eating with Gentiles. Nevertheless, Paul argues, Christ would hardly be called a minister of sin by Peter because they did that. 4. Some refer the sense of "sinners" to the actual practice of sin by Christians after their conversion, but this is extraneous to the context. 5. A final interpretation is that Paul refers to the standard antinomian objection to the doctrine of justification by faith which, significantly enough, he

also deals with else where. This view is adopted by Ridderbos, Stamm, and Stott (in loc.). According to this interpretation, Paul would be answering the objection that to eliminate the law entirely as he is doing is to encourage godless living, living without norms. The argument would go, "Your doctrine of justification by faith is dangerous, for by eliminating the law you also eliminate a man's sense of moral responsibility. If a person can be accounted right eous simply by believing that Christ died for him, why then should he bother to keep the law or, for that matter, why should he bother to live by any standard of morality? There is no need to be good. The result of your doctrine is that men will believe in Christ but thereafter do as they desire." Paul's reply is abrupt. The form of his expression suggests that he was aware of the possibility that a Christian can (and that all

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Christians do) sin. But this is not the result of the doctrine of justification by faith, and therefore Christ is not responsible for it. Such a thought is abhorrent. "Absolutely not!" "God forbid!" If there is sin, as Paul acknowledges indirectly in the next verse, man himself is responsible ("I am a lawbreaker"). This view is preferred by the present writer because it reflects Paul's arguments elsewhere (cf. Rom 6-8) and it best explains the presence of the following verses, as the commentary indicates. Why is it that Paul can reply so vigorously to the objection that his gospel promotes antinomianism, especially since he seems to admit that those who have been justified by faith do sin'? The answer is that the objection totally misunderstands the nature of man's justification. In the eyes of legalizers, justification by faith is nothing more than a legal fiction by which men and women are accounted righteous when in fact they are not. But justification is not a legal fiction. It is true that men are accepted by God as righteous when they are not, but this takes place only because God has first joined them to Christ and this in its turn implies a real transformation. They are "in Christ," says Paul. Consequently, they are "a new creation" (2Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). Obviously, to return to the old way of life after such a change is inconceivable.

**18** The interpretation of this verse is not difficult if the interpretation of v. 17 given above is valid. The legalizers had accused Paul of encouraging sin because Paul's doc trine throws over the law for God's grace. This Paul denied. Nevertheless, he replies, sin could be encouraged if having once come to God by faith in Jesus Christ the one coming should then return to law as a basis for the relationship. This is an argument *e contrario* . It refers to a situation precisely like that one into which Peter had fallen. How is it that returning to law promotes sin? It is likely, in view of the following verses, that Paul is thinking here of the great sinfulness of turning from the Savior (whom the law anticipated) to mere ordinances. For a similar argument, see Hebrews 6:4-6.

**19** The "we" of v. 17 (which included both Paul and Peter) has changed to the "I" of v. 18. This personal form of expression now continues as Paul begins to unfold the full nature of the justification that is his because of his being "in Christ." In this verse "I" is emphatic by being in the first position in the sentence. It contrasts with the similar position given to "in Christ," which (in the Greek text) begins v. 20. Paul has argued that if he should return to law after having come to God through faith in Christ, he would make himself a transgressor. But this is not what he does. Actually, the opposite is true, because in coming to God in Christ he died to the law so completely that he could not possibly return to it. "Through the law" probably justifies seeing in this brief sentence a capsule version of Paul's explanation of the law's purpose as developed at greater length in Romans 7. The law cannot bring life, for no one has ever fulfilled it. Law brings death, for by it all stand condemned. Nevertheless, even in doing this, law performs a good function. For in the very act of destroying all hope for salvation by human works, law actually opens the way to discovering new life in God. It is only when a man will die to his own efforts to achieve salvation

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that he will receive the gift of salvation that God offers.

**20** This same point Paul now repeats in greater detail, with the name of Christ promi nent. He has died to law so that he might live for God, but this is true only because he has been joined to the Lord Jesus Christ by God the Father. Jesus died; so did Paul. Jesus rose again; so did Paul. The resurrection life he is now living he is living through the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ within him. There are different ways in which Paul's references to having died and come to life in Christ may be taken; he himself uses the images in different ways. He may be referring to the participation of Christians in the benefits of Christ's experiences, as Burton notes (in loc.). This would mean that Chris tians experience death and new life because Jesus experienced death and new life for them. He may be referring to Christian experiences analogous to those that Christ endured. Philippians 3:10 and Romans 8:17 would be examples of this usage. Finally, he may be referring to an actual participation of the believer in Christ's death and resurrection conceived on the basis of the mystical union of the believer with the Lord (cf. Rom 6:4-8; Col 2:12-14, 20; 3: 1-4). This last view is the hardest to understand, but it is the one involved here. What does it mean to be "in Christ"? It means to be so united to Christ that all the experiences of Christ become the Christian's experiences. Thus, his death for sin was the believer's death; his resurrection was (in one sense) the believer's resurrection; his ascension was the believer's ascension, so that the believer is (again in one sense) seated with Christ "in the heavenly realms" (so Eph 2:6). This thought is particularly evident in Paul's use of the perfect tense in speaking of his having been crucified with Christ. The perfect refers to something that has happened in the past but whose influence continues into the present. Therefore, Paul cannot be speaking of a present experience of Christ's crucifixion, in whatever sense it may be conceived, but rather to Christ's death itself. He died with Christ; that is, his "old man" died with Christ. This was arranged by God so that Christ, rather than the old Paul, might live in him. In one sense, Paul is still living. But he adds that the life he lives now is lived "by faith." It is a different life from the life in which he was

striving to be justified by law. In another sense, it is not Paul who is living at all, but rather Christ who lives in him.

**21** The last sentence of the chapter is introduced abruptly and from a new point of view. In the preceding verses Paul has answered the objections of his critics. Now he objects to their doctrine, showing that if they are right, then Christ has died in vain. The heart of Christianity lies in the grace of God and in the death of Jesus Christ. So, as Stott notes,

If anybody insists that justification is by works, and that he can earn his salvation by his

own efforts, he is undermining the foundations of the Christian religion. He is nullifying the

grace of God (because if salvation is by works, it is not by grace) and he is making Christ's

death superfluous (because if salvation is our own work, then Christ's work was

unnecessary) (in loc.).

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Paul's logic is incontrovertible. Yet many still pursue the fallacious logic of the legaliz ers. They suppose that to earn their salvation is somehow praiseworthy and noble, when actually it is vainglorious and ignoble. True nobility (and humility) is to accept what God offers. One must either receive God's offer of salvation or insult him.

**II. Paul's Defense of the Gospel** (3:1-4:31)

*A. The Doctrinal Issue: Faith or Works* 3:1-5

The apostle has been defending the gospel of grace from the very beginning of this letter, but till now it has been done from the point of view of his own experience and calling. These had been challenged. So Paul begins by insisting that God rather than man has called him and given him his message. In speaking of his own experiences, however, Paul has gradually worked around to talking about the gospel itself, and this has brought him to the place where he is now set for a theological--or, better, a scriptural--defense of the gospel. So he returns to the Galatians themselves and to the point at which the doctrine of justification through faith bore down upon their own experience.

**1** This is the first time since 1:11 that Paul has addressed the Galatians by name. Now it is by the impersonal term "Galatians" rather than by the word "brothers" he used earlier and it sets a sober tone for the formal argument to follow. Three things are inexplicable in regard to the Galatians' conduct, according to vv. 1-4. First, Paul says, their conduct is irrational or foolish. The word used here is not *moros* , so often used in Christ's parables (Matt 5:22; 7:26; 25:2 ff.). *Moros* refers to one who is mentally deficient or who plays the fool, particularly in the moral or spiritual realm. In Galatians the word is *anoetos* which, quite differently, suggests the actions of one who can think but fails to use his powers of perception (so also

at Luke 24:25; Rom 1:14; 1Tim 6:9; Titus 3:3). This term was clearly suggested to Paul by the trend of his thought at the end of the previous chapter--namely, that a doctrine of salvation by works foolishly denies the necessity for grace and declares the death of the Lord Jesus Christ unnecessary. A doctrine leading to such a conclusion is irrational. Yet this is what the Galatians were on the verge of embracing. They were being intellectually inconsistent, self-contradictory. How can such nonsense be explained? Paul suggests facetiously that perhaps they have been placed under a spell by some magician. Second, the conduct of the Galatians is inexplicable because the true gospel has been so clearly preached to them. Undoubtedly, Paul is referring to his own preaching, arguing that the gospel had been made as clear by him as if he had posted it on a public bulletin board. Moreover, he had not obscured it by nonessentials. For the heart of the gospel Paul preached is--and always must be--"Christ crucified." The perfect tense of this verb is important, for it

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refers to an act completed in the past but which nevertheless has continuing significance.

**2** The third reason for the incomprehensible nature of the Galatians' defection is that it was so totally contrary to their initial experiences of Christianity. How did they begin? This is what Paul would like to hear from them. Did they receive the Holy Spirit by living up to some formal statutes? Or did they enter into the Christian life simply by believing and receiving what they heard concerning the death of the Lord Jesus Christ? The form of the question (literally, "This only do I wish to learn from you") suggests that so long as they are in their present confused state, Paul does not want to hear anything other than the most basic answer to this most basic question.

**3** Paul presupposes their answer, which is obviously that they became Christians only through faith, through believing what they heard. The conclusion follows that, having begun by faith, they must continue in faith. It cannot be otherwise, because the two ways--faith versus works--are in conflict. Paul emphasizes this conflict by three sets of comparisons: (1) works versus hearing, (2) law versus faith, and (3) spirit versus flesh. The last antithesis will come to prominence in the ethical section of the letter where the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit are contrasted.

**4** There is some ambiguity in the question "Have you suffered so much for nothing ... ?" It may imply actual suffering, as the English word generally does. Or it may refer simply to the Galatians' previous spiritual experiences. NEB takes this approach by translating, "Have all your great experiences been in vain ... ?" Neither view makes a great deal of difference for interpreting the letter as a whole, but the latter seems to fit the immediate context better. In this case, the experiences of the Galatians are further amplified by the reminder in v. 5 that God was working miracles in their midst through the power of his Holy Spirit.

**5** Nothing must be allowed to obscure the point Paul is making, so once more he voices the test question of v. 2. There are some differences, however. First, v. 2 presents the question from the point of view of the Galatians, asking on what basis it was that they received God's Spirit. Verse 5 looks at the matter from God's point of view, asking on what basis God is working miracles among them. The two verses also differ in that the past tense of v. 2, which looks back to the initial moment of the Galatians' faith in Christ, gives way to present participles in v. 5. The present participles ("gives" and "works") anticipate the end of the argument, for it is evident that blessing in the Christian life comes just as the Christian life began--through faith, and not as the result of any human attainments. Many outlines have been given of the verses that follow. A helpful outline is to be found in the very antithesis that Paul develops in this section. Is a person justified by "observing law" or by believing what was heard? With this question in mind, Paul begins to discuss the alternatives-- dealing first with faith, then with law, then faith, then law, and so on. The diagram suggests the

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flow of the argument.

In the first three sections the contrast is absolute. In the last three sections the contrast begins to slip into each section; thus, we have "transgressions" versus "promise," "pedagogue" versus "heirs," and "bondage" versus "freedom."

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The Test Question:

Believing what was heard or "observing the law"?

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| The true gospel | The legalizers' "gospel" |

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| 3:6-9 Faith ("Abraham") | 3:10-14 Law (the "curse") |

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| 3:15-18 Faith ("covenant") | 3:19-22 Law ("transgressions") |

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| 3:23-29 Faith ("heirs") | 4:1-7 Law ("bondage") |

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*B. The Doctrinal Argument* (3:6-4:7)

*1. Sons of Abraham* 3:6-9

Paul now turns to the first section of the alternating argument that will occupy him as far as 4:
7. The issue is scriptural, for he is concerned to show that not only the experience of the Galatians but also the words of the OT support his teaching that the means of entering into salvation is faith. Abraham is his example. Paul's statements presuppose a knowledge of Abraham by the Galatians, and it is not difficult to imagine how the Christians of Galatia had come by it. If Paul had preached among the Galatians for any length of time, he would undoubtedly have taught Christian theology in part on the basis of Abraham's life. If the churches of Galatia were the churches of the south, there was undoubtedly a large Jewish population in the area with which Christians must at least have had some contact and with whose history they must have been familiar. Most significant, however, is the probability that the obligation to become "sons" of Abraham through circumcision formed the central argument of the legalizers' teaching. This argument would have focused on Genesis 12 and 17 and would have advanced the position that no one could be blessed by God who was not part of the company to whom God's promises were made. It would have added that one entered this company solely through circumcision. These arguments Paul encounters head on, for he shows that even Abraham was blessed through faith, not circumcision.

**6** The particle beginning this verse ( *kathos* ) is generally used to introduce a new idea but is, nevertheless, one that is linked to the thoughts preceding. In this case, Paul links up his OT example to the Galatians' spiritual experience, showing that what they had known to be true in

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their own lives was also true for others and is confirmed scripturally.

To appeal to Abraham is more than to appeal to just any historical example, because Abraham was the acknowledged father and prototype of Israel. Abraham was the man God started with. He had come from a pagan ancestry beyond the river Euphrates (Josh 24:1, 2), but God had called him and had made a covenant with him. It was from Abraham that the Jewish people came. All Jews, including Paul's opponents, would look back to Abraham as their father in the faith and as their example. This is what gives the patriarch his importance for Paul's argument. How, then, did Abraham receive God's blessing? How was he justified? Paul answers by a quotation of Genesis 1 5:6, noting that Abraham "believed God" and that "it was credited to him as righteousness." What does Paul understand to have been imputed to Abraham as righteousness? The answer depends on what definition of "righteousness" he is using. Righteousness may be either a forensic term (denoting a right standing before the law) or a right relation^ ship, in this case to God. If the latter definition is taken, then "faith" is the key factor, and Paul's point is that Abraham's trusting attitude toward God was accepted by God as righteousness. In this view of justification, there is no difficulty with a so-called "legal fiction." But if the forensic use predominates, then it must be God's own righteousness that is imputed to Abraham in place of his own, which was inadequate. If there were nothing else to go on than Genesis 15:6, the second of these two uses might be prefera ble. But in view of Paul's development of the doctrine elsewhere, the first must be accepted. It is only by thinking of God's righteousness actually being credited to our account that Paul can say, as he does, for instance, in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "God made him [Christ] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." These two views are not in opposition, of course, for justification does bring one into a right relationship with God out of which ethical changes follow. The changes result from one's being placed "in Christ," as Paul has shown.

**7** One example does not make a case, however. So Paul continues his argument with a sentence linking the situation of Abraham to the present. He means, "Since Abraham was saved by faith, his true children are, therefore, even now, those who are saved by faith, as he was." The background is undoubtedly the claim of the Judaizers that one became a genuine son of Abraham by circumcision and subsequent obedience to the law. The phrase "sons of Abraham" (RSV) is discussed at considerable length by both Lightfoot (pp. 158-164) and Burton (pp. 156-159).

Furthermore, this verse is an important one for linking the two covenants, that of the OT and that of the NT. To this end Paul eliminates the article from the word "faith," thus stressing that Abraham's faith was of the same kind as Christian faith and placing the phrase "those who believe" or "those who are characterized by faith" in the first and prominent position. Marcion objected to this joining of the two covenants (he stressed their opposition) and, therefore, quite predictably eliminated vv. 6-9 from his canon.

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**8** The particle ( *de* ) that introduces v. 8 is continuative, for Paul wishes to refer to Scrip ture as evidence of what he has already concluded in v. 7. The quotation, from Genesis 12:3, makes two points: (1) that the blessing promised to Abraham was from the begin ning intended to include the Gentiles as well as the Jews, and (2) that the gospel promise preceded everything else in God's dealings with his people, including the giving of the law, as he will show later (v. 17). The use of this verse is not "proof-texting." If that were the case, the sentence would have been introduced with a stronger conjunction, perhaps *hoti* . Instead, the reference is introduced only in support of a conclusion reached on other grounds. The unusual way the OT is cited here makes this an important verse assessing the value given the OT by Paul and other NT writers. The unusual feature is that the Scriptures are personified, Paul writing that "the Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham." Paul views the Scriptures as if they were God speaking. Another example is Romans 9:17, in which Paul writes: "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: I raised you up for this very purpose." As Warfield observes,

It was not, however, the Scripture (which did not exist at the time) that, foreseeing God's

purposes of grace in the future, spoke these precious words to Abraham, but God himself

in his own person.... It was not the not yet existent Scripture that made this announcement

to Pharaoh, but God himself through the mouth of his prophet Moses. These acts could be

attributed to "Scripture" only as the result of such a habitual identification, in the

mind of the

writer, of the text of Scripture with God as speaking, that it became natural to use the term

"Scripture says," when what was really intended was "God, as recorded in Scripture, said"

( *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* , 2nd ed. [Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and

Reformed Publishing Company, 1948], pp. 299, 300)

These verses, along with others, highlight an absolute identification of Scripture with the words of God in the minds of the NT writers and are important biblical support for the historical Christian belief in the total inspiration of the Bible and its authority.

**9** The reader is now at the peak of the first section of Paul's argument. It is a throwback to the question of v. 5. Who are the ones who enter into spiritual blessing? The answer is: Those characterized by the approach of faith are blessed along with Abraham, who had faith. Besides, since the blessing of Abraham is declared to have been intended for the Gentiles also, how could the Gentiles be blessed except by faith? To have been blessed in any other way would have involved their ceasing to be Gentiles.

*2. The law's curse* 3:10-14

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Having established his doctrine of justification by faith positively, Paul now turns to its negative counterpart: the impossibility of justification by law. Significantly enough, he rests his case on the statements of the law itself, contending that those wishing to live by the law are bound by their own principles to these statements. Three points follow: (1) Those living under the principle of law are under the law's curse, for the law pro nounces a curse upon all who fail to keep the law in its entirety; (2) no one is justified by law, since the law itself teaches that men are justified by faith; and (3) no mixture of these principles is possible, for they are mutually exclusive. To this argument Paul adds a full reference to the work of Christ. It is twofold: a work of redemption from the curse the law has imposed on everybody and a work of blessing by which the promise of the Spirit made to Abraham is fulfilled for all who believe on Christ as Savior.

**10** In the first four verses of Paul's formal argument (vv. 6-9) he has cited two OT texts: Genesis 15:6 in v. 6 and Genesis 12:3 in v. 8. Now he quotes from the OT three more times in vv. 10- 12, in each case demonstrating that an attempt to live by law, rather than producing a blessing, actually brings a curse. Why is this so? First of all, because the law demands perfection, as Deuteronomy 27:26 declares. The law- is not a collection of stray and miscellaneous parts, some of which may be conveniently disregarded. It is a whole, and must be kept in all its parts if it is to be considered kept at all. The point is not that justification cannot come by keeping the law, at least theoretically, but that a curse is attached to any failure to keep it, no matter how small. Since all fail, all are under the curse. Paul is assuming the universality of sin in this quotation. The idea that men could be under a curse as a result of God's judgment has appeared so offensive to some commentators that they have tried to avoid the difficulty by stress ing that the curse referred to is the curse "of the law" rather than the curse "of God." But this is unsatisfactory. It must be agreed, as Stamm and Burton (who take this ap proach in their commentaries) maintain, that Paul does attach this curse to the logical and ultimate extension of the law (cf. Burton, "Redemption from the Curse of the Law," AJT, 11, 1907, pp. 624-646). Paul's phrase is always "the

curse of the law," rather than "the curse of God." Still, the law is God's law, an extension of his character and will, and it is a failure to keep the law that brings man under God's wrath. There is another way to avoid the wrath of God, as Paul has shown. There is mercy in the work of Christ. Nevertheless, if a man will not come to God on the basis of the atonement made by Christ, he must be judged by his works measured against the law's standard and be condemned. It is true as a principle, as v. 12 says, that "the man who does these things will live by them." But no one does them perfectly. And so the law cannot bring life. Its purpose is to condemn and by condemning to point man in his desperation to the Savior.

**11** One must not think that the law did nothing but condemn during all the centuries between the

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giving of the law through Moses and the coming of Jesus. On the contrary, the law itself showed the way of salvation. Paul proves this by a quotation of Habakkuk 2:4--"The righteous will live by faith"--one of the few OT verses in which faith is presented as the means of salvation. It has been argued that Paul misrepresents Habak kuk's meaning. But if "the righteous" in Habakkuk 2: 4 means those who are standing in a right relationship to God rather than those who are literally righteous before the law, as there is every reason to believe, then Habakkuk's view is certainly in accord with Paul's position here. Habakkuk is thinking of the temporal ills resulting from the Chal dean invasion. Paul is thinking in a more general spiritual context. Yet the basic position is the same. It is by faith that a man stands in a right relationship to God and lives before him.

**12** But perhaps both are needed, both faith and law? Not so, says Paul. For faith excludes law, and law by its very nature excludes faith. He quotes the law itself (Lev 18:5) to support this position. Mentally we are to supply "the law says that" after "on the contrary."

**13** If these principles are true and if they support the topic sentence of v. 10--"all who rely on observing the law are under a curse"--then the condition of man under law is obviously hopeless. If there is to be hope, it must come from a different direction entirely. Abruptly, therefore, and without any connecting particle, Paul introduces the work of Christ through which the curse of the law has been exhausted and in whom all who believe find salvation. This is the first time Christ has been mentioned since the opening verse of the chapter, but now both he and his work are prominent. Christ is the only possible means of redemption. The two ways of understanding the "curse" of v. 10 (the curse of the law exclusive of the curse of God and the curse of the law which contains within it the idea of divine disapproval) lead to two ways of understanding the "us" of s. 13. If redemption is from the curse of the law only, then "us" refers most naturally to Jews who have been living under a serious misconception concerning

God and his true nature (so Burton). But if, on the contrary, the curse involves the true *anathema* of God, then "us" must correctly refer to both Jew and Gentile since both have received deliverance through Christ. This latter view is demanded by the context, for Paul will go on to show that the purpose of Christ's death was that the blessing given Abraham might come upon both Jew and Gentile. To redeem ( *exagorazo* ) means "to buy out of slavery" by paying a price. Christ paid this price by dying (cf. 1 Peter 1:18, 19; Acts 20:28). Another way of saying the same thing is to say that Christ became "a curse for us," which Paul does. But what does this mean? In what sense could Jesus become a curse? Paul's quotation from Deuteronomy 21:23--"Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"--suggests that Jesus passed under the law's curse in a technical way by virtue of the particular means by which he was executed. Thus, having violated the law in one part--through no fault of his own--he became technically guilty of all of it and bore the punishment of God's wrath for every violation of the law by every man. This may be in the back of Paul's mind as a particular form of rabbinical argument (hence, the quotation) but it does not

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do full justice to the situation as Paul describes it. The curse of the law is not a technical, still less an imagi nary, thing. The curse is real. Jesus bore this real curse on our behalf. The preposition
( *hyper* ) indicates this by showing that Jesus took our place in dying. No doubt there is more to this than anyone can understand completely, at least in this life. Yet it can be understood in part both through the illustration of the OT sacrifices and in Christ's cry of dereliction from the cross--"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46). The idea of the curse of sin being borne away by an innocent substitute is best seen in the instruction concerning the scapegoat found in Leviticus 16:5 ff.

**14** Paul concludes this section of the argument with a twofold statement of the purpose for which Jesus Christ redeemed man through his death. The two clauses (introduced by *hina* , "in order that") relate to the statement "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law," rather than to any subordinate element of the sentence. The two purposes are these: first, that the blessing of Abraham (Paul is referring to justification, as in vv. 8, 9) might come to Gentiles as well as Jews, and second, that all might together receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. These last two clauses, stating the purpose for which Christ redeemed men from the curse, are coordinate. That is, they express the same reality from two perspectives. Both return to the point from which Paul's argument started--namely, that the blessing of Abraham, seen today in the reception of the Holy Spirit, is received through faith and through faith only.

*3. The seed of Abraham* 3:15-18

At the close of the preceding section Paul introduced the idea of God's promise to Abraham. Now he picks up this idea once more and develops it in relation to the giving of the law. This is the third section of his alternating answer to the question of v. 2: "Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing

what you heard?" Paul's opponents were not ready to admit that Abraham was justified by faith in God's promise. But even if he were, they might argue, still the giving of the law at a later time changed the basis for man's entrance into salvation. Anticipating this objection, Paul draws on the acknowledged character of human wills and covenants so as to show that no new development could change the promise made to Abraham.

**15** "Brothers" introduces a change of tone on the apostle's part, in contrast to the somewhat distant and formal beginning of chapter 3 (cf. 4:31; 6:1). It is as though he now invites the erring Galatians to reason along with him as he uses an analogy. "Let me take an example from everyday life" (literally, "I speak as a man," *kata anthropon lego* ) does not indicate a lowering of the tone of the argument, still less an appeal to human authority rather than God's. It means that Paul is borrowing an illustration from human relationships (so also at Rom 3:5; 6:19; 1Cor 9: 8; cf. Paul's use of marriage laws in Rom 7:1-3).

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Commentators have found difficulty in Paul's use of the word "covenant" ( *diatheke* ) in this verse because the word can mean either "agreement" or "will." Ramsay, for instance, argues strongly for the idea of a "will," noting that in human affairs only a will has the permanent character Paul alludes to in this passage. Others observe that in LXX *diatheke* always has the sense of a covenant between God and man and that Paul has just been thinking of God's covenant with Abraham. But is it necessary to choose between the two meanings? Perhaps not. In English one has to choose between them simply because there are two separate words. But in the Greek language, with one word, it is possible to use both ideas. That this is the case here seems to be supported by: (1) Paul's custom of playing on words elsewhere (e.g., Gal 5:12), (2) the same double mean ing in Hebrews 9:15-20, and (3) the particular nature of the "covenant" made by God with Abraham. Paul is alluding to the promise of a universal blessing both to Jew and Gentile through Abraham's seed (Gen 12:2, 3) which he conceives as the offer of justifi cation to all men through Christ. But if this is so, Paul certainly also has in mind the formal enactment of the covenant by the ceremony recorded in Genesis 15. This was a unilater al agreement. That is, it did not depend on any condition to be fulfilled by Abraham. In Abraham's day an oath was sometimes confirmed by a ceremony in which animals were cut into two parts along the backbone and placed in two rows, the rows facing each other across a space marked off between them. The parties to the oath walked together into the space between the parts and spoke their promises there. This oath would be especially sacred because of the shed blood. It was this ceremony God enacted with Abraham (Gen 15). But it had this exception: In the case of God's covenant with Abra ham, God alone passed between the pieces of the slain animals, thereby signifying that he alone stood behind the promises. The author of Hebrews captures this sense of the covenant by saying, "When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, `I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.' And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised" (Heb 6:13-15). The idea of a will is not far removed from this type of covenant, save in the matter of the death of the testator, which obviously cannot apply to God. Paul's

point is simply that the promise of justification through faith first made to Abraham is permanent. If a human will or agreement cannot be added to or annulled--he is not even thinking of the possibility of altering a contract by mutual consent, since two parties are not involved in this agreement--how much less can there be alteration in the solemn promises made to Abraham and his seed by the living God!

**16** Verse 16 appears to be a parenthesis, and a difficult one at that. But by showing the scope of the promises made to Abraham, it is actually essential to Paul's argument. The truth is seen in this way. If the promises made to Abraham were made only to Abraham and his immediate descendants, they might well be considered fulfilled even before the giving of the law; the law would simply inaugurate a new era in God's dealings with mankind. But the promises were not fulfilled in the period before the giving of the law, Paul argues. They were embodied in the

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coming Redeemer through whom the fullness of blessing was to come. That Redeemer was Christ. Consequently, God's blessing of justification by grace through faith spans the ages; and the law, whatever else one might think of it, must be seen to have served only an interim function. When Paul speaks of "seed" in the singular as opposed to "seeds," he poses a further difficulty for commentators. For the singular form has a collective significance and does, in fact, generally denote more than one person. The nearest English equivalent is the word "offspring." What is the explanation? The one completely invalid explanation of Paul's procedure is that he did not know Greek accurately. On the contrary, he knew it as well as anybody and certainly knew that "seed" generally referred to many persons. Indeed, he himself so uses the word elsewhere (Rom 4:16-18; 9:6-8). It is not much better to say that Paul merely descends to a typically rabbinical form of argument in speaking to those with this background. The best explanation is that Paul is simply pointing out that the singular word--"seed" rather than "children," "descendants," or some such plural word--is appropriate, inasmuch as Israel had always believed that the ultimate messianic blessing would come through a single individual. The essential point is that the promises made to Abraham cannot be considered fulfilled solely in the period prior to the giving of the law on Sinai and hence must be in effect eternally.

**17** The 430 years comes from Exodus 12:40, which in the Greek text is given as the period between Abraham and Moses rather than, as in versions based on the Hebrew text, as the period during which the people were slaves in Egypt. The difference is of no consequence from the viewpoint of Paul's argument, because his point depends only on the historical sequence. If God had been blessing Abraham and his posterity through the way of promise for 430 years and if he was to do the same for all men through Christ and his posterity, how could the giving of the law annul this promise? It could not, as even the human analogy of covenants and wills shows. Therefore, the law cannot add to, nor subtract from,

God's first and only way of salvation.

**18** This verse adds an objective as well as temporal reason why the giving of the law cannot change the promise. Promise and law are antithetical by nature. They can be neither mingled together nor combined. This point is a restatement in a slightly different context of the point made in v. 12. In the last phrase the words "to Abraham" are emphasized, thereby once again driving all discussion of how men and women enter into a right relationship with God to its original source. The word "gave" ( *kecharistai* ) is important, because it emphasizes that salvation is both a free gift ( *kecharistai* is based on the word for grace) and permanent (the perfect tense). Whatever may be said about the law, this much is certain: God saved Abraham through promise, not law, and the original way of salvation is still operative.

*4. Law versus covenant* 3:19-22

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Paul has proved, at least to his own satisfaction and perhaps even to that of the Galatians, that the way of salvation is by means of the promise received through faith. But the legalizers might object that the approach he has taken has actually proved too much. He has demonstrated that the way of salvation is by promise and that the law brings a curse. But if this is so, it would seem to follow (1) that the law has no purpose at all in the scheme of salvation, or (2) that it is actually opposed to it. This would be an intolerable conclusion for most persons, particularly those Jews whose life had been dominated by the law for centuries. Paul answers these charges by denying both conclu sions and by establishing God's true purpose in giving the law. He declares that the law was given not to save man but rather to reveal his sin, that it was temporary, and that it was inferior to the promise because, unlike the promise, it was given through a mediator.

**19** To the question "What, then, was the purpose of the law?" Paul provides as his first answer the truth that the law "was added because of transgressions." On the surface the sense is ambiguous. The phrase can mean either that the law was given to restrain transgressions (which is the natural function of law) or that the law was given to make the transgressions known, even in one sense to encourage them or to provoke them to a new intensity. In view of Paul's choice of the word "transgressions" ( *parabasis* ) rather than "sin" ( *hamartia* ) in this context and of his discussion of the purpose of the law elsewhere, the latter is the only real possibility. In Romans, Paul argues that "through the law we become conscious of sin" (3:20) and that "where there is no law there is no transgression" (4:15). The point is that though sin was in the world before the giving of the law, sin was not always known as such. The law reveals sin as sin. Hence, it may be said that it is the law that turns sin into transgression--transgression of law--and even accentuates it (Rom 5:20). In this act, law performs the function of showing man's need of a Savior. The second half of v. 19 carries the thought a bit further to show that the giving of the law was temporary ("until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come") and inferior (because "put into effect through angels by a

mediator"). Here the mediator is doubtlessly Moses who, as an agent of a mediated revelation, is brought forward in contrast to Abraham, to whom God made promises directly. The role of angels in the giving of the law is suggested in Deuteronomy 33:2 and Psalm 68:17 and is referred to explicitly in Acts 7:53 and Hebrews 2:2.

**20** This verse is probably the most obscure verse in Galatians, if not in the entire NT. Lightfoot notes that there have been over 250 interpretations of it; Fricke raises the figure to 300. The difficulty lies in the abrupt, aphoristic character of the verse and in the necessity to relate to Paul's context whatever interpretation may be given of it. The most important interpretations fall into three categories: 1. Those that take Paul's reference to a "mediator" in a general sense. According to this approach, Paul is introducing a general principle in support of the point made at the end of the preceding verse. Mediators always act between parties. Hence, since Moses was a mediator of

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the law, it follows that he acted between God and the people and that the law thereby came to man indirectly. The last phrase would suggest that in giving the promise to Abraham (see vv. 15-
18) God acted directly and unilaterally.

2. Those that take the reference to a "mediator" as a specific reference to Moses. This view has support in the fact that Paul has been talking about Moses and that he uses the direct article ("the mediator") in this verse, though the direct article in itself does not necessarily imply an individual. This approach can obviously lead to an interpretation very similar to that given above. However, it can also lead to other views, such as that of Forbes, in which Moses is contrasted with Christ as one who was unable to be a mediator of "a perfectly united body" (cf. " *Brevia* -- Galatians 3:20," Exp., 3rd series,4, 1886, pp. 150-156). 3. Those that refer "the mediator" to Christ (Jerome, Chrysostom and, in more recent times, Cole). This has support in the fact that Paul employs these same terms of Christ in another passage (1Tim 2:5), but this view does not relate well to the context. If it is right, Paul would be acknowledging that even in Christianity there is a mediator, Christ; but he would be adding that since Christ is God as well as man, in Christ God is therefore still dealing with man directly. Whatever the details of the interpretation--and there probably will never be perfect agreement on Paul's precise meaning--the general thought seems to be that the promise must be considered superior to the law because the law is one-sided. The law was mediated, and this means that man was a party to it. The promise, on the other hand, is unilateral; man is not a party to it. This thought is intended to reinforce what Paul has said earlier about the unconditional and unilateral nature of the promises.

**21** The second apparent conclusion from Paul's doctrine of justification, as the legalizers would note, is that the law becomes evil because it is in opposition to grace as the true means of salvation. But this does not follow, Paul replies. Actually, it is an abhorrent idea, because it suggests a conflict within the nature of

God, who gave both the law and the promise. True, the law increases transgressions (Rom 5:20). In a sense it even kills, as Paul argues elsewhere (Rom 7:7-11). Still, the law is not bad. It is good. In fact, it is so good that if a man could do what the law requires, he would find life (Lev 18:5; cf. Gal 3:12).

**22** This being impossible, however, the law fulfills its actual function by shutting all humanity up within the bounds of acknowledged sin (cf. note on v. 23). It condemns them so that they might turn from attempts to please God through legalism and instead receive the promise of God through faith in Jesus Christ. In the first part of this verse Paul gives a capsule statement of the major truths of the first three chapters of Romans: the law shows that all--the immoral person, the ethical person, and the religious person--have sinned and need a Savior. The second half of the verse reminds us that there is indeed a Savior and that it had always been God's purpose to save a great company through faith in him. Seen from this angle, even the law flowed from God's grace, because it prepared men and women to receive the Lord Jesus Christ when he came. In

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the last phrase, "faith," the sole means of grace, is again prominent.

*5. Heirs with Abraham* 3:23-29

The closing section of chapter 3 follows directly upon what Paul has said regarding the true purpose of the law. Still, a change has taken place, and this change justifies our taking these verses as a new step in Paul's argument. Before, he has been concerned with the law's true purpose, which is to lead men to Christ. Now, though he begins with this point, he soon moves on to the idea of a change of status for those who have passed from being under the bondage of the law to being sons in Christ. Before, we were prisoners, shut up under the law as under a guardian. Now we are sons, being reconciled to God and being made one with one another and with all who throughout history have been justified on the basis of God's promise.

**23** The proper understanding of the phrase "before this faith came" is found in the fact that the definite article occurs before the word "faith," a fact obscured by KJV. It is true that Paul can refer to faith generically as that on which every successful approach to God is founded. But this is not his meaning here. By "this faith" he means "the Christian faith," that faith he has just spoken of in v. 22--faith in Jesus Christ as Savior (cf. 1Tim 4:1 for a similar usage). This faith is like the faith exercised by Abraham. But it is different in that it relates to the explicit revelation of Christ in time and to the distinct Christian doctrines concerning him. Faith waited for this complete revelation. Paul's point is that the law was intended to function only during this 1,500-year period of anticipation. While the law was here, however, it did serve a purpose; and that purpose was to *hold us prisoner, locking us up* until Christ should be revealed. The second of these two words ( *sunkleio* ) has already occurred in v. 22. It means "to confine." The first word ( *phroureo* ) is similar. It means "to hold in custody" (cf. 1 Peter 1:5). Most likely Paul is thinking here that the law, like a jailer, has kept men locked up and

therefore out of trouble till Christ, the liberator, should come to set them free. However, it is also possible that he intends the reference more generally, inasmuch as the next verse speaks of a different kind of confinement entirely.

**24** It is unfortunate that KJV refers to the law as a "schoolmaster" and that NIV finds it necessary to work around the operative term by speaking of our being put under "charge" or "supervision" (v. 25). The term is *paidagogos* , which means "a child-custodi an" or "child- attendant." The pedagogue was a slave employed by wealthy Greeks or Romans to have responsibility for one of the children of the family. He had charge of the child from about the years six to sixteen and was responsible for watching over his behavior wherever he went and for conducting him to and from school. The pedagogue did not teach. Therefore the translation "schoolmaster" is wrong; if Paul had meant this, he would have used *didaskalos* rather than *paidagogos* . Paul's point is that this responsi bility ceased when the child entered into the

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fullness of his position as a son, becoming an acknowledged adult by the formal rite of adoption by his father (see on 4:1-7). "To Christ" is not to be taken in a geographic sense as though the pedagogue was conducting the child to a teacher, as some have implied. The reference, as in the preceding verse, is temporal; it means "until we come of age at the time of the revelation of our full sonship through Christ's coming." The next phrase (literally, "in order that by faith we might be justified") gives the ultimate objective of the law in its role of pedagogue. The emphasis is on justification rather than faith, for Paul has already shown that faith is the only means to salvation.

**25** The two most important points of the previous verses are repeated for emphasis: first, the time element--we were under the law as pedagogue *until* the faith should come, but now no longer; second, the reference to the fully revealed faith of Christianity (again with the definite article). No doubt, the experience of passing from law to promise needs to be repeated in everyone who comes to faith in Christ Jesus, for the law condemns in order that faith might make alive. But Paul does not have this thought in view here. He is thinking historically, stressing that the reign of law has ended for those believers who now through the coming of Jesus have become mature sons of God.

**26** But what are the actual results of this passage from the reign of law to grace through faith in Jesus Christ? In the final verses of the chapter Paul lists three of them. First, through faith in Christ all who believe become "sons of God"--that is, those who have passed through spiritual infancy into full maturity as justified persons. In view of Paul's previous reference to the pedagogue, the mention of full-grown sons is particularly appropriate. Still we must not think of this as a matter of growth alone. To be a true son of God is to be one who is justified by faith in Christ and who has therefore passed into a new and right relationship to God. Before, the person was under law. Now he is under grace. Before, he was

under the curse. Now he is the recipient of God's paternal favor. In this verse emphasis falls on the word *pantes* ("you ... *all* "), which at the same time becomes very personal by the change from the first person (in v. 25) to the second person. All are included in these statements, the Galatians particularly.

**27** This new relationship is not something natural to men, as though all automatically were or became God's sons. The fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of men are not NT concepts. True, God has a relationship to all men as Creator. Paul can say, as he did in speaking to the Athenians, "We are his children [literally, `begotten ones']" (Acts 17:28). But a creature is not necessarily a son. In fact, he can become a son only through union by faith with that unique Son of God, Christ Jesus. Baptism signifies this transforming identification with Christ. So Paul refers to it here. Paul is not now contradicting all he has previously taught about the means of salvation, as if he were

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suggesting that baptism will now replace circumcision as a saving sacrament or ordinance. No one is saved by baptism. Indeed, Paul mentions baptism only once in the paragraph, but faith five times. Rather baptism is an outward sign of the union that already exists through faith. To be "clothed with Christ" means to become like Christ. If Paul is thinking of the theatre, where this word was employed, he means that one is identified with Christ on the world stage.

**28** Second, through faith in Jesus Christ all who believe become one with each other so that, in one sense, there is now "neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female," but all are "one in Christ Jesus." In what sense is this true? Clearly, it does not mean that differences of nationality, status, and sex cease to exist. A Jew remains a Jew; a Gentile, a Gentile. One does not lose his identity by becoming a Christian. Paul simply means that having become one with God as his sons, Christians now belong to each other in such a way that distinctions that formerly divided them lose significance. Race is the first example, for Paul writes that there is neither Jew nor Greek. In Paul's day there was a deep division between the two. It was national in many respects, but the depth of the feeling (at least from the Jewish perspective) came from the fact that it was also religious. The Gentile was among the *goyim* . He was uncircumcised and therefore no child of Abraham. He did not have the law or the cermonies. He was not of the covenant. This barrier Paul now claims to have been broken down in Christ (cf. Eph 2:11-18). Today this principle must be extended to deny the significance of all racial barriers. In Christ there must be neither black nor white, Caucasian nor Oriental, nor any other such distinction. Social status is a second example, for there is neither "slave nor free." Again, this is not meant to deny that in actual fact there are social distinctions among men. It is merely meant to affirm that for those who are united to Christ these things do not matter. In fact, when such distinctions no longer matter, when men treat each other as true brothers in Christ regardless of their social standing, then the power of such distinctions is broken and a basis is laid for social change. On this pattern the ideal church should be composed of members from all spectra of society: wealthy and poor, educated

and uneducated, straight and long-hair, management and labor, and so on. There is also the example of sex, for Paul declares that there is neither "male nor female." It is hard to imagine how badly women were treated in antiquity, even in Judaism, and how difficult it is to find any statement about the equality of the sexes, however weak, in any ancient texts except those of Christianity. The Jew prayed, "I thank God that thou hast not made me a woman" (common morning prayer). Josephus wrote, "Woman is inferior to man in every way"

( *Contra Apion* , 2:24). The Gentile world had similar expressions. But Paul reverses this. Indeed, in this statement we have one factor in the gradual elevation and honoring of women that has been known in Christian lands. When Paul concludes this breakdown of the distinctions that are superseded by Christianity, he speaks of the fact that all who are in Christ are "one," using the mascu line form of the

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numeral. The distinction is not between masculine and feminine, as if Paul were reinstating male superiority again after having denied it, but between mascu line and neuter; that is, between a unified personality and a unified organization. Paul is, therefore, not thinking of a unified church structure but of the church as the living body of Christ. In this body all are truly one in and with one another. The only permissi ble distinctions are those of function (cf. 1Cor 12).

**29** Third, through faith in Jesus Christ all who believe also become one with those who have been saved by faith throughout the long history of salvation. Thus, by union with Christ, believers become "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Here that which Paul had previously declared to be Christ's--the inheritance of the promise made to Abraham (3:16)--he now applies to the Christian church as a whole by virtue of its actually being Christ's body. The verse carries the thought back to the beginning of the chapter. The use of the word "seed" without the article is of great importance, for it keeps the necessity of a union with Christ constantly before the Galatians. The prize the legalizers had been holding before the eyes of the Galatian Christians and by which they had hoped to win them to the ceremonial aspects of Judaism was the possibility of becoming part of the seed of Abraham. They meant physical seed. Paul now replies that what the legalizers were offering through circumcision was actually already theirs in Christ. But it was only theirs in him. He is *the* seed to whom the promises were made. Believers enter into the promises by entering into him, thereby also becoming spiritual seed to God. This last section of the chapter has been filled with references to Jesus Christ. He is mentioned six times, and the point of each reference is that Christians receive all that is of value spiritually by virtue of their attachment to him. Stott has noted,

This is a three-dimensional attachment which we gain when we are in Christ--in height,

breadth and length. It is an attachment in "height" through reconciliation to the God who,

although radical theologians repudiate the concept and we must be careful how we

interpret it, is a God "above" us, transcendent over the universe He has made. Next, it is an

attachement in "breadth," since in Christ we are united to all other believers throughout the

world. Thirdly, it is an attachment in "length," as we join the long, long line of believers

throughout the whole course of time.

It is through faith in Christ and in Christ alone that we find ourselves.

*6. Heirs of God* 4:1-7

For the final time Paul contrasts the condition in which believers found themselves before Christ's coming with the position they enjoy now. The difference between these verses and those that conclude chapter 3 is in emphasis. Before, Paul had been stressing the temporal nature of

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the change, showing what they *were then* in contrast to what they *are now* . At this point he dwells on their status, showing that whereas they were previ ously *slaves* , they had now become *sons* of their heavenly Father. This development flows from the thought of the pedagogue in vv. 23-29. It is the last stage in the six-part alternating argument (see on 3:1-5).

**1** The English reader will miss the flavor of these verses unless he realizes that the moment of growing up was a very definite one in antiquity and that it involved matters of great religious and legal importance. For instance, in Judaism a boy passed from adolescence to manhood shortly after his twelfth birthday, at which time he became "a son of the law." In the Greek world the minor came of age later, at about eighteen, but there was the same emphasis on an entering into full responsibility as an adult. At this age, at the festival of the *Apatouria* , the child passed from the care of his father to the care of the state and was responsible to it. Under Roman law there was also a time for the coming of age of a son. But the age when this took place may not have been as fixed as is often assumed (cf. Lightfoot), with the result that the father may have had discretion in setting the time of his son's maturity. If this is so, it leads one to think that Paul is referring primarily to the Roman custom as he observed that a child is under guardians and trustees "until the time set by his father." A Roman child became an adult at the sacred family festival known as the Liberalia, held annually on the seventeenth of March. At this time the child was formally adopted by the father as his acknowledged son and heir and received the *toga virilis* in place of the toga praetexta which he had previously worn. A sense of the moving nature of this moment can be gleaned from the description of the coming of age of Marcellus in the opening pages of *The Robe* by Lloyd Douglas. This is the general background (whether of Greek law, Roman law, or both) of Paul's words in these verses. When the child was a minor in the eyes of the law--it is this word that Paul actually uses--his status was no different from that of a slave, even though he was the future owner of a vast estate. He could make no decisions; he had no freedom. On the other hand, at the time set by his father the child entered into his

responsibility and freedom. The application of the illustration is obvious as Paul applies it to the inferior condition of a person under law, both a "minor" and a "slave," and to the new freedom and responsibility that come to him in Christ.

**2** It is interesting that here Paul drops the term "pedagogue" he had used earlier, and speaks instead of "guardians" ( *epitropous* ) and "trustees" ( *oikonomous* ) Too much should not be read into the change, but the fact that these refer to legal functions should not be missed either. It is status that Paul is thinking of.

**3** Paul now applies the illustration in the way already indicated. Before Christ came we were children and slaves, slaves to the "basic principles" or "elemental spirits" of the world. There has been much debate about the proper understanding of Paul's phrase at this point,

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and rightly so, for it contains a reference difficult to identify. There are three major interpretations. First, the reference to "basic principles" or "elemental spirits" (one word in Greek) may be taken as referring to the elementary stages of religious experience common to all men. This is the view of Burton, Ridderbos, and other com mentators. The word itself might suggest this, for the word is *stoicheia* and can mean "alphabet." This, or a meaning closely related to it, is involved at Hebrews 5:12 and may be involved in Colossians 2:8 and 20. If this is Paul's meaning, then he will be referring to the elemental stages of Jewish and Gentile religious experience his readers have gone through in the past but which have now been superseded by Christ's coming. The advantage of this view is that it can apply to both Jew and Gentile. The disadvantage is that it is hard to see how Paul could have considered pagan ideas of religion in any way a rudimentary preparation for the coming of the Christian gospel. A second interpretation (Lightfoot, Stott, Teeny) is that Paul is again referring to the law of Israel. This view is consistent with Paul's earlier teaching about the law--that it holds us in bondage (cf. 3:23). But in this case there are two further difficulties: (1) It does not seem to apply to the Gentiles, for the difficulty of the Gentiles is not that they were under law in the past but that they were in danger of falling under it in the present; and (2) it does not explain why or how Paul could add the phrase "of the world" to the term *stoicheia* . All Jewish thought would emphasize the other-worldly character of the law resulting from its divine origin. The third view is based on an entirely different meaning of the word *stoicheia* (Guth rie, Neil, and others). The word can mean "elements" in the same way twentieth-century man speaks of the chemical elements the world is made of. In ancient times, the elements were not regarded in the abstract way people today regard them. For one thing, there were fewer of them--earth, fire, air, and water. For another, they had been associated from the dawn of civilization with the gods. It would seem that in Paul's time this exceedingly early and primitive view had been expanded to the point at which the *stoicheia* also referred to the sun, moon, stars, and planets-- all of them associated with gods or goddesses and, because they regulated the progression of the calendar, also associated with the great pagan festivals honoring the gods. In Paul's mind these gods were demons. Hence, he would be

thinking of a demonic bondage in which the Gala tians had indeed been held prior to the proclamation of the gospel. There is some support for this position because in the verses that follow, Paul goes on to speak of these three crucial subjects in quick succession: (1) "those who by nature are not gods," presumably false gods or demons; (2) "those weak and miserable principles," again *stoicheia* ; and (3) "days and months and seasons and years" (vv. 9, 10). No doubt Paul would think of these demons in ways entirely different from the former thinking of the Galatians, but the idea of a spiritual warfare against demons would not be alien to the world view he found in the Bible and to which he adhered (cf: Rom 8:38, 39; Eph 6:10-12). Thus, this whole issue takes on a cosmic and spiritual significance. The ultimate contrast to freedom in Christ is bondage to Satan and the evil spirits.

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**4** But God has set men free! "But God...." These are wonderful words, because they show that
the entry of the Christian message is at the same time the turning point of history. Apart from these words, life offers no future hope for any man. Man is lost, without hope and without God. But God has intervened in a way that brings an effective and complete salvation. What God has done, Paul now spells out in two propositions. First, "God sent his Son." From the human point of view, that this happened in the fullness of time ("when the time had fully come," NIV) can be seen in historical factors. It was a time when the *pax Romana* extended over most of the civilized earth and when travel and commerce were therefore possible in a way that had formerly been impossible. Great roads linked the empire of the Caesars, and its diverse regions were linked far more significantly by the all-pervasive language of the Greeks. Add the fact that the world was sunk in a moral abyss so low that even the pagans cried out against it and that spiritual hunger was everywhere evident, and one has a perfect time for the coming of Christ and for the early expansion of the Christian gospel. Viewed theologically, however, it may also be said that the time was full because God himself had filled it with meaning.

**5** Specifically, God sent his Son "to redeem" those who were under the law's bondage and to provide the basis by which God is able "to adopt" them as sons. Men are in need of both actions. Redemption is mentioned here for the first time since 3:13 and is particulary appropriate in view of the imagery Paul is using. Redemption means "to buy out of slavery" (cf. note on 3:
13). Men were slaves either to the law, as Jews, or to the elemental spirits of the universe, as Gentiles. Christ paid the price of their redemption and set them free. Moreover, it is through him that men have the adoption. That is, they move not only from bondage into freedom, they also move into the great household of God where all are free men and all are also "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ"

(Rom 8:17). Observe the subtle link between the central ideas of this verse and the phrase "weak and miserable (literally, *poor* ) principles" of v. 9. The opposing powers are "weak" because they are unable to redeem and "poor" because unable to provide the adoption. And who is the one through whom this great salvation comes? It is striking how much of the important Christian teaching about Jesus is revealed in these two verses (vv. 4, 5). He is divine, for he is God's "Son." This speaks of an ontological relationship existing from eternity (Philippians 2:5-11; Col 1:15). He is human, for he was "born" of a woman. He was "under law"; that is, he was born into Israel and thus within God's historical stream of salvation. It may even be, as some have suggested, that Paul here alludes to the virgin birth--born "of a woman." For though Paul does not speak of the virgin birth directly either here or elsewhere, this alone does not prove that he was not aware of it or may not occasionally allude to it, as here. Indeed, if Paul traveled with Luke, who had undoubtedly investigated the birth stories, it is inconceivable that he who was "the apostle of the Gentiles" would not have known of them also.

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**6** Paul has already pointed out the first great redemptive act of God in history: God sent his Son. Here he adds the second act: "Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ` *Abba* , Father.'" In other words, to the other doctrines of the faith already spilling over from vv. 4, 5 Paul now adds Trinitarian teaching, for he is telling us that salvation consists in its fullness of acts by God the Father in sending both God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Moreover, this salvation is both objective and subjective. For God the Father sent the Son in order that believers might have the *position* of sons and He sent his Spirit so that they might have the *experience* of the same reality. We should notice that the gift of God's Spirit is not something the child of God is to strive after as if, having been given his salvation, he must now work to realize it or achieve it on a higher level. The Spirit is the gift of God to every believer because he is a son. How does the Christian experience what is his objectively? Paul suggests that this is primarily through the reality of God's presence made known to him in prayer. Before, he was alienated from God, who indeed did not even hear him. Now, being made a member of his family, the Christian is permitted and even urged to cry, "Father." " *Abba* " is the Aramaic diminutive for "Father," perhaps suggesting the overtones of the English word "Daddy" (cf. note on this verse). It was the word Jesus habitually used in his prayers to the Father and which he passed on to those who through him became God's children.

**7** This verse sums up all that Paul has said previously. Formerly slaves, Christians are now both sons and heirs. It is also connected with the previous verse, for Paul teaches that the use of the intimate word " *Abba* " in prayer, provided only by the work of the Holy Spirit within, is proof on the subjective level of sonship. The change from the plural of v. 6 to the singular of v. 7 brings the argument home to the individual reader. Each reader should therefore ask, "Do I know the reality of such an internal witness by God's Spirit? Am I assured of these things?" In the Greek the final words of this section are "through God" ( *dia Theo* ). Their

position emphasizes them. Confidence in such matters as Paul has just dealt with comes therefore, not from looking to man, but from looking to God and from receiving through faith what he has done in sending the Lord Jesus Christ to die for the believer and in sending the Holy Spirit to live within him.

*C. Paul's Appeal to the Galatians* (4:8-31)

*1. A return to bondage* 4:8-11

At this point the formal argument for salvation by grace rather than by works is finished, but Paul seems unwilling to end the discussion without a direct and, indeed, rather lengthy appeal to the Galatians. Paul reminds his converts of their former bondage in paganism and expresses his astonishment that they could even consider a return to such slavery. In view of this possibility, he

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expresses concern that his labors among them may have been to no purpose.

**8** For the third time (3:23 ff., 4:1 ff., and now) Paul speaks of the former enslaved state of the Galatians, and for the third time he has a very good reason. In these verses the point is made to establish the folly of their proposed actions in returning to the law-s bondage. It has already been shown that the former state of the Galatians, indeed of all who are not yet Christians, was one of bondage and immaturity (3:23, 4:1). But this is not all that can be said. That highly undesirable former state was also one of ignorance of the true God in which the pagans worshiped those who were not gods. The reference is clearly to the idols of paganism, which, in typically Jewish idiom, Paul terms "no gods." This ignorance was actually one cause of their bondage to paganism.

**9** That the Galatians had been in bondage through ignorance of the true God is no surprise to Paul. It is only what would be expected. But that they should return to their former bondage after having been delivered from such ignorance by God himself--this is astonishing and, indeed, totally incomprehensible. The astonishment involved in the question is more prominent in Greek than in most English translations, for it spans both vv. 8 and 9. A cumbersome but suggestive translation would be, "But how can it be that, on the one hand, having formerly been in ignorance of God and therefore enslaved to those who are not gods and, on the other hand, having come to know God or (which is more to the point) being known by him, you are now returning anew to those weak and bankrupt elements which once controlled you?" There are three causes for Paul's astonishment: (1) the Galatians were going back to what they had already been through--that is, not to a new error but to an old one; (2) they were turning from reality to nonreality; the absence of the article before the word "God" stresses a qualitative contrast between the true God revealed in Jesus Christ and the "no gods"; and (3) this was done after they had actually come to "know" God in a real

way. Paul uses the verb *ginosko* ("to know intimately and on a personal level") at this point rather than *oida* ("to know factually") or *orao* ("to know through perceiving something"). It is characteristic of Paul's understanding of man's total spiritual depravity and of the electing grace of God that he corrects himself so as not to leave the impression that it is possible for any man to come to know God by his own efforts. The truth of the matter is that God comes to know us. That is, he takes the initiative in salvation with the result that we come to know him only because we are first known of him. Again, the word "known" does not refer to factual knowledge, for God always possesses that. It refers rather to the fact that through Christ the individual Christian has become an object of God's personal recognition and favor. We have already seen why the elemental spirits or principles the Galatians were in the process of turning to are "weak and miserable" (literally, "powerless and bankrupt"). They are weak because they are unable to set men free, as Christ has done by redeeming them. They are bankrupt because they have no wealth by which they can provide an inheritance.

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**10** The Judaizers were probably not intentionally trying to enslave the Galatians and it is even more probable that the Galatians did not regard their current drift toward legalism as a return to slavery. Yet that is precisely what it was, as Paul reminds them. In view of the context of the struggle in Galatia, there can be little doubt that the observances the Galatians were succumbing to v. were Jewish observances. "Days" would refer to sabbath days, including also those feasts that fell on specified dates in the calendar. "Months" refers to celebrations tied to the recurring monthly cycle, such as those connected with the appearances of the new moon and which Isaiah ridiculed (Isa 1:14). "Seasons" refers to seasonal events of more than one day's duration--the feasts of Tabernacles, Passover, etc. "Years" most naturally refers to the recurring years of Jubilee. What is most significant, however, about this listing of the Jewish observances is not that Paul opposed them (it is easy to see how they might be opposed pragmatically as but one step in a full return to Jewish legalism--circumcision and a full keeping of the rabbinic traditions), but that he regards them in exactly the same light as the pagan festivals--that is, as under the control of and involving interaction with the demonic spirits. This does not, of course, mean that Paul would attribute the origin of the law, which includes the religious feasts, to Satan. Far from it. The law is good and from God. Nevertheless, even the law, when distorted into a way of trying to earn salvation, can be used by Satan to increase man's bondage. That Paul, the Jew, would even consider the Jewish observances in the same context as the pagan festivals shows the intensity of his estimate of the deadly character of legalism.

**11** Can the reader have missed that point? If so, it comes to him once again as the same Paul who speaks elsewhere of the fact that nothing can ever separate the Christian from the redeeming love of God (Rom 8:35-39) and who expresses confidence that the work begun in the Christian by God will be continued till the day of Christ (Philippians 1:6) now voices the thought that his labor in bringing

the gospel to the people of Galatia might be wasted. This is not, to be sure, the same thing as saying that a Christian can lose his salvation. Indeed, even the Galatians have not gone that far. They have only begun to observe the feasts; they have not been circumcised (5:2). Nevertheless, the are wavering ("turning," present tense, in v. 9), and their wavering is inexplicable and inexcusable. It can only be, as Peter is later to write of other unfruitful Christians, that they are "nearsighted and blind" and have "forgotten" that they were cleansed from old sins (2 Peter 1:9).

*2. Their past and present relationships* 4:12-20

If the reader is inclined to think Paul has been impersonal in dealing with the problems at Galatia, that he has been arguing as a scholar and not as a pastor, the present passage should disabuse him of this idea. It is true that Paul has dealt with the issues facing the Galatians as

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doctrinal ones and has even been somewhat distant in addressing his con verts. The most endearing he has been is in calling them "brothers" (1:11; 3:15), but this was certainly a common enough term within the Christian community. Now, however, all this changes and the deep pastoral concern of Paul for the Galatians, which has stood behind even his staunch biblical and theological discussion, surfaces. In these verses Paul intensifies his appeal to them. He calls them "brothers" once again and then "dear children." The latter, common in John's writings occurs only here in Paul's. Moreover, Paul bases his appeal on their past and present relationship to one another; first their past relationship to him (vv. 12-16) and second, his past and present relationship to them (vv. 17-20). He contrasts the former with their present actions; the latter he contrasts with the actions of the Judaizers.

**12** The opening words of this verse--literally "Become as I [am], for I as you"--are somewhat puzzling, for there is not enough said to know precisely what Paul is referring to. The NEB suggests that Paul is dealing with attitudes. "Put yourselves in my place, my brothers, I beg you, for I have put myself in yours." Cole suggests, "Be as frank and loving with me as I have been with you." Again, as Burton argues, Paul may have been asking the Galatians to enter into the freedom he knows, with the reminder that he had once been in bondage to the law as they are. In the context of Paul's thought in this chapter, it seems that the first part of the appeal must be understood as the third of these suggestions--that is, "Become like me in regard to my full faith in Christ and in my Christian liberty"--while, on the other hand, the second part of the sentence--" for I as you"--is best referred to Paul's identification of himself with the Galatians in order to preach the gospel to them. This point was one of Paul's evangelistic principles: "To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one 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 ... so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1Cor 9:20-22). When Paul went to

the Galatians, he did not stand on any special dignity or insist that the Galatians first come to him by becoming Jews. He went to them, becoming like them, in order to win them to Christ. This is a principle of great importance for all who are trying to witness. As Stott says, "In seeking to win other people for Christ, our end is to make them like us, while the means to that end is to make ourselves like them. If they are to become one with us in Christian conviction and experience, we must first become one with them in Christian compassion" (in loc.). In other words, while witnessing involves doctrine, it also involves the most personal involvement of the witness with those he is witnessing to.

**13** "You have done me no wrong" (v. 12) really belongs with this and the following verses. Verses 13-15, telling of Paul's original reception by the Galatians on the occasion of his first visit to them, are written to make exactly that point.

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How had Paul been received by the Galatians? He recalls that he had been received graciously and with compassion, as if he had been an "angel of God" (v. 14). And this was all the more remarkable in that he had not been at his best when among them. He had been ill. In fact, it was only as a result of his illness that he had visited Galatia in the first place. This illness, unpleasant as it was, was a temptation to the Galatians to despise him. Many attempts have been made to identify the precise nature of Paul's illness and link it to the question whether he is writing to Christians in northern or southern Galatia. But it is impossible to be so precise. Some have imagined that Paul was suffering from a form of malaria he had contracted while on the mosquito-infested coast and that he had therefore left the coastal area for the highlands to recuperate there. Others have guessed that Paul is referring to the physical abuse and resulting weakness he had suffered at Lystra (Acts 14:19; 2Tim 3:11) as a result of which he may have remained longer in southern Galatia than he had intended. Still others have linked Paul's illness to his "thorn in the flesh" (2Cor 12:7) and to his reference to the desire of the Galatians to give him their eyes (v. 15). On the basis of these verses they have supposed that Paul was suffering from an eye disorder, perhaps some form of ophthalmia. That Paul was suffering from bad eyesight is possible (see on 6:11), but it is not necessary to find a reference to that here. The only thing we can say with certainty is that some form of unpleasant illness lay behind Paul's first visit to the Galatians and that, though they could have despised him for his resulting appearance or weakness, they did not and, instead, received him favorably.

**14** They actually received him as "an angel of God," that is, as Paul said, "as if I were Christ Jesus himself," so great was their respect for him then. It is noteworthy that though Paul was well aware that he, like the Galatians, was a sinner and though he had been careful even when among them not to allow any conduct on their part that sug gested worship (see Acts 14:8-18), nevertheless he does not suggest in this passage that their respect for him as a messenger of God was in error. On the contrary, they were quite right to receive him in this manner. For he came among them as the approved messenger of the Lord Jesus Christ and

with the gospel. Today there are no apostles. But to the degree that ministers and teachers of the Word of God do teach the Word, to that same degree should they be received as the Galatians received the apostle Paul. Ministers should not be received and evaluated on the basis of their personal appearance, intellectual attainments, or winsome manner, but as to whether or not they are indeed God's messengers bearing the word of Christ. If they are, the message is to be received and acted upon, whether it appeals to a particular congregation or not.

**15** The Galatians had once had this attitude toward Paul, but their opinion of him had changed. Earlier they had not wronged him; now they have. The joy they had toward him had vanished and now they were apparently regarding him as their enemy. The word translated "joy" is literally "blessedness" ( *makarismos* ). They had counted them selves blessed as a result of Paul's having preached among them. If one thinks that Paul probably suffered from bad eyesight, then this

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particular expression of the extent of their joy--"you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me"--would refer to actual conversations they had at the time. If not, then it is just a vivid figure of speech.

**16** Why had Paul become their enemy? After their previous reception of him, the only explanation is that he had become an offense to them through telling them the truth. Unfortunately, this is often the case for those who are faithful to Christ's teaching.

**17** Paul can appeal, not only to the former attitude of the Galatians, nor only to the contrast between that and their actions in the present, but also to his own attitude toward them. His attitude was guileless and in marked contrast to that of those who had since been attempting to woo the Galatians into legalism. There are two things Paul notices about the actions of the legalizers: their zeal and their motives. Zeal itself is not bad. Certainly Paul had himself been zealous for the Galatians as he worked among them, and he encourages them to be zealous in regard to the gospel. If zeal is placed at the service of Christ, it is a fine characteristic. In the case of the legalizers, however, this zeal was misdirected. Indeed, it was a zeal by the legalizers in their own cause and for their own glorification, and it had the side effect of alienating the Galatians from both Paul and Christ. The word translated "zeal" ( *zeloo* ) can have two meanings, though in Greek thought both probably blended together more than the two do in English. It can mean "to envy." It can also mean "to be deeply concerned for someone to the point of courting their favor." That these do go together is seen in Paul's use of the same word in 2 Corinthians 11:2 in a marriage metaphor: "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him." This very metaphor may lie behind Paul's thinking in Galatians, for the actions of the legalizers may be compared to those of a seducer who would alienate an engaged woman from her fiance or a bride from her husband. There is here an interesting throwback to a previous

verse, as Cole notes. When Paul says that the Judaizers "want ... to alienate you" (literally, "lock you up," *ekkleisai* ), he is probably thinking of the function of the law in "locking" men up under sin ( *sunklei omenoi* , 3:23). The locking up was the same action, but the purposes were different. The law served a proper function in locking men up as sinners so that they might find salvation in Christ. The legalizers were trying to lock the Galatians up under law so that they might be separated from Christ and serve their teachers. For the present, the legalizers are courting the Galatians. But the Galatians must take note. When once they are courted and thereby estranged from both Paul and Christ, then the roles will be reversed and the Galatians will find that they must court the legalizers. Failure to maintain Christian liberty always leads to ecclesiastical as well as other forms of bondage.

**18** There are three possible meanings of this verse depending on who may be exercising such

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zeal--whether it is the legalizers, Paul, or the Galatians. (1) It can be the legalizers (Lightfoot, Ridderbos). In this case Paul is saying that he does not begrudge in itself the interest the legalizers are showing in the Galatians and indeed would not begrudge it at all if only it were in a good cause. He himself had shown similar zeal when among them. (2) It can be Paul (Burton). If so, the verse means, "It is only good to be sought after when it is in a good cause, as in the case of my relationship to you both in the past and now." (3) It can refer to the zeal of the Galatians (Cole), which Paul wishes was as intense now in pursuit of the right thing as it was when he was with them. If it were only a matter of grammar, the first of these interpretations might be pre ferred. In this case, *zelousthai* would be passive and the natural reference would be to the legalizers by whom they had "been courted." It is difficult, however, to believe that Paul can now be referring to these enemies of the gospel in a favorable way, especially after his earlier denunciations of them. To speak favorably in even a limited way would undermine his argument. On the other hand, if we are to take the verb as being in the middle voice and apply it to the Galatians who had once exercised zeal in following after the true gospel, then we get a transition that, though somewhat abrupt, nevertheless leads on to the thought of Paul's having been with them in the past and of his wish to be with them once again if possible (v. 20).

**19** Paul now comes to his main point in referring to the actions and motives of the legalizers. It is that his own attitude to the Galatians was quite different. He had not come to them in order to build up his own personal following, as the false teachers had. He had come to help them: first, to see that they were born again, and second, to labor for them till Christ himself should be formed in them. In calling the Galatians his "dear children" and in speaking of his labor "pains" on their behalf, Paul pictures himself as a mother who went through the pains of childbirth at the time of their conversion to Christ and who is apparently in labor once again as the result of their apparent defection. It is pedantic and foolish to

ask whether Paul is thinking of Christ being formed in the Galatians after their birth or as an embryo before birth, or again whether it is Christ who is being formed or the Galatians. Paul's metaphors are mixed. His point is merely that his pastoral concern matches his evangelistic fervor and, indeed, that neither has dimin ished because of the Galatians' listening to the legalizers.

**20** We do not know why Paul was unable to visit Galatia again at this time, but if he could (he says), he would change his tone. This does not mean that he would change his teaching or be less exacting in expecting them to conform to it, but his approach would be different. He could ask questions. He could find out why they were in the process of turning from freedom to bondage, and so he would no longer be perplexed and perhaps could even speak to them differently as he nevertheless continued to recall them to the gospel.

*3. An appeal from allegory* 4:21-31

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Commentators are sometimes embarrassed because Paul's doctrinal argument in the central two chapters of Galatians concludes with an allegory based on what they consid er an unjustified use of an OT story. But this is an unnecessary embarrassment, as is also the thought that the allegory was somewhat of an afterthought for Paul, who had, in fact, actually concluded his argument early in the fourth chapter. In one sense, the formal argument did conclude there. What follows (from 4:8 on) is mostly an appeal to the Galatians to remain in that freedom to which God has called them. However, one may just as well feel that Paul has deliberately saved precisely this argument for his capstone. The advantages are these: (1) The allegory allows Paul to end on a final citation of the law and, in particular, on a passage involving Abraham, who has been his primary example; (2) it allows him to use a method of argument which, we may assume, had been used by the legalizers, thus turning their own style of exegesis against them; (3) it illustrates and reviews all his main points--the radical opposition between the principle of law and the principle of faith, the fact that life under law is a life of bondage and the life of faith is freedom, that the life of faith is a result of the supernatural working of God by means of the Holy Spirit; (4) the story contains an emotional overtone suited both to a wrap-up of the formal argument and to a final personal appeal; and (5) it gives Paul a base upon which to suggest what he had undoubtedly thought but had apparently been reluctant to say previously--that the Galatians should obey God by casting out the legalizers (v. 30). Therefore, the allegory effectively ties together both the doctrinal section of the letter and the appeal based on it, while at the same time leading into the ethical section that begins in chapter 5. Paul introduces the facts of the story itself (vv. 21-23), develops the allegory (vv. 24-27), and then applies the allegory to the Galatians and indeed to all believers (vv. 28-31). The latter section speaks of the supernatural basis of the new life in Christ, the inevitabil ity of persecution for those who stand by the gospel, and the need to so stand.

**21** Paul has already appealed to statements of the law to show that the law brings a curse to those who desire to be under it (3:10-14). But that was both indirect and negative. Now he appeals directly and demands that those desiring to be under law hear what the law actually says and retreat from their folly. He does not yet consider that the Galatians have actually rejected the gospel, only that they are desiring to reject it for law.

**22** Now Paul turns for the final time to the case of Abraham upon whom the legalizers had undoubtedly based a large part of their argument. Jews derived much satisfaction from their physical descent from Abraham and in many cases certainly considered the promises and blessings of God to be theirs because of it. This outlook had evoked John the Baptist's comment, "Do not think you can say to yourselves, `We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham" (Matt 3:9), and had become the

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subject of the extended debate between Jesus and the Pharisees recorded in John 8. In that debate Jesus had denied that the Pharisees were descended from Abraham spiritually. The present passage deals with the same issue, only Paul's method of attack is slightly different. Instead of denying outright their descent from Abraham, Paul simply reminds his opponents that Abraham had two sons (Ishmael and Isaac are meant, though Abraham did have other sons later) and asks, in effect, which of these two children the legalizers take after.

**23** There were two main differences between these sons. The first is that they were born of different mothers (v. 22). One was a free woman, the other a slave. This, accord ing to ancient law, also affected the sons' status. The second difference was in the manner of their conception. Ishamel's was entirely by natural means. Abraham was elderly at the time, about eighty-six years old, but still the conception was natural. In Isaac's case the conception was by means of a miracle; for by this time Abraham had passed the age at which it was normally possible to engender children--he was ninety-nine years old--and Sarah was long past the age of conceiving them. The preposition "through" in Paul's phrase "as the result of [or through] a promise" indicates that the promise of God called life into being. Moreover, in v. 29 the phrase "through a promise" becomes "by the power of the Spirit," and this makes the supernatural character of the birth even clearer. It is apparent that this contrast lends itself well to the very distinction Paul is trying to make between natural or man-made and supernatural or God-made religion. The religion of works and law corresponds to the natural birth of Ishmael. The religion of the Spirit, which is Christianity, corresponds to the supernatural birth of Isaac.

**24-26** This basic distinction between the two sons and in the manner of their concep tion and birth Paul now carries out in more complete spiritual terms, using the historical account as an allegory. This does not mean that Paul's exegesis is

fanciful, as some have implied, but only that he uses the story for the sake of its major principle, which he then quite properly applies to the struggle between Judaism and Christianity. The best way to understand the allegory is to carry it through in parallel columns. Lightfoot argues that the need to do this is suggested by the text itself, for the word *sustoichei* in v. 25 (translated "corresponds") refers to things that are in the same column --letters of the alphabet, for instance, or soldiers at attention. Thus we have:

Hagar, the bond woman -- Sarah, the free woman

Ishmael, a natural birth -- Isaac, a supernatural birth

The old covenant -- The new covenant

Earthly Jerusalem -- Heavenly Jerusalem

Judaism -- Christianity

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In this arrangement Hagar, the slave woman, stands for the old covenant enacted at Sinai, while her son, Ishmael, stands for Judaism with her center at earthly Jerusalem. This is one form of religion. On the other hand, Sarah, the free woman, stands for the new covenant enacted on Calvary through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and her son, Isaac, stands for all who have become part of the church of the heavenly Jerusalem through faith in Christ's sacrifice. On the most superficial level, Isaac and Ishmael were alike in that both were sons of Abraham. But on a more fundamental level they were entirely different. In the same way, Paul argues, it is not enough merely to claim Abra ham as one's father. Both Christians and Jews did that. The question is: Who is our mother and in what way were we born? If Hagar is our mother, then we were born of purely human means and are still slaves. If our mother is Sarah, then the birth was by promise, and we are free men. It is significant that when Paul contrasts "the present city of Jerusalem" with "the Jerusalem that is above" he is mixing two metaphors so as to enrich his meaning. Strictly speaking, the phrase "the present city of Jerusalem" should be matched with "the Jerusalem that is to come," and the phrase "the Jerusalem that is above" should be matched with "earthly Jerusalem." These connotations are more or less evident, though unexpressed. But that Paul did not actually say "the Jerusalem that is to come" may be significant; for while it is true that there is a Jerusalem to come (Rev 21:2), it is also true, though in another sense, that this Jerusalem is now present in those born again by God's Spirit.

**27** There is no evidence that the verse Paul now quotes (Isa 54:1) was ever associated with the story of Hagar and Sarah and their children; nevertheless, it is highly appropri ate. The verse is a prophecy of Jerusalem's restoration following the years of Babylonian captivity and involves the thought that the blessing of the latter years will be greater than that enjoyed formerly. The pre- exilic Jerusalem and the post-exilic Jerusalem corre spond, then, to Paul's distinction between the earthly and heavenly Jerusalems and the promise itself to the blessings of God to

Israel under the old covenant as contrasted with the greater blessings to the church under the new covenant. The one element common to these verses is the supernatural intervention of God in order to establish Christianity. The new element is the suggestion, soon to be fulfilled, that the numbers of Christians will outnumber those within Judaism.

**28** In the third section of this treatment of the Hagar and Sarah story Paul applies the allegory to all Christians, pointing out that because they are like Isaac, who had a supernatural birth, rather than like Ishmael, their experiences will be consistently similar to that of the younger son.

**29** In the first place, they must expect to endure persecution from their brother. Paul is referring to an incident in Genesis 21. At the weaning of Isaac, when he was probably about two years of age and his half-brother Ishmael about seventeen, Ishmael "laughed at" or "mocked" Isaac. This was why Sarah asked that Hagar and her son be sent away. So it is today, says Paul. True

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Christians will be persecuted, as Jesus himself taught (Matt 5:10-12) and the apostles confirm (Philippians 1:29; 1Thess 3:1-4; 2Tim 3:12; 1 Peter 4:12, 13). And the remarkable thing is that this will not always be by the world but also and indeed more often by their half-brothers--the unbelieving but religious people in the nominal church. This is the lesson of history. It was the Jews who killed the prophets, not the Gentiles. It was the Pharisees and other religious leaders who opposed Jesus and instigated his execution, which was carried out by the Romans. Paul's fiercest opponents were the fanatically religious Judaizers. Today the greatest enemies of the believing church are found among the members of the unbelieving church, the greatest opposition emanating from the pulpits and church hierarchies.

**30** Second, the Christians at Galatia must recognize the categorical incompatibility of man-made and God-made religion and respond by casting out the legalizers. Those born after the flesh (v.
29) will never share in the inheritance God has reserved for his true children, born after the Spirit. Therefore, Christians are to reject both legalism and those who teach it. It is interesting, as Stott notes, that the verse of Scripture (Gen 21:10) that the Jews undoubtedly interpreted as a statement of the principle of God's rejection of the Gentiles Paul now boldly turns around and applies to the exclusion of unbelieving Jews from Christianity. The procedure would probably have infuriated his opponents, but his point was well taken. God does not look on physical descent but on spiritual affinity. The true sons of Abraham are those who are born of the Spirit.

**31** Of such are the Galatians. The "therefore" of this verse is not designed to draw a special conclusion from the verses immediately preceding, but rather to sum up the whole allegory and indeed the whole of Paul's doctrinal argument. The shift to the first person "we," instead of "you" or "they," once again includes both Paul himself and all who embrace the true gospel.

## **III. The Call to Godly Living** (5:1-6:10)

### *A. Summary and Transition* 5:1

Paul has already reached two important goals in his appeal to the Galatians. He has defended his apostleship, including a defense of his right to preach the gospel with or without the support of other human authorities (1:11-2:21), and he has defended the gospel itself, showing that it is by grace alone entirely apart from human works that the Christian is freed from the curse of the law and brought into a right relationship with God (3:1-4:31). But there is one more point to be made before Paul concludes his letter: that the liberty into which believers are called is not a liberty that leads to license, as his opponents would charge, but rather a liberty that leads to mature responsibility and holiness before God through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. This theme domi nates the last two chapters of the Epistle.

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**1** Before plunging into this third section of his letter, Paul interjects a verse that is at once a summary of all that has gone before and a transition to what follows. It is, in fact, the key verse of the entire Epistle. Because of the nature of the true gospel and of the work of Christ on his behalf, the believer is now to turn away from anything that smacks of legalism and instead rest in Christ's triumphant work for him and live in the power of Christ's Spirit. The best MS evidence divides the verse into two parts--a declaration of Christ's purpose in saving us ("It is for freedom that Christ has set us free") and an appeal based upon that purpose ("Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be bur dened again by a yoke of slavery")--rather than leaving it as one sentence as does the KJV. Thus, though only loosely connected with the preceding, the first part aptly sums up the message of chapters 3 and 4, while the second part leads into the ethical section. The appeal is for an obstinate perseverance in freedom as the only proper response to an attempt to bring Christians once more under legalism. Since the Jews of Paul's time spoke of "taking the yoke of the law upon oneself," it is likely that Paul is referring to such an expression here. To the Jews the taking up of the law's yoke was good; indeed, it was the essence of religion. To Paul it was assuming the yoke of slavery. Perhaps Paul was also remembering that Jesus had spoken of Chris tians taking his yoke upon them (Matt 11:29, 30), but this involves a different kind of service--one that is "easy" and "light"--as the readers of the letter are to see.

## *B. The Danger of Falling From Grace* 5:2-12

The reader is apt to think that in the opening verses of chapter 5 Paul, who seemed to be moving on to the ethical section of his letter, here nevertheless reverts to a theme he has already covered and so departs from his purpose. But to reason this way is to miss an important point-- that even the ethical life must begin by recognizing that the founda tion of God's dealings with men is grace

through faith rather than legalism. "Do you wish to lead a holy life?" Paul seems to be asking. "Then begin with the principles of faith and shun legalism." Holiness will never come as the result of someone insisting on adherence to either man-made or even God-made regulations. This passage (vv. 2-12) makes this point twice: first, from the point of view of those who, like the Galatians, may be about to fall into legalism, thinking it somehow to be a higher good (vv. 2-6) and, second, by reference to those who teach such false doctrines (vv. 7-12).

**2** NIV's "Mark my words!" is actually the word "Behold!" or "Look!" used as an intro ductory particle. It calls attention to what follows. If the Galatians allow themselves to be circumcised, the result will be that Jesus Christ will profit them absolutely nothing at all. The phrase has the force of a disposition in court of law. Circumcision was, of course, the particular form of legalism that was a problem in Paul's day, and the argument is simply that, circumcision having taken the position it had and signifying what it did, the choice was between Christ and no

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circumcision at all, or circumcision and no Christ at all. In other words, God would put a minus sign before Christ in the lives of the Galatians if they put a plus sign before anything else. This explains why Paul is so categorical in condemning the practice of circumcision for the Galatians. It is not that circumcision in itself is that important. In fact, Paul himself had once had Timothy circumcised; just four verses farther on he will declare that "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value." What Paul is condemning is the theology of circumcision-- namely, the theology that makes works necessary for salvation and seeks to establish conformity to some external standards of behavior as a mark of spirituality. In this verse the tense of the verb "to be circumcised" is important. It is a present passive (as it is in v. 3), which gives the sense, "If you should let yourselves be circum cised." This implies quite clearly that the Galatians had not yet taken this step but rather were just considering it, and therefore their motivation becomes the important thing. It also means that Paul was in no sense condemning those Jewish Christians who had always, as it were, been circumcised. His advice to such is given in 1 Corinthians 7:17-20. If a man who has been circumcised becomes a Christian, he should remain circumcised, not seeking to change his status. If he is uncircumcised, he should remain uncircumcised. The point, once again, is that particular forms of legalism are not them selves the important issues. The issue is works versus grace, or, as we will soon see, spirit versus flesh. Paul's concern was that nothing should cloud perception of this central Christian doctrine.

**3** Paul has already given one good reason why the Galatians should remain firm in the freedom Christ has given them: to fall into the practice of circumcision is to lose the value of Christ's death both for salvation and for living the Christian life. Now he adds another: to choose circumcision is to choose legalism, which in turn involves taking on the burden of the whole law. Had the legalizers warned the Galatians that this was involved? One is inclined to doubt it, feeling rather that

they were slyly proceeding step by step in their efforts to impose legalistic religion--first the feasts (4:10), then circumcision, and even tually the whole law.

**4** Once again Paul reiterates his points, this time dropping the hypothetical "if" for the much stronger statement: "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace." Have they desired to be saved by legalism? In that case, Christ is of no value to them and the burden of keeping the whole law is theirs. What does "You have fallen away from grace" mean? Some have taken it as teaching that salvation can be lost. Thus, though this is the only place in Scripture where the phrase occurs, the statement has assumed an importance far beyond Paul's use of it and in a way entirely out of keeping with his context. The phrase does not mean that if a Christian sins, he falls from grace and thereby loses his salvation. There is a sense in which to sin is to fall into grace, if one is repentant. But to fall from grace, as seen by this context, is to fall into legalism. Or to put it another way, to choose legalism is to relinquish grace as the principle by which one desires to be

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related to God. The article with "grace" distinguishes it as that specific grace of God in Christ that Paul has already stated to be the core of the gospel.

**5** The essence of that gospel is now brought forward in the last full statement of the principle of justification by faith in the letter. Up to this point Paul has been talking only of the Galatians, using the pronoun "you." He has been warning them about what they seemed to be doing. Now the pronoun changes to "we" and is placed in an emphatic position--"we wait" and "we hope." It is as if Paul is saying, "But, on the other hand, we Christians do not choose legalism; rather, we wait in faith through the Spirit for the full realization of God's righteousness." Each word in this verse is important and, except for the nontheological words, has already been defined. After "we," which is prominent in the Greek text, comes "through the Spirit." It is a reminder of the electing grace of God in salvation. Next is the phrase "by faith." This is the key word and stands in contrast to flesh, as all should be aware from the arguments of chapters 3 and 4. Circum cision is of the flesh. Faith denotes an entirely different approach. Next, the Christian "waits eagerly" for the full realization of his salvation. He does not *work* for it; hc *waits* for it. In the context, "the righteousness for which we hope" does not refer to that imputed righteousness the heliever has in thc prcsent through faith in Christ's death, though the thought is not far away, but rather (in line with the ethical section to follow) to that actual righteousness the believer is to grow into and which he is to be perfectly conformed to in glory. In the Bible, "hope" refers to that which, though certain, is not yet fully realized.

**6** Two more points are made as this verse wraps up the first half of this section. First, as hard as Paul has been on circumcision and as much as it would serve his purpose polemically to downgrade it in preference to uncircumcision, he nevertheless acknowl edges that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision in themselves count for anything. This is further evidence that his concern is theological and not ceremonial. It is a similar point to that made about eating

meat offered to idols (1Cor 8:8). The second point is that true faith, having an ethical side, works itself out "through love." This is what matters--this kind of faith! True, we are saved through faith rather than by works; but faith is no mere intellectual conviction, as if a Christian could do as he wishes so long as he believes properly. This is a horrible idea, as Paul writes elsewhere (Rom 6:1, 2). To believe is to place one's personal confidence in C`hrist, who loves us and gave himself for us. Therefore, since Christians have learned love in such measure and at such a source, faith must issue in a genuine and self-denying love for others. It is worth noting that, in making these two points, Paul has come very close to giving a full and extremely beautiful definition of true religion. "In this is the whole of Chris tianity," says Bengel. The sentence begins with a reference to those who are "in Christ Jesus," so placing the emphasis both in point of order and in importance on God's act of engrafting a person into his Son. It proceeds by repudiating the value of form or ceremony in determining a person's

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relationship to God. It ends with a unique emphasis upon the combination of faith and love toward both God and man. Paul does not combine the words in this manner anywhere else in his writings. In vv. 5, 6 the three great terms "faith ... hope ... and love" appear together (cf. 1Cor 13; Col 1:4, 5; and 1Thess 1:3).

**7** In the first half of this section the contrast has been between those who desire to add circumcision to Christianity and true believers who trust Christ alone. Paul has indicated the contrast by the pronouns "you" and "we." Now the contrast changes to that between the false teacher or teachers, designated as "the one who is throwing you into confu sion," and "I," that is, Paul, who is teaching correctly. Paul was fond of using athletic imagery to describe the Christian life. To him life is a race, demanding adherence to rules and discipline if the race is to be completed successfully and a prize obtained. Quite often he thinks of himself as the competitor (1Cor 9:24-27; Gal 2:2; Philippians 3:13, 14; 2Tim 4:7). At other times, as here, he applies it to the life of his converts. The Galatians had begun the race well, Paul testifies. Theirs had not been merely an intellectual assent to certain truths, that is, not mere orthodoxy divorced from Christian life and character. Nor was theirs the life of Christianity without doctrine. This is the full meaning of the phrase "obeying the truth." Theirs was both a head and a heart religion. In spite of this good beginning, however, something had obviously gone wrong. Someone had hindered them. The verb *enkopto* --a military term--refers primarily to setting up an obstacle or breaking up a road. In this context, it probably refers to the illegal interference of a runner who cuts in ahead of another and thereby disadvantages him. Thus, so it seemed, the situation at Galatia was one in which the Galatians had already ceased, in some measure, to obey the plain truth of the gospel.

**8** But what is to be said regarding the false teaching and false teacher or teachers'? Much indeed. In three succinct statements Paul traces the origin, results, and end of such doctrine. What is the origin of this teaching? "Well," says Paul somewhat understating the case, "its origins do not lie in the one who calls you." The one who called the Galatians is obviously God (so at 1:
6), but Paul does not say that the origin of the false teaching is with Satan, though that may well be the case. The point is simply that the doctrine of salvation by works is not of God but rather proceeds from that which is hostile to God's grace.

**9** Second, Paul speaks of the present results of such teaching: it spreads. It is permeating, insidious, and therefore dangerous. No doubt Paul is quoting a proverb at this point, as he also seems to be doing in 1 Corinthians 5:6. But there is no need to identify it as a specific saying of the Lord, as some have done. The point is merely that false teaching, like yeast, grows and affects everything it touches. Therefore, this alone would justify Paul's alarm at the state of affairs in the Galatian churches.

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**10** That it is the nature of evil to spread does not mean that God will permit evil to triumph ultimately. In fact, its end is the opposite. In completing his analysis of the situation, Paul therefore concludes with an optimistic expression of his confidence that the Galatians will return to a right mind and that the false teacher, whoever he is or however important he may seem to be, will suffer God's judgment. Paul's use of the singular ("the one") must not be overstressed. Some question exists about what the phrase "no other view" refers to. "No other view" from what? From the gospel? From their first opinions formed as the result of Paul's teaching? Or to what Paul has just said regarding the origin and danger of the legalizers' teaching? The answer is not given. Any of the three is possible, and indeed Paul may have all of them in mind.

**11** Two personal remarks conclude the section, one in this verse and one in the next. The first presents a difficulty. What does Paul mean by saying, "If I am still preaching circumcision"? This cannot refer to his pre-Christian days only, for there would be no point to the criticism in that case. Besides, Paul links his alleged preaching to times in which he was persecuted as a Christian. But is one to believe that anyone could actually have made that claim in view of Paul's stand on the circumcision issue? Those who feel the force of this objection are inclined to take the verse in the sense of "If I preach circumcision, which everyone knows I do not" (gaining support from the omission of the word "still" in a few ancient MSS), or else by arguing that Paul must have preached circumcision early in his ministry. The most likely explanation is simply that Paul's words are a reply to an accusation that he did preach circumcision when it suited him, however unfounded or unlikely that accusation was. The accusation could have originated from views such as those expressed in 1 Corinthians 7:18 or from the fact that Paul had once encouraged Timothy to be circumcised. The "offense [ *skandalon* ] of the cross" is an important concept in Paul and is a highly important reference in this context. The Greek word means a "trap," "snare," or "temp tation." Paul uses it in the sense of that which is so offensive to the natural mind that it arouses fierce opposition. But why should Paul link his refusal to approve circumcision

for Gentiles to the offense of the cross? Obviously, for the same reason that he opposed circumcision or any other work of the flesh generally. All these things--feasts, circumci sion, ceremonies, legal observances, or anything symbolizing external religion today-- are of man and are part of a system that seeks to attain standing before God through merit. In opposition to this, the cross proclaims man's complete ruin in sin, to the degree that nothing he does or can do can save him, and thus also proclaims man's radical need for God's grace. The natural man does not understand such teaching (1Cor 2:14) and, in fact, hates it, because it strips away any pretense of spiritual achievement. It is "only by the gift of God's Spirit," as Cole maintains, that "that which was once a `trap' to him become[s] his greatest boast and glory" (on Gal 6:14).

**12** The second of Paul's personal remarks concerns the legalizers. It is his wish, ex pressed

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somewhat obliquely, that they would not stop with circumcision in their zeal for ordinances but rather would go on to castration. Sacral castration was known to citizens of the ancient world; it was frequently practiced by pagan priests as in the cult of Attis-Cybele, which was prominent in Asia. But for Paul to compare the ancient Jewish rite of circumcision to pagan practices even in this way is startling. For one thing, it puts the efforts of the Judaizers to have the Gentiles circumcised on the same level as abhorred pagan practices. For another, it links their desire for circumcision to that which even in Judaism disbarred one from the congregation of the Lord (Deut 23:1). To many in our day Paul's expression sounds coarse and his wish reprehensible. But we may be sure that Paul did not speak out of a malicious spirit or in ill temper. He spoke out of a concern for the gospel of grace and for God's truth. As Stott says, "If we were as concerned for God's church and God's Word as Paul was, we too would wish that false teachers might cease from the land" (in loc.).

## *C. Life in the Spirit* (5:13-26)

### *1. Liberty is not license* 5:13-18

Paul has already spoken of freedom several times in this letter (2:4, 4:26, 31; 5:1). From one point of view, Galatians is almost entirely about freedom. Still, up to this point, Paul has not yet defined it, at least not in practical terms dealing with the ethical life. Now he does so, showing not only the true nature of Christian freedom but also that it is only through the life of the Spirit and by the Spirit's power that the Christian can live for God and not fulfill the desires of his sinful nature. Negatively, freedom in Christ is not license. Positively, it is service both to God and man. It expresses itself in the great Christian virtues. This latter point is emphasized by two contrasting catalogs of the works of the flesh versus the

fruit of the Spirit. One reason why Paul adds this section to his letter is to show what he means by "faith expressing itself through love" (v. 6). Another is apparently to counter developing strife and divisiveness in the churches of Galatia (so Cole), for the verses speak of a "biting," "devouring," and "destroying" of each other that seems to have been taking place. The greatest reason, however, is undoubtedly Paul's desire to complete his portrait of true Christianity by showing that the freedom we have been called to in Christ is a responsi ble freedom that leads to holiness of life. Called to freedom? Yes! But this is a freedom to serve God and others as love dictates! That Paul would have had this point uppermost in mind is evident from the apparent and quite understandable fear within Judaism that a faith without law would not be sufficiently strong to resist the ethical debauchery of paganism.

**13** Verse 13, like v. 1, is transitional and marks a new beginning. The fact that "you" is emphasized in the Greek by being placed first in the sentence (cf. NIV) shows that Paul is

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building on the confidence expressed earlier as to what side the Galatians are on (v. 10); the language of the verse shows that Paul is echoing the original challenge of v. 1: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free." On the other hand, while in the first instance Paul followed his statement with a warning about falling again into slavery, in this case the warning is changed into the demand not to allow this freedom to become an excuse for sinful self-indulgence. Here the contrast is between indulgence and the serving of one another in love. Paul says that the Christian is not to allow this freedom--the articles emphasize that this is the freedom in Christ Paul has been writing about--to become a beachhead for the armies of indulgence to gain a foothold in his life. The first meaning of the Greek word *aphorme* originally means "a starting point or base of operations for an expedi tion," then an "opportunity" or "pretext" (so 2Cor 11:12). When Paul speaks of *sarx* ("flesh"; "sinful nature" in NIV) he means all that man is and is capable of as a sinful human being apart from the unmerited intervention of God's Spirit in his life (see comment on v. 16). It is ironical that, having urged the Galatians not to become slaves to law, Paul should now encourage them to become slaves of one another--for that is what the verb trans lated "serve" ( *douleuete* ) means. It is a paradox, but the paradox is instructive. The Galatians are to be slaves of one another, though this slavery is not at all like the first. In fact--this is the paradox--it is the Christian form of being free. Slavery to sin is involuntary and terrible; a man is born into sin (Ps 51:5) and cannot escape it (Rom 7:18). Slavery to law, which comes by choice, is foolish and burdensome. On the other hand, slavery to one another is voluntary and a source of deep joy. It is possible only because Christians are delivered through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit from the necessity of serving sin in their lives.

**14** Throughout his letter Paul has been arguing against law and in defense of the gospel of pure grace. Now, in a most striking fashion, he returns to law and seems to speak favorably of it, stressing that when Christians love and serve others, the

law is fulfilled. There is a play on two meanings of the Greek word *peplerotai* , translated "summed up." On the one hand, it refers to the fact that the law can aptly be summarized by the words of Leviticus 19:18. This idea was a commonplace of rabbinic opinion and Jesus endorsed it in Matthew 22:39 and Luke 10:25-28. On the other hand, the word can also mean "fulfilled" (as in Rom 13:8), and in this sense Paul is suggesting that it is actually out of the new life of love made possible within the Christian community through the Spirit that the law finds fulfillment. This use of the word "law" is most instructive, because it shows that in spite of all Paul has said, there remains a sense in which the requirements of the law are a proper concern for Christians. This does not mean that the Christian is to make progress in holiness by once again setting up a system of rules and regulations. Nothing in the last half of Galatians or any other part of the NT suggests this. Still, it means that the essential ends of the law will be met in those who, being called by God and being filled with the Spirit, allow God to produce the Spirit's fruit in their character. On this verse, Ridderbos says, "This fulfillment [of the law] remains a divine

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requirement. But since the law, as de manding agent, cannot effectuate the fulfillment, it is not the imperative of the law but the bond of faith in Christ which forms the ground and origin of the fulfillment of the will of God."

**15** It is not hard to imagine the kind of strife that may have been present in the Galatian churches, either strife parallel to that of the Corinthians (1Cor 1:10-12; 3:1-4) or strife arising directly out of the conflict with the legalizers. Paul does not say precisely what it was. That it was, so far as Paul knew, even then existing is evident from the tense of the verbs. That it was intense seems evident from the verbs themselves as well as by the fact that they move by increasingly strong degrees to a climax.

**16** What is the solution to such biting, devouring, and destroying that is all too common among Christian assemblies? The answer, Paul says, is in living by the Spirit. Then, and only then, will one cease to gratify the desires of the flesh. It is the Spirit alone who can keep the believer truly free. The contrast between *sarx* ("flesh"), on the one hand, and *pneuma* ("spirit"), on the other, is one of the characteristic themes in NT, and particularly Pauline, theology. It is as important, for instance, as the contrast between the works of the law and the hearing of faith which has thus far dominated the letter. In the earliest days of the Greek language *sarx* meant mostly the soft, fleshy parts of the body, like its Hebrew equivalent *basar* . But *sarx* soon came to denote the body as a whole (that is, the material part of a person) and after that, by extension, the whole man as conditioned by a bodily existence and by natural desires. In this sense, it is not bad. But when the word was taken over into the Christian vocabulary, as it was to a large degree by Paul, it came to mean man as a fallen being whose desires even at best originate from sin and are stained by it. Thus, *sarx* came to mean all the evil that man is and is capable of apart from the intervention of God's grace in his life. In this respect *sarx* is synonomous with "the natural man" or "the old nature." Because fallen man is only flesh apart from the intervention of God's Spirit, "old nature"

or "sinful nature" (as in NIV) rather than "lower nature" (NEB, Phillips) or "animal nature" is the better translation in these passages.

*Sarx* also contains thoughts of human limitation, both intellectually (1Cor 2:14, where, however, the term *psychikos* is used) and morally (Rom 7:18). Thus, that which is flesh is incapable of knowing God apart from special revelation and the redemption that removes the barrier of sin. The other term is *pneuma* , which is usually translated "spirit." Its meaning in the earliest writers is "wind," "air," "breath," or "life." The word later came to refer to the spirit or incorporeal part of man, which (like breath) leaves him at death. These meanings also occur in the NT. But in biblical texts the emphasis is always on "spirit" as the Spirit of God. Indeed, it is because God breathes his spirit or breath into man that man has breath. The word also refers to the incorporeal part of man (which has God - consciousness) and to incorporeal beings such as

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angels or demons. In distinctly religious terminology, it is the Spirit of God who takes up residence in Christians to enable them to understand spiritual things (1Cor 2:14), receive Christ as Savior and Lord, call God "Father" (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6), and develop a Christian personality. The Spirit, in many characteristic passages, is thus the presence of God in the man, through which fellowship with God is made possible and power given for winning the warfare against sin in the soul. The Spirit is not natural to man in his fallen state. But this does not mean that by the gift of the Spirit the redeemed man escapes the need to struggle against sin. The Spirit simply makes victory possible and that only to the degree that the believer "lives by the Spirit" or "walks" in him. The present tense of the verb "walk" ( *peripateite* ) points to a continuing condition or need for it. That the word is an imperative demonstrates the necessity of a choice.

**17** A characteristic of the contrast between flesh and spirit--Paul has stressed the contrast by eliminating the articles before each word in v. 16--is that the two principles are in deep and irreconcilable conflict. In the sense in which Paul uses the words, the flesh does no good and does not desire good, whereas the spirit does no evil and, indeed, opposes anything that does not please God. A fuller discussion of this same principle occurs in Romans 7. The last clause of v. 17 may mean one of three things: (1) the sinful nature keeps you from doing the good you desire, (2) the Spirit keeps you from doing the evil you desire, or (3) each nature hinders the desires of the other (so Burton). In view of the parallel statements in Romans 7:15, 16, probably the first should be preferred, especially since the next verse goes on to speak of the victory that can be attained by the Spirit's power. Some have maintained that there is no conflict within the Christian because of the supposition that the old nature governed by the flesh has been eradicated. But this is not true according to this and other passages. Naturally, the flesh is to become increas ingly subdued as the Christian learns by grace to walk in the Spirit. But it is never eliminated. So the Christian is never released from the

necessity of consciously choosing to go in God's way. There is no escape from the need to depend on God's grace.

**18** This final verse of the section is best taken as a summary in which Paul reminds the Galatians that, though he is now talking of the need to live a godly life, he is not thereby reverting to legalism. Life by the Spirit is neither legalism nor license--nor a middle way between them. It is a life of faith and love that is above all of these false ways. Being led by the Spirit does not imply passivity but rather the need to allow oneself to be led. Responding to the Spirit is described by three mutually interpreting words in vv. 16, 18, and 25--"walk" (RSV), "led," and "live."

*2. The works of the flesh* 5:19-21

That spirit and flesh are in conflict is now illustrated by contrasting lists of the works of the flesh and of the fruit of the Spirit. Paul has both in mind as he begins to write this section. At the

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same time, the lists are more than a mere proof of what he has written earlier. For by raising these particulars of conduct, he also provides a checklist for measuring the conduct of those who consider themselves spiritual. If one's conduct is characterized by the traits in the first list, then he is either not a believer or else a believer who is not being led by God's Spirit. The same standards of evaluation hold true for churches.

**19** When Paul says that the acts of the flesh are obvious, he does not mean that they are all committed publicly where they may be seen. Some are, some are not. Instead, he means that it is obvious to all that such acts originate with the sinful nature, and not with the nature given believers by God. Here the full scope of the word "flesh" becomes evident (if it was not so before), for the list does not contain only the so-called "fleshly" sins. It contains sins that emanate from every part of human nature. It is impossible to tell whether Paul was thinking in categories of sin as he wrote. But whether or not he did, four divisions in his list are obvious: first, three sins that are violations of sexual morality; second, two sins from the religious realm; third, eight sins pertaining to conduct in regard to other human beings--i.e., social sins; and finally, there are two typically pagan sins-- drunkenness and the revellings accompanying it. These divisions are indicated by appropriate punctuation in NIV and other modern versions. The first three words, then, cover sexual sins. They are obviously intended to be somewhat comprehensive and inclusive. "Sexual immorality" or "fornication" ( *porneia* ) is the broadest term, denoting any immoral sexual intercourse or relationships. It prob ably derives from the words meaning "prostitution" and "prostitute." In starting with this vice, Paul begins with what was acknowledged to be the most open and shameless vice of the Greek and Roman world. "Impurity" ( *akatharsia* ) originally meant the state of being dirty but later developed ethical overtones, referring to a person who was either morally or ceremonially unclean. Paul uses it almost exclusively of moral impurity and perhaps of unnatural vice. "Debauchery" ( *aselgeia* ) is an "open and reckless contempt of propriety" (so Lightfoot). In this regard it is a fitting term for what is probably intended to be a

climax of several evils. The same words occur in 2 Corinthians 12:21.

**20** Sexual sins are not the only sins of the flesh, however. Paul goes on to list two sins of religion: "idolatry" ( *eidololatria* ), a worship of the creature rather than the Creator, and "witchcraft"

( *pharmakeia* ), a secret tampering with and at times a worship of the powers of evil. These two terms are also arranged in an ascending horror of evil and indicate that the works of the flesh include offenses against God as well as against ourselves or our neighbors. Neighbors are in view in the third section of Paul's list, since this section includes much of what would today be called social offenses. Most of the words are self-explana tory. "Hatred" ( *echthrai* , the first of several words occurring in plural form to denote multiple manifestations of the quality) means "enmities" such as those between classes, nations, and individuals. It is these

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enmities that have been broken down for those who are in Christ (Gal 3:28; Eph 2:14-16). "Discord" ( *eris* ) is the natural outcome of hatred both in the world and in the church. Four out of six of Paul's uses of the word are connected with church life. "Jealousy" ( *zelos* ) and "fits of rage" ( *thumoi* ) can denote both good and bad qualities. There is a godly zeal as well as righteous anger. When zeal or anger originate from selfish motives and hurt pride, they are evil and harm others, as Paul implies here. "Selfish ambition" ( *eritheiai* ) may be translated in many ways: conten tion, strife, selfishness, rivalry, intrigues. Its basic meaning is a selfish and self-aggrandiz ing approach to work. This and the preceding three words occur in the same order in 2 Corinthians 12:20. "Dissensions" ( *dichostasiai* ) and "factions" ( *haireseis* ) denote a state of affairs in which men are divided and feuds flourish.

**21** "Envy" ( *phthonoi* ) is so closely related to "jealousy" ( *zelos* ) that it is hard to tell the difference between them, except for the fact that *phthonoi* is always bad, whereas *zelos* is not. This set of words, beginning with "hatred," shows the flesh to be responsible for that breakdown in interpersonal relationships seen in all strata of society. The final grouping is concerned with sins of alcohol: "drunkenness" ( *methai* ) and "orgies" ( *komoi* ). They denote pleasures that have degenerated to debauchery. There are more items that could be mentioned, for when Paul adds "and the like," he indicates that the list is not exhaustive. Paul adds a solemn warning, saying that those who habitually practice such things will never inherit God's kingdom. This does not mean that if a Christian falls into sin through getting drunk, or some such thing, he thereby loses his salvation. The tense of the verb (present) indicates a habitual continuation in fleshly sins rather than an isolated lapse, and the point is that those who continually practice such sins give evidence of having never received God's Spirit. When Paul says that he warned the Galatians of this previ ously (presumably when he was among them), he reveals that his preaching was never what one might call mere evangelism but that it always contained a strong dose of the standard of morality expected from Christians. The reference to the kingdom of God introduces an entirely new and

large subject and one that it is an important and complex idea in the New Testament. Here, however, Paul is doubtlessly thinking of God's kingdom only in an eschatological sense. The phrase "will not inherit" carries the thought back to Paul's words about Abraham in chapter 3. The point is that those who keep on living in the flesh give evidence that they are not Abraham's seed and therefore will not inherit salvation.

*3. The fruit of the Spirit* 5:22-26

Paul continues the contrast between the natural productions of the flesh and Spirit he had begun in v. 19. Here, however, he speaks of the "fruit" of the Spirit (using both a new term and the singular form) in contrast to the "works" (v. 19) of which the flesh is capable. The term

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"works" ( *erga* ) already has definite overtones in this letter. It refers to what man can do, which, in the case of the works of the law (2:16, 3:2, 5, 10), has already been shown to be inadequate. The fruit of the Spirit, on the other hand, suggests that which is a natural product of the Spirit rather than of man, made possible by the living relationship between the Christian and God (cf. 2:20; John 15:1-17). The singular form stresses that these qualities are a unity, like a bunch of grapes instead of separate pieces of fruit, and also that they are all to be found in all Christians. In this they differ from the "gifts" of the Spirit, which are given one by one to different people as the church has need (1Cor 12). The nine virtues that are the Spirit's fruit hardly need classification, though they seem to fall into three categories of three each. The first three appear to "comprise Christian habits of mind in their more general aspect," as Lightfoot notes. Their primary direction is God-ward. The second set primarily concerns the Christian in his relationship to others and are social virtues. The last three concern the Christian as he is to be in himself.

**22** It is appropriate that "love" ( *agape* ) should head the list of the Spirit's fruit--every Christian feels this--for "God is love" (1John 4:8) and, therefore, the greatest of these is love (1Cor 13:
13). In biblical texts it is the association of agape with God that gives the word its distinctive character. Divine love is unmerited (Rom 5:8), great (Eph 2:4), transforming (Rom 5:5), and unchangeable (Rom 8:35-39). It is this love that sent Christ to die for sinful men and that perseveres with men in spite of their willfulness and love of sin. Now because the Spirit of Christ (who is characterized by love) is living within the Christian, the believer is to show love both to other Christians and to the world. By this, men are to know that Christians are indeed Christ's disciples John 13:35). "Joy" ( *chara* ) is the virtue in the Christian life corresponding to happiness in the secular world. On the surface they seem related. But happiness depends on circum stances, whereas joy does not. In the NT a form of the word "joy" becomes a typical-- and the most popular--Christian greeting

(Matt 28:9; Luke 1:28; Acts 15:23; 2Cor 13:11; James 1:1). Joy is particularly full when what was lost spiritually is found (Luke 15:6, 7, 9, 10, 32). The second of the two most popular Christian greetings is "peace" ( *eirene* ). It is roughly the equivalent of the Hebrew shalom. But, though it is related to this word, it also means more. Above all, peace is God's gift to man, achieved by him at the cross of Christ. It is peace with God (Rom 5:1) and is to express itself both in peace of mind (Philippians 4:6, 7) and in a very practical peace between all those who know God. This latter peace should be seen, as Barclay notes: in the home (1Cor 7:12-16), between Jew and Gentile (Eph 2:14-17), within the church (Eph 4:3; Col 3:15), and indeed in the relationships of the believer with all men (Heb 12:14). Moreover, Christians are to strive for it (1 Peter 3:11). The importance of this word is evident from its frequent and extensive occurrence in the NT--eighty times and in every book. "Patience" ( *makrothumia* ) is the quality of putting up with others, even when one is severely tried. The importance of patience is evidenced by its being most often used of the character of

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God, as in the great text from Joel: "Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repents of evil" (2:13, RSV). "Kindness" ( *chrestotes* ) is the divine kindness out of which God acts toward men. It is what the OT means when it declares that "God is good," as it so frequently does. The Christian is to show kindness by behaving toward others as God has behaved toward him. "Goodness" ( *agathosune* ) is hard to define, just as in English. However, though it is related to "kindness" (above), it differs from it in being a more active term and being often directed toward that which does not merit the action. The primary idea seems to be generosity that springs from kindness. The last three virtues are concerned with the Christian man primarily as he is to be in himself, though these virtues naturally affect others also. He is to be characterized by "faithfulness"

( *pistis* ). This word also means faith, as KJV translates it here, but in this list it undoubtedly means that which makes a person one on whom others can rely--trustworthiness or reliability. It is the word by which a faithful servant is described (Luke 16:10-12), including servants of the gospel and of Christ (1Tim 1:12; 2Tim 2:2). It describes the character of a person who will die for his confession of Christ (Rev. 2:10; 3:14). It goes without saying that it is also descriptive of the character of Christ, the faithful witness (Rev 1:5), and of God the Father, who always acts faithfully toward his people (1Cor 1:9; 10:13; 1Thess 5:24; 2Thess 3:3).

**23** "Gentleness" ( *prautes* ) describes the person who is so much in control of himself that he is always angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* , IV, 5, 1-4), just like Moses, who is praised for being the gentlest or meekest among his contemporaries (Num 12:3). This is the spirit in which to learn (James 1:21) and in which discipline must be applied and faults corrected (Gal 6:1). It is also the virtue for meeting opposition (2Tim 2:25) and giving a Christian witness (1 Peter 3:15, 16). "Self-control" ( *enkrateia* ) is the quality that gives victory over fleshly desires and which is therefore

closely related to chastity both in mind and conduct. As Barclay says (in loc.), " *Enkrateia* is that great quality which comes to a man when Christ is in his heart, that quality which makes him able to live and to walk in the world, and yet to keep his garments unspotted from the world." These are the qualities of the life that has been claimed by Jesus Christ and is Spirit -led. "Against such things there is no law" (v. 23b). The last clause is most likely an understatement used for rhetorical effect. The law, as Paul has said, was given to restrain evil; but these qualities do not need to be restrained. Hence, no law opposes them. There may also be a sense, however, in which Paul is suggesting that the law cannot be against such as live in this manner because of the very fact that by being so led they are in principle fulfilling all that the law requires.

**24** It should be evident to the reader of Galatians that the warfare between the flesh and the

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Spirit is both intense and unremitting. The qualities of each are fundamentally opposed; it may therefore well be, as Paul seems to have said earlier (v. 17), that the one who is caught in the warfare cannot do the good he would like to do. How, then, is victory to be achieved? What must the believer do to triumph? In the final verses of this chapter Paul gives two answers. First, he reminds his readers that when they came to Christ, they repented fully of the works of the flesh and indeed turned their backs on them forever. This act they must sustain. In speaking of this radical repentance, Paul uses the vivid image of crucifixion. This is an image he has used in other places; it was a favorite with him. But here he uses it in a slightly different way from the way he used it in Romans 6:6 or Galatians 2:20, for example. In these other instances, the verb is in the passive voice ("was crucified," "have been crucified"), and the reference is to what has been done for the believer as a result of Christ's death. But in this passage the verb is in the active voice ("have crucified") and points rather to what the believer has himself done and must continue to regard as being done. The proper term to describe this act is repentance. Thus the believer in Christ has already repented of his former way of life to the degree of actually having executed the old nature. This does not mean that the battle is thereby over forever. As in an actual crucifixion, life lingers even though the criminal has been nailed to the cross. Nevertheless, the believer is to regard the decisive act as having been done. He is not to seek to remove from the cross what has once been nailed there.

**25** Next, Paul reminds believers that if they have been made alive by the Spirit--which, of course, they have if they are truly believers--they are also to walk by the Spirit. The Spirit leads; they are to follow. Indeed, they are to get in line with him or keep in step ( *stoichomen* ). The verb is also used of those who walk in the steps of the faith of Abraham by believing as he believed (Rom 4:12) or obeying the truth of the gospel (Gal 6:16).

**26** It is hard to tell whether this verse belongs with the preceding section or with what follows. Certainly, it is the first of a number of specific actions that should characterize those who are being led by the Spirit. But, on the other hand, it is also a return to the theme of v. 15 and, therefore, a summation. The direct address ("brothers") in the next verse has the effect of beginning a new section. Perhaps the verse is best seen as a reference to the situation Paul knew to be existing in Galatia and hence a direct attempt to discourage pride and dampen party spirit. Walking by the Spirit is the ultimate solution to such evils.

*D. Two Practical Exhortations* (6:1-10)

*1. Bearing one another's burdens* 6:1-5

In the verses closing chapter 5, Paul has contrasted the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit, concluding that Christians are to live Spirit-led lives. But what does it mean to live a life

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characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, and the other virtues? To those who might prefer a mystical experience or a flight of fancy at this point it comes as a shock to find Paul returning at once to the most down-to-earth subjects--personal relationships (vv. 1-5) and the use of money
(vv. 6-10)--and to find him measuring spirituality by action in these areas.

It is easy to talk about the fruit of the Spirit while doing very little about it. So Christians need to learn that it is in the concrete situations, rather than in emotional highs, that the reality of the Holy Spirit in their lives is demonstrated.

**1** The first situation is one that, more than any other, inevitably reveals the real character and spiritual maturity of a believer. Paul imagines a hypothetical situation--which is, however, not at all infrequent--in which one believer unexpectedly learns that an other believer is trapped in some sin. What is he to do? Is he to overlook the sin? Does love mean that he is to refuse to face the facts? Or should he expose the sin openly and so gain for himself a reputation for superior holiness? Paul shows that a Spirit-led person should not proceed in either of these ways. In presenting the proper course of action, he shows what to do, who should do it, and finally how it should be done. First, Paul shows what should be done. He says that Christians are to restore the person who has fallen into sin. The verb ( *katarizo* ) is a medical term used in secular Greek for setting a fractured bone. What is wrong in the life of the fallen Christian is to be set straight. It is not to be neglected or exposed openly. Second, Paul says that the work of restoring must be done by those who are spiritual. This word "spiritual" ( *pneumatikos* ) cuts two ways. On the one hand, it is obviously related to Paul's use of it at the end of chapter 5. It is as much as to say, "Do you consider yourself to be a spiritual instead of a carnal Christian? Well, then, here is a way you can test it. Restoring an erring brother is exactly the kind of thing that spiritual Christians do." On the other hand, Paul is reminding his readers that only those who are genuinely led of the Spirit have the maturity to deal with sin in others. Every Christian should desire such maturity and be mature. Third, Paul says that

the restoration should be made "gently" (using the same word he used in the list of virtues in 5:22) and with the consciousness that none, no matter how spiritual, have immunity from temptation and that all can fall. Stott's comments (in loc.) are valuable:

If we walked by the Spirit we would love one another more, and if we loved one another

more we would bear one another's burdens, and if we bore one another's burdens we

would not shrink from seeking to restore a brother who has fallen into sin. Further, if we

obeyed this apostolic instruction as we should, much unkind gossip would be avoided,

more serious backsliding prevented, the good of the Church advanced, and the name of

Christ glorified.

**2** The second practical example of spirituality is the bearing of one another's burdens. Four times

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in the letter Paul uses the word "bearing" ( *bastazo* ). In 5:10 it is the Judaizer who is to bear his judgment. At 6:5 each Christian is to bear his own load. At the very end, 6:17, he will speak of bearing the marks of Jesus Christ on his body. In this verse the reference is to helping another Christian--sharing his load--whenever temptations oppress him or life depresses him. Here Paul returns quite deliberately to the thought of love being the fulfillment of the law, for the "law of Christ" is the new commandment (John 13:34) fulfilled in part at least by such actions. "If you must needs impose burdens on yourselves, let them be the burdens of mutual sympathy. If you must needs observe a law, let it be the law of Christ" (Lightfoot, in loc.).

**3** Two errors might keep a believer from fulfilling this role. The first is conceit, that is, thinking himself to be more important than he is. The implication seems to be that if the Christian neglects to bear another's burdens or refuses to bear them, it is because he thinks himself above it. But this is to be self-deceived, for, measured by God's standards, no one amounts to anything. Paul's statement has more force in Greek even than in English: "thinks" ( *dokei* ) contrasts sharply with "is" (on, "being"), and "something" ( *tis* ) contrasts with "nothing" ( *meden* ). The first part of the contrast is the one by which Paul described the Jerusalem pillars in chapter 2 (vv. 2, 6, 9), but he refrained from saying that these men were nothing, though, in fact, apart from the grace of God, this was true. A positive statement of the same principle occurs in Romans 12:3.

**4** The second error that might keep a believer from bearing the burdens of another Christian is to be always comparing himself and his own work with others. This can be harmful both in a positive sense ("I am doing better than they are"--the very conceit Paul has just warned against) and in a negative sense ("I am unable to do anything; everyone else is much better"). To counter both these forms of the error, Paul suggests that each believer has a task from the Lord and is responsible only to the Lord for doing it. To use others as a norm is a kind of escape. When a

Christian has his eyes on God rather than on other Christians, then in his own eyes he will at best be an unprofitable servant (Luke 17:10) and God himself will receive glory (2Cor 10:12-18).

**5** In other words, the duty of a Christian is to carry his own load. There is no contradiction between this verse and v. 2, as KJV seems to suggest, for different words are used for what one is to bear. The word in v. 2 is bare, which means "heavy burdens"--those that are more than a man should carry. The word in this verse is phortion, a common term for a man's "pack." Each Christian has his own work to do, so let him take pride in how he does it.

*2. The use of money* 6:6-10

The second area to which Paul seeks to apply the life of the Spirit in a practical way is the use of money; indeed, few things more clearly disclose the priorities of the heart than this. Many commentators hesitate to relate this entire section to the use of money, believing that vv. 7-9

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cannot be written primarily of material things. But while it is true that the section as a whole goes beyond the use of money, nevertheless, at least three factors indicate that Paul was thinking primarily of money as he wrote it. First, although vv. 7-9 expand on the theme of v. 6 in general ways, v. 10 returns to it; for the phrase "do good to all" is most certainly a euphemism for giving alms. This indicates that a concern for financial matters never entirely leaves Paul's mind. Second, v. 7 is a proverb Paul used on at least one other occasion to encourage generous giving (2Cor 9:6). The presumption is that giving is also uppermost in his mind here. Finally, we have the fact that giving is important to Paul at this time even apart from the situation in Galatia, for the collection for the Jerusalem poor is part of his policy and the admonition to proceed with the collection is fresh in his mind as a result of the Jerusalem council (Gal 2:10). Seen in this light, the passage may even be an indirect allusion to the collection, as Cole speculates. Three uses of money are mentioned: (1) the support of the teacher in a Christian congregation, (2) the use of money to build up the life of the Spirit rather than to feed the flesh, and (3) the spending of money to help others, particularly Christians. The principle that ties all three points together is that enunciated in the proverb: reaping is in proportion to sowing. Thus, a man will get out of his effort what he puts into it.

**6** The reference to the one who is taught in the word ( *katechoumenos ton logon* ) probably does not imply a fully developed catechetical system such as prevailed in the church later on, but it does point to a class of paid teachers at a surprisingly early date. Paul's policy was apparently to preach the gospel without receiving money, preferring to earn his living as a tentmaker. But this was in pioneer work. As soon as possible he seems to have established a more fixed structure. So here as elsewhere (1Cor 9:11, 14; 1Tim 5:17, 18; cf. Luke 10:7), he indicates that a workman is worthy of his pay. To support the Lord's servants is not, however, a grim duty, though some congregations seem to treat it as such. Instead, Paul

speaks of it as sharing; it is a "fellowship" or a "partnership"

( *koinoneo* ). As the teacher shares the good things of the Word, so the congregation is to share all good things with the teacher.

**7** The special advice of v. 6 is now enlarged to benevolence in general, and the principle that ties everything together is stated. What a man sows he reaps. This is an immutable law of God, which the phrase "God cannot be mocked" emphasizes. Consequently, though a man may fool himself (by sowing little but expecting much), he cannot fool God and the results of his poor sowing will be manifest.

**8** This is true especially in Christian living. If a man spends his money on what gratifies his fleshly nature, he will reap a fleshly harvest. And since the flesh is mortal and will one day pass away, the harvest will pass away also. On the other hand, if a man uses his money to promote spiritual causes and to feed his spiritual nature, the resulting harvest will remain. Two factors give the

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primary application of this principle as Paul intends it to be applied here: (1) he is still dealing with money, and (2) he has just been dealing with the spiritual character of the Christian. It is obvious, however, that the principle also applies more broadly. It applies to others than the individual himself, for instance. Thus, as in the case of ministers, if congregations refuse to support them and so forfeit good teaching, preferring to spend their money on themselves, the results will be corruption. But if, on the other hand, they support good teachers, a spiritual harvest will result. The principle also applies to the use of time, the use of the mind, and other matters.

**9** The great hindrance to such good sowing is weariness that results in discouragement and eventually in giving up. Four months elapse between planting and harvest (John 4:35); and, while it is true that in spiritual sowing the results occasionally come sooner, it is also true that more often the results take much longer. Two imperatives govern Paul's warning: "do not be weary" and "do not faint." These are not identical but are directed against the temptations to become discouraged and give up (cf. Smith, "Gal. 6:9," ExpT, 13, 1901-02, p. 139). The best reason for resisting them is that if the necessary preparation is done, the harvest is sure. One cannot help feeling that Paul may be talking to himself as he thinks of the extensive but thus far unrewarding efforts he expended on the churches of Galatia. The change to the first person plural supports this supposition.

**10** Finally, Paul speaks broadly about the obligation to do good to all men, returning, however, primarily to the thought of giving money. But suppose a Christian is very limited in his resources? In that case, says Paul, he is to give to Christian causes especial ly, knowing that if they are not supported by Christians, they will not be supported at all. If he has unlimited funds, he can give to every valid charity that comes along. Two parts of this verse are of special interest.

First, Paul speaks of the "family of believers." This really means "those who have become related to us by believing in Christ" and points to a relationship transcending all others. In one sense, this is a narrow company made up of those who should have preference in Christian giving and other kinds of welldoing. On the other hand, the phrase includes all who so believe. Therefore, giving should not be unduly restricted by denomination or party loyalty. The other point of special interest is Paul's mention of "time" ( *kairos* , translated "time" in v. 9 and "opportunity" in v. 10). *Kairos* denotes "the right time" or "the proper time" for anything; consequently a time that occurs only once before it is lost forever. No one can hope to reap the harvest before the time appointed for it by God (v. 9). But if he does not seize the time appointed him for sowing, he will reap no harvest at all (v. 10).

**Conclusion** 6:11-18

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The apostle has said nearly everything he wishes to say, and the letter is drawing to a close. But in ending it he first takes the pen from the hand of his amanuensis and adds a summary of the letter in his own handwriting. The summary contains a fresh warning against the legalizers, a restatement of the basic principle that Christianity is internal and supernatural rather than external and human (as the legalizers were trying to make it), a final reference to his own suffering for the cause of Christ, and a benediction. The somewhat abrupt ending has the effect of leaving the great issue of the letter--faith or works--sharply before the Galatians.

**11** There can be little doubt that Paul took the pen in his own hand at this point and an almost equal lack of doubt that he did so for at least two purposes: (1) to authenticate the letter, as he seems also to have done on other occasions (cf. 1Cor 16:21; Col 4:18; 2Thess 3:17), and (2) to emphasize his main points. There is less agreement about the meaning of the words "large letters." On the one hand, some, among them certain of the reformers (Luther, Calvin), refer them to the size of the letter: that is, "See what a lengthy letter I have written." But grammar and comparative brevity of the letter argue against this. On the other hand are the majority of scholars who correctly see a reference to the size of the letters Paul was inscribing but who, nevertheless, disagree on their signifi cance. Deissmann believed that this was a reference to the awkward writing of a working man, whose hands had become disfigured by toil ( *Light from the Ancient East* , pp. 166, 167; Paul,
p. 49). This seems unconvincing and even a bit snobbish. Besides, while it is probably true that Paul did not write with quite the degree of polish of a professional scribe, this alone seems hardly to account either for his large letters or his emphasis on them. The second and more general assumption is that Paul increased the size of his letters for emphasis much as in contemporary printing a paragraph is italicized or set in boldface. This view accords with the tone of this section in which the main points of the letter are reiterated to impress them on the minds of the Galatians. A third and very intriguing view is that Paul may have been writing with large letters due to poor eye sight. The case for this view,

which involves both the "thorn in the flesh" passage in 2 Corinthians 12:7 and the reference to "eyes" in Galatians 4:15, is presented by Clemens ("St. Paul's Handwriting," ExpT, 24, 1912-13, p. 380) and other scholars.

**12** For the last time Paul speaks of the legalizers, this time warning the Galatians about what they were attempting to do and why they were doing it. The object of this legalistic activity, Paul says, is "to make a good impression outward ly." The Greek for this phrase is richer than any single English translation can make it. For one thing, the verb translated "to make a good impression" ( *euprosopesai* ) carries overtones of insincerity. They were not what they seemed. For another, the impression they desired to make was both before men and in external matters. The word that suggests this is the crucial term "flesh" ( *sarx* ), which has appeared throughout the letter. Flesh refers to men, whom the legalizers wanted to impress, and to circumcision, which had become the touchstone of their religion. In contrast to

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this, Christianity consists in a desire to please God on the part of those who, as a result of his grace, have become new creatures (vv. 14, 15). But why did the legalizers persevere so strongly in their error if, indeed, as Paul claims, it is an error? There are two reasons. First, they desired to escape the persecution that attached to Christ's cross. It is not even so much Christ himself who is the problem here, as Paul expresses it, for a Christ who is a teacher (but only a teacher) can well be assimilated by Judaism or by any other religion. The difficulty is the cross, because the cross speaks of the necessity of a divine death as the only solution to the sin of man. To have the cross is to have three disquieting and humiliating doctrines: (1) man is a sinner; (2) his sin brings him under the curse of God, which curse Christ bore; and (3) nothing man can do can earn salvation, for if this were possible, the cross would have been unnecessary. These doctrines humble men. Consequently, men hate the cross and ac tively persecute those who proclaim it.

**13** Second, the legalizers persevered in their error because of their desire to boast that they had been able to win over the Galatians for Judaism. There were two things wrong with this. (1) It was an attempt to win others to that which was itself bankrupt; for not even those who were circumcised (that is, Jews) were able to keep the law. (2) It was based on pride. The legalizers wanted to boast in the flesh of the Galatians. This means that they wanted to boast in the number of circumcisions, much as David had boasted in the two hundred foreskins of the Philistines. They were trophy hunters and wanted to be able to report on mass "conversions" in Galatia. The humbling parallel would be in the tendency to take pride in counting the number of "decisions for Christ" or "baptisms" today.

**14** Over against all such improper and sinful boasting, Paul sets an entirely different boasting of his own. It is a boasting "in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." So important is this cause of boasting that, says Paul, it is inconceivable

that he could boast in anything else. It is striking how much of the gospel is involved in this statement. The cross speaks of the atonement necessitated by man's sin (see above on v. 12). The full name of the Savior speaks of the significance of his person and the role he played, meaning literally "God who saves, the Messiah." Finally, the pronoun "our" speaks of the personal aspects of Christ's redemption, for it becomes "ours" through the response of faith. The legalizers had a motive for their actions. Well, so did Paul. Only his motive was not that of a fear of persecution or of a desire to boast in statistics. He was boasting in the cross of Christ because of what the cross had accomplished in his life. As Paul looks back on his life he realizes that before his conversion he was exactly like the legalizers. Once he, too, was ruled by externals. He, too, gloried in human attainment (Philippians 3:3-6). But when he met Jesus, all this passed for him, so much so that he is able even to apply the bold image of crucifixion to it. The world with its selfish and fleshly attitudes was crucified to him and he to the world. In its place came Christ alone--Christ, who is everything.

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**15** The summary is brief. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision count for anything as a means of salvation (cf. 5:6 and 1Cor 7:19). The only thing that counts is to be born again, to become a new creation. This comes about not by observing the law in any form but by receiving and stepping out upon the truth of the gospel.

**16** Has anyone yet missed the point? If so, Paul will state it once again in even starker language--"Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God" (cf. the blessings of Pss 125:5; 128:6). This statement makes three points: (1) the peace and mercy of God are given only to those who adhere to this gospel; (2) all who believe the gospel, so it is implied, have an obligation to continue walking in it; and (3) these, and these only, are the true Israel. In this verse "rule" ( *kanon* ) clearly refers to the heart of the gospel just enunciated; but it may also be applied to the "canon" of Scripture (as the church later used the word) and to the whole of Christian doctrine. It is sometimes said that those who are concerned with the essence of the gospel and with true doctrine are the disrupters of the church, but Paul says the opposite. The truth is that the gospel is the real promoter of peace and is the channel of God's mercy. There can be no peace or mercy for the church when those responsible for following this "rule" depart from it.

**17** Paul's last words are a request and a final benediction. The request is that henceforth he be not troubled with the kind of problem that had erupted in the Galatian churches. This can hardly mean that Paul did not want to hear about such problems if they occurred. If they did occur he would want to combat them. Nor can it mean that he did not want further trouble from the legalizers; for they would certainly cause trouble, regardless of his wishes, and he could hardly direct an appeal to them anyway. Instead, the appeal is to the churches themselves and is that they might no longer trouble him by giving way to the legalistic heresies. The reason, Paul says, is that he has suffered enough already. It would be far

better if the churches he founded at such cost would assume their own share of suffering, above all by resisting the kind of teaching that the legalizers upheld and therefore, if necessary, by enduring whatever persecution might follow. The "marks of Jesus" refer to the scars Paul bore on his body as the result of the persecutions he had endured for the sake of his Lord. These marks revealed his relation ship to Christ, just as the "marks" (stigmata) of a slave revealed his ownership. A list of the experiences that might have caused such scars occurs in 2 Corinthians 6:4-6 and 11:23-30. These genuine and honorable marks in the body contrast strikingly with the ritualistic and now meaningless mark (circumcision) the legalizers wished to impose on the Galatians.

**18** Paul ends the letter as he had begun it, upon the single and glorious note of God's grace, expressing the wish that this grace might abide with the spirits of the Galatians. Paul's legacy is, therefore, a wish that the grace of God would be increasingly realized and that whatever external

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marks there might be, would be received, not as an effort to impress God ritualistically, but as a natural result of true Christian service. The church will always know great days when these are the two distinguishing marks of God's people.

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