

The Letter of Paul to the Galatians



Notes and Commentary
Jim Wilsford, Ph.D.

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To Helen

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GALATIANS*

History and Background

Ancient Galatia was an area in the highlands of central Anatolia (Ankara, Çorum, Yozgat Province) in modern Turkey. Galatia was named for the immigrant Gauls from Thrace, who settled here and became its ruling caste in the 3rd century BC, following the Gallic invasion of the Balkans in 279 BC. It has been called the "Gallia" of the East, Roman writers calling its inhabitants Galli (Gaul or Celt). The Galatians themselves were not literate, and their name for themselves remains unknown. (Wikipedia)

In 1 Peter 1:1-2, Peter listed Galatia as one of the places too which Jewish Christian were scattered:

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.

On his second missionary journey in Acts 16:6-7, Paul traveled throughout the region:

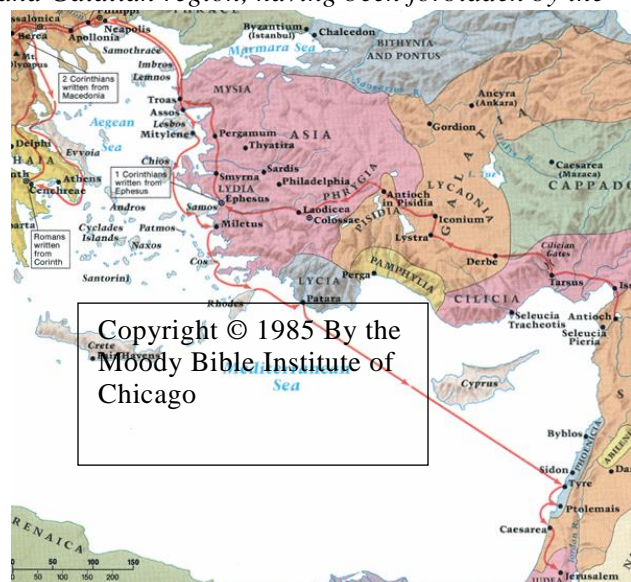
*6 And they passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia;
7 and when they had come to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them;*

Later on his third journey Paul visited Galatia again, as recorded in Acts 18:23:

23 And having spent some time there, he departed and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

During one of these visits Paul became ill and reported it in Gal 4:13-15:

13 but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; 14 and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself.



* Scriptures are NASB unless noted otherwise.

GALATIANS 1

Greeting

Galatians 1:1-5

Paul, an apostle (not sent from men, nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead), 2 and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen.

Paul begins the letter attesting to his apostleship, which establishes the authenticity of the Galatian letter as the inspired word of God. He addresses the letter to the churches in Galatia, where church means, literally, called out body or congregation. Church is used also in a geographic sense, hence, congregations in Galatia.

The grace of God and the gift of Jesus for our sins constitute the core of the salutation. Eph 2:4-7 also uses this grace (unmerited favor) and the resurrection of Christ to explain God's incomparable kindness toward believers:

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

This gift of God's grace makes salvation possible in every way. Titus 2:11-14 teaches:

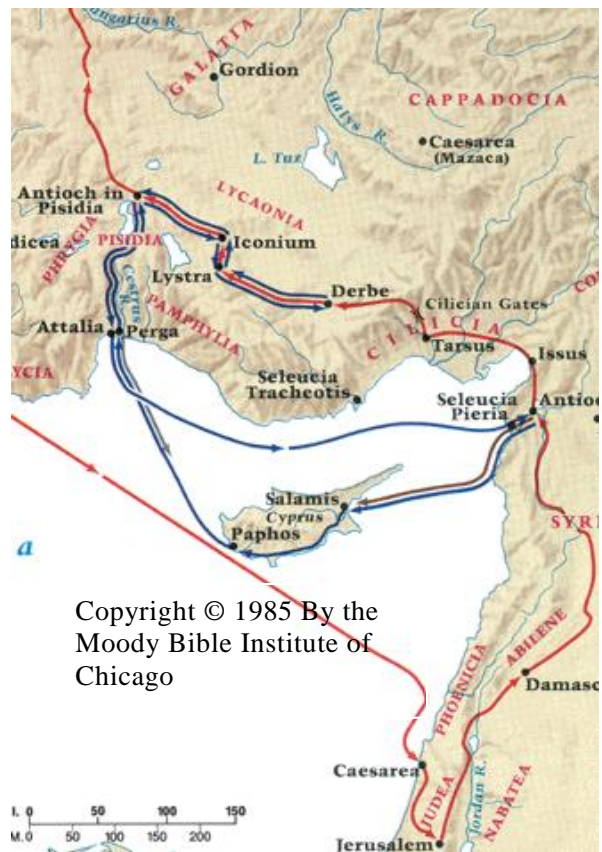
11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; 14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

Only One Gospel

Gal 1:6-10

6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; 7 which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a

* Scriptures are NASB unless noted otherwise.



gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed. 10 For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.

This statement, contrasting the one true gospel with other perverted gospels, establishes once and for all the certainty and integrity of the unchanging gospel of Christ.

The Gospel Is the Truth

In Ephesians 1:13-14, the gospel is the word of truth and it alone can guarantee our inheritance and redemption:

13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation — having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

Our very hope of heaven depends on God's grace in all of its truth—the gospel. Colossians 1:5-8 teaches:

5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel, 6 which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth;

The Gospel Is the Power of God for Salvation

Therefore, the mighty power of God for salvation is the gospel in which is revealed righteousness, according to Rom 1:16-17:

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith."

It is the gospel that Paul preached; it is the gospel, which we received and on which we take our stand; it is the gospel by which we are saved; but only if we hold firmly to the word preached!

Everything else is vain. 1 Corinthians 15:1-2 reads:

15 Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

This is the certain, true, unchanging gospel of Jesus Christ born of his sacrifice in his death, burial, and resurrection as stated in 1 Corinthians 15:3-6:

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

The Gospel Is Not Made Up

Galatians 1:11-12

11 For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Anything that man adds to the gospel or takes away perverts the gospel, rendering its power ineffectual—no true gospel, no salvation. Paul explains here and in Ephesians 3:2-6 exactly how the gospel came to the apostles:

* Scriptures are NASB unless noted otherwise.

2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

The Penalty for Perversion Is Eternal Condemnation

Anyone—even an apostle or an angel from heaven—who preaches another gospel or perverts the gospel of Christ is to be eternally condemned. In older translations, the Greek and English words are the same—anathema, cursed in the worst possible way. It is clear: all the religions of today that change the teaching of Jesus are condemned. The exception is those who practice New Testament Christianity just exactly as it was revealed through the apostles and prophets.

Call to Apostleship (cf. Acts 9:1-25)

Galatians 1:11-17

11 For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. 13 For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it; 14 and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. 15 But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased 16 to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.

Paul discussed way of life as a fervent Jew in Philippians 3:4-6:

4 although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

Acts 22:2-5 describes Paul's previous life in his own words:

2 And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect, they became even more quiet; and he said, 3 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, just as you all are today. 4 "And I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, 5 as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished.

In Acts 8:1-3, we are offered a real life view of Paul, called then Saul, persecuting the church:

8 And Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death.

And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. 3 But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.

On the day of Saul's conversion, he was on his way to persecute the saints in Damascus, recorded in Acts 9:1-3:

* Scriptures are NASB unless noted otherwise.

9 Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, 2 and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Contacts at Jerusalem (cf. Acts 9:26-31)

Galatians 1:18-24

18 Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. 19 But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. 20 (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.) 21 Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. 22 And I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; 23 but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy." 24 And they were glorifying God because of me.

Acts 9:19-31 offers additional details of Paul's life after his conversion:

18 And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he arose and was baptized; 19 and he took food and was strengthened.

Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, 20 and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." 21 And all those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, "Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?" 22 But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

23 And when many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him, 24 but their plot became known to Saul. And they were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death; 25 but his disciples took him by night, and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket.

26 And when he had come to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. 28 And he was with them moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord. 29 And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews; but they were attempting to put him to death. 30 But when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.

GALATIANS 2

Jerusalem Conference

Defending the Gospel (cf. Acts 15:1-21)

Galatians 2:1-2

Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. 2 And it was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain.

As might be expected, when the gospel went to the “ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8), dissension followed pitting Jewish Christians against Gentile Christians. Acts 15:1-2 describes the circumstances surrounding Paul’s trip to Jerusalem:

And some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

Thus Paul and Barnabas (with Titus) went to see the elders and apostles in Jerusalem about the false teachers who were binding circumcision on Gentile converts.

Galatians 2:3-5

3 But not even Titus who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. 4 But it was because of the false brethren who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage. 5 But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.

Rather than make a public display, Paul determined to go privately to “those who seemed to be leaders” in the Jerusalem church. This passage alone shows that there were no structured connections between churches; rather they were each autonomous. Those who use the Jerusalem conference to justify ties between churches at a hierarchical level and justify denominationalism ignore that Paul did not even know who the leaders were.

In Acts 15:4, it was the apostles and elders who with the church welcomed them:

4 And when they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

At this point those binding the law on Gentiles asserted that Gentiles should be required to obey the Law of Moses. Acts 15:5 reads:

5 But certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed, stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses."

It is important to note that the issues went far beyond circumcision to the much broader issue: “to observe the Law of Moses.” Later Paul was still confronting this broader issue when he returned to Jerusalem in Acts 21:20-21:

20 And when they heard it they began glorifying God; and they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, **and they are all zealous for the Law**; 21 and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.

* Scriptures are NASB unless noted otherwise.

The Jerusalem Council

Galatians 2:6-10

6 But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me. 7 But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised 8 (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), 9 and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we might go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. 10 They only asked us to remember the poor — the very thing I also was eager to do.

These leaders of the church—apostles and elders—agreed with Paul, adding nothing to what he taught and recognizing that he was an apostle to the Gentiles. God worked through Paul just as he had done through Peter. Therefore, James, Peter, and John gave Paul and his cohorts the “right hand of fellowship.”

The detail of their consideration in Acts 15:6-11, shows Peter making the main argument on Paul’s behalf:

6 And the apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. 7 And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. 8 "And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; 9 and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. 10 "Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? 11 "But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are."

However, in Acts 15:12-21, James delivers the final word, offering a path to unity between the Jewish and Gentile Christians:

12 And all the multitude kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. 13 And after they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, "Brethren, listen to me. 14 "Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. 15 "And with this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written,

16 'After these things I will return,

And I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen,

And I will rebuild its ruins,

And I will restore it,

17 In order that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,

And all the Gentiles who are called by My name,'

18 Says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old. [Amos 9:12-21]

19 "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, 20 but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. 21 "For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

The Jerusalem Decree

In Acts 15:22-29, the apostles and elders composed a letter to the Gentile churches and determined to send men with Paul and Barnabas:

22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, 23 and they sent this letter by them,

"The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings:

24 "Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls, 25 it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

27 "Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth. 28 "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: 29 that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell."

Principles of the Letter in Application

While the truth of the scriptures regarding the keeping of the Law of Moses was settled for the time being, it continued to create issues among the early churches. According to Luke, as seen above, the issue arose later when Paul returned to Jerusalem for the last time in Acts 21:20-25:

0 And when they heard it they began glorifying God; and they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all **zealous for the Law**; 21 and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. 22 "What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. 23 "Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; 24 take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses in order that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, **keeping the Law**. 25 "But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication."

It is interesting that “many thousands” of Jewish Christians continued to keep the Law of Moses. This separated the Jews and Gentiles on the basis of fundamental practices, implying that cultural differences—even those with religious connotations—were allowed to exist in the early church. Paul dealt with some of these in Romans 14:5-7:

5 One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. 7 For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself;

In the context, these days might have been Jewish or pagan days and the meat could have been offered to idols. The key to Christians is that they must be assured in their own minds and do what they do unto the Lord. Romans 14:22-23 offers the final test:

* Scriptures are NASB unless noted otherwise.

22 The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

Thus, one must do the act without doubting. On the other hand, we cannot impose unauthorized acts on others, according to Paul in Colossians 2:16-17:

16 Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day — 17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

No Return to the Law

Galatians 2:11-13

11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. 13 And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.

The cultural differences between Jews and Gentiles created tensions in the early church. One example was when Paul had to go through the purification rites of the Law to satisfy the cultural needs of the Jewish Christians of Acts 21:20-25, cited above. More negative but still an act that might be describe as cultural confusion was when Peter withdrew himself from eating with the Gentiles in this passage. Embedded in Peter's error must have been the long standing attitude of Jews toward the Gentiles, voiced by Peter himself when God led him to Cornelius and his house in Acts 10:27-29:

27 And as he talked with him, he entered, and found many people assembled. 28 And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. 29 "That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. And so I ask for what reason you have sent for me."

After preaching to this household, Peter asserted in Acts 10:34-35:

34 And opening his mouth, Peter said:

"I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, 35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him.

In the gospel preached by Paul and Peter, when culture and truth collide, truth must always triumph. In this case and in most cases, the truth is self-evident, as Paul wrote Galatians 3:28-29:

8 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

No Justification under the Law

Galatians 2:14-16

14 But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews? 15 "We are Jews by nature, and not sinners from among the Gentiles; 16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith

in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified.

In this passage, justification by observing the Law of Moses is contrasted to justification by faith in Christ Jesus. We are justified by faith and not by observing the law or by the works of the law.

Galatians 2:17-21

17 "But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be! 18 "For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. 19 "For through the Law I died to the Law, that I might live to God. 20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me. 21 "I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."

While we are justified in Christ, we are still sinners. The rhetorical question—"does that mean that Christ promotes sin?"—is reinforced: "Absolutely not!" Two laws are explained side by side here. The Law of Moses, which Christ nailed to the cross and the law of Christ—the new law dedicated by his blood shed upon the cross. Of the first and old law, Paul wrote in Colossians 2:13-14

13 And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

Of the second law, the law of Christ, Jesus said in Matthew 26:27-29:

And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; 28 for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. 29 "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

The Hebrew writer affirmed this same teaching concerning the superiority of the law of Christ in Hebrews 8:6-7:

6 But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. 7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second.

Christ lives in us; and we live by faith in Christ, the son of God. If we are saved by the law, Christ died for nothing.

GALATIANS 3

Justification by Faith (cf. Rom 4)

Galatians 3:1-4

You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? 2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? 4 Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?

The phrase “O foolish Galatians!” and the rhetorical questions seem to taunt the Galatians who had first viewed a crucified Christ and had obeyed the truth of his portrayal. How could they turn from the truth of this gospel? These questions are followed by more; the first: “Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing of faith? The answer is obvious. Hebrews 11:6 instructs us:

6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

This absolutely necessary faith comes from hearing, according to Romans 10:11-15:

11 For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him; 13 for "Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved." 14 How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

Are they willingly trading the Spirit in whom they had begun for some kind of perfection of the flesh—an impossibility to begin with? Was their suffering for Christ and in Christ vain?

Galatians 3:5-9

5 Does He then, who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 6 Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. 7 Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the nations shall be blessed in you." 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

Christ supplied the Spirit to them and worked miracles among them. These, of course, came by the hearing of faith and not by works of the law. The true sons of Abraham are those of faith just as the justification of the Gentiles is by faith, allowing the gospel to be preached beforehand to Abraham: “In you shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” [Footnotes for Galatians 3:8: Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14].

The Law Brings a Curse

Galatians 3:10-12

10 For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them." 11 Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, “The righteous man shall live by faith.” 12 However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "He who practices them shall live by them.

Paul cites three passages to prove his point that as many are of the works of the law are under the curse:

* Scriptures are NASB unless noted otherwise.

Deuteronomy 27:26: 26 “Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.”

Habakkuk 2:4: 4 "Behold, as for the proud one,

His soul is not right within him;

But the righteous will live by his faith.

Leviticus 18:5: 5 “So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the Lord.”

Those who are of the works of the law are under a curse, because these do not justify a man, since the just live by faith.

Galatians 3: 13-14

13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us — for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" — 14 in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Christ himself suffered the curse of law in Deuteronomy 21:22-23 and in doing so redeemed (bought back) us from the curse of the law:

22 "And if a man has committed a sin worthy of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, 23 his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance.

Because of this sacrifice, the blessing of Abraham comes upon Gentiles in Christ Jesus. The end of this is that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. The blessing of Abraham is to all nations—Jew and Gentile alike. Genesis 22:18 reads:

18 And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

And again it is repeated in Genesis 28:14:

14 Your descendants shall also be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

The Changeless Promise

Galatians 3:15-18

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

God gave his promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3:

12 Now the Lord said to Abram,

"Go forth from your country,

And from your relatives

* Scriptures are NASB unless noted otherwise.

And from your father's house,
To the land which I will show you;
2 And I will make you a great nation,
And I will bless you,
And make your name great;
And so you shall be a blessing;
3 And I will bless those who bless you,
And the one who curses you I will curse.
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Paul explains why the promise cannot be changed: Even a man's covenant once entered into cannot be annulled or added to, the seed is clearly Christ ("and your seed" 'who is Christ.'). The covenant was confirmed before by God in Christ and cannot be annulled by the law. An inheritance of the law is no longer of promise.

Purpose of the Law

Galatians 3:19-20

19 Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made. 20 Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one.

If the blessing in Christ is not under the law, then what purpose does the law serve? It was added because of the transgressions and sins of the Jewish people until Christ should come. Paul teaches this same principle of the law related to sin and transgressions in Romans 3:20:

20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

In short, sin and transgression required a sustaining law until the blessing of Abraham was fulfilled in Christ. So that Christ himself would teach in Matthew 5:17-18:

17 "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. 18 "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.

Thus the law and the promised work perfectly together with each fulfilling its purpose in Christ.

Galatians 3:21-25

21 Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. 22 But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. 23 But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. 24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

Therefore, the law is not against the promises of God because the law could not give life; if it could have given life, righteousness would have been by the law. The law established sin for all, and the promise establish salvation to all who believe in Jesus Christ. The law kept mankind under guard for the faith in Christ which was afterward to be revealed. Therefore, the law came:

As a tutor to bring us to Christ.

* Scriptures are NASB unless noted otherwise.

That we might be justified by faith.

But after faith came, we are no longer under the law.

In this way, Christ was the fulfillment of the law as taught also in Romans 10:4: “4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

Sons and Heirs

Galatians 3:26-29

26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

We who receive Abraham's blessing through belief in Christ are all sons God through this faith in Christ. However, it is not by faith alone as James also records in James 2:19:

19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. 20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

To become a son of God, one must obey by being baptized into Christ to put on Christ—a consistent principle taught by Christ and his apostles. In Mark 16:16, Jesus taught:

16 "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.

In Acts 22:16, Saul (later, called Paul) at the point of his conversion was told:

6 “And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.”

Finally Peter wrote in 1 Peter 3:21:

21 And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you — not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience — through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

This promise of salvation is open to all men of every nation, slave or free, male or female. We are one in Christ Jesus; we all are Abraham's offspring; and we are heirs according to the promise!

This testimony is certain; Romans 8:12-17 agrees:

12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh — 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are **being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.** 15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, **but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons** by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are **children of God**, 17 and if children, heirs also, **heirs of God** and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

GALATIANS 4

Galatians 3 concluded with these four points necessary to understand Galatians 4:

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

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

For you are all one in Christ Jesus.

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

That we are “heirs according to the [God’s] promise” is the salient point and the one carried into the logic of chapter four.

The Fullness of Time

Galatians 4:1-7

4 Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, 2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. 3 So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. 4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

An heir, who is a child, is no different from a slave though he is heir and master. He stays in ward until the time appointed by his father. Mankind were heirs of promise under ward to the law and held captives by the elements of the law until the fullness of time—that is when God sent forth his son. The fullness of time was established by Jesus at the advent of his preaching, according to Mark 1:14-15:

14 And after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Paul agrees in Ephesians 1:10-11 that this was the “the fullness of times:”

10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him

With the heir—Jesus—came our redemption and adoption as sons. As his sons, we have his Spirit in our hearts. Thus, here and in Romans 10:15-17, we cry out, “Abba, Father:”

15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "**Abba! Father!**" 16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are **children of God**, 17 and if children, heirs also, **heirs of God** and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

Christ himself used the term from the depth of his despair in the shadow of the impending cross in Mark 14:36:

36 And He was saying, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what you will."

According to Vine, *Abba*, which is *Father* from the Aramaic mother’s tongue of Jewish children and *Father*, which is from the everyday Greek language, *pater*, combine to express love and intelligent confidence (from Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.) Today these emotional differences are represented by *father*, *dad*, *daddy*.

* Scriptures are NASB unless noted otherwise.

Therefore, by the Spirit of adoption we are children of God in the very same sense that Christ was the only begotten child of God, with the very same inheritance.

Fears for the Church

Galatians 4:8-11

8 However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. 9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? 10 You observe days and months and seasons and years. 11 I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.

Chapter four, verse eight begins a two-fold argument:

1. The Galatians turned from godless idolatry, but after knowing and serving God, they return to bondage under the elements of this world. Galatians 4:8-11.
2. The Galatians accepted Paul and received him as they would have received an angel from God, even as Christ, and then treated him as an enemy because he told them the truth. Galatians 4:12-16

It was not that they were returning to idol worship, but it was that they accepting the teaching of those who would bind the law of Moses on Christians, being once again in bondage to beggarly elements of this world: observing days and months and seasons and years. Paul made this exact same point to the Colossian Christians in Colossians 2:14-17:

14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

16 Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day — 17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

Whether people keep the empty practices of godless idolatry or the empty practices of the law, of Moses, now nailed to the cross, they are in bondage to the weak and beggarly elements of this world.

Galatians 4:12-16

12 I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong; 13 but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; 14 and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself. 15 Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness, that if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. 16 Have I therefore become your enemy by telling you the truth?

Paul urges them to be like him, who turned his back on the weak and beggarly elements of the world, whether of idolatry or Judaism. They had not always rejected him for their perverted form of the gospel (Gal 1:6-10). For when he had come to them, they accepted him totally including his physical weaknesses, for which they would have plucked out their eyes for him. Many think this refers to a conditions of blindness or a least partial blindness. In 2 Corinthians 11:30-31, he spoke of his infirmity:

30 If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness. 31 The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.

And in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, he spoke of his thorn in the flesh:

* Scriptures are NASB unless noted otherwise.

7 And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me—to keep me from exalting myself! 8 Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me.

The idea that Paul was to a degree blind is also supported by the closing statement of the letter to these Galatians in Galatians 6:11-12:

11 See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. 12 Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

However, verse 13 in this context, forces one to think that Paul was otherwise sick when he first came to Galatia:

13 but you know that it was because of a **bodily illness** that I preached the gospel to you the first time; 14 and that which was a trial to you in my **bodily condition** you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself.

The important point is that his former reception “as an angel of God, even as Jesus Christ,” offers stark contrast to Paul’s current situation with them: “Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?”

Galatians 4:17-20

17 They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out, in order that you may seek them. 18 But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you. 19 My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you—20 but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

The contrast extends to the issue of whether they will be zealous for the false (Judaizing) teachers or zealous for Christ and the gospel that they had first received. Their position creates doubts about them concerning their faithfulness. Their departure is to such a degree that Christ who has left them must be formed in them again.

Two Covenants (Gen 21:8-21; Isa 54:1)

Children of the Bond Woman

Galatians 4:21-27

21 Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. 23 But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. 24 This is allegorically speaking: for these women are two covenants, one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. 25 Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. 27 For it is written,

"Rejoice, barren woman who does not bear;

Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor;

For more are the children of the desolate

Than of the one who has a husband."

There is no doubt that the covenant gives birth to bondage; thus there is no way one should want to be under the Law of Moses. On the other hand, the Jerusalem above is mother of us all. Therefore, we are children of the free woman. Our Jerusalem is the New Jerusalem of Rev 3:12:

* Scriptures are NASB unless noted otherwise.

12 'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.

The Jerusalem above is the holy city of Rev 21:1-2:

21 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

The Jerusalem above is the church, now and eternally, in Heb 12:22-24:

22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

We Are Children of the Free Woman

Galatians 4:28-31

8 And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. 30 But what does the Scripture say? [Genesis 21:10-12]:

"Cast out the bondwoman and her son,

For the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman."

31 So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.

Symbolism of This Passage Is an Extended Metaphor

Children of the Bondwoman	Children of the Free Woman
Hagar	Sarah
Ishmael	Isaac
Born of the Flesh	Born of the Faith and Promise
Covenant of Mount Sinai—Bondage	Gospel of Christ--Freedom
Jerusalem That Now Is, Bondage with Her Children	Jerusalem Above, Now Free with Her Children
Heir (Ishmael) according to the Flesh	Heir (Christians) according to the Spirit

* Scriptures are NASB unless noted otherwise.

GALATIANS 5

Among other important facts established in Gal 4, two are pertinent to the beginning of Galatians 5:

Galatians 4:6-7: 6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

Galatians 4:30-31: But what does the Scripture say?

Cast out the bondwoman and her son,

For the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman."

31 So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.

We, who are baptized into Christ (Gal 3:26-29), are sons and heirs; and as heirs, we are free. Only bondage remains for those turning back to the law or any other perversions of the gospel, according to Gal 1:6-10.

Christian Liberty

Galatians 5:1-7

5 It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

2 Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. 3 And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. 4 You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. 5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.

Why, if Christ has made us free by the liberty bought with his death on the cross, would we want to turn again to the bondage of pagan idolatry or Judaism and the Law of Moses? Yet religions claiming Christian affiliations have done it even beginning at this time in the first century until now. If one binds the law (circumcision), Christ will profit nothing. And if we or modern religions bind a part of the law we are in debt to the whole law. Many present day practices seek Old Testament justification: praise worship, infant baptism, instrumental music, feast days and Sabbaths, incense burning, etc. Have they not become estranged from Christ? In fact, the writer says plainly, "You have fallen from grace."

The faithful will remain true to the faith (Jude 3) by faith working through love of the Lord, his church, and his gospel.

Love Fulfills the Law

Galatians 5:7-10

7 You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? 8 This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. 10 I have confidence in you in the Lord, that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.

Sometimes we get a good start, faithful to the word of the New Testament, but false teachers hinder us, planting false teachings, unfounded in the scriptures. Once they come in and place that teaching in the heart of just one member, the false teaching runs like leaven through the entire congregation. Paul believes that they will return to the mind of Christ, and the false teacher will stand the judgment of God.

* Scriptures are NASB unless noted otherwise.

Galatians 5:11-15

11 But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished. 12 Would that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves.

13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another.

Let us suppose that we, as Paul, might go along with perversions of the gospel. In Paul's case this was circumcision. In our case, it will be the many perversions of the day, the offense of the cross will not cease just because we go along. Paul may hope, but those that teach falsely will never go away.

Those of us, who are called to the liberty in Jesus, are not called to seek opportunity for the flesh. The opportunity that we have is to love and serve one another. There is only one thing that we get from the law: "Love your neighbor as yourself." To bite and devour one another leads to our destruction at the hands of one another.

Walking in the Spirit

Galatians 5:16-18

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

The Spirit against the Flesh

Walking in the Spirit keeps us from fulfilling the lust of the flesh. In fulfilling the lust of the flesh, we sin just as James described in James 1:14-15:

But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

The great war within us is the flesh lusting against the Spirit and the Spirit lusting against the flesh. In Ephesians 6:10-12, Paul described this war in more detail placing the devil and his minions in the leadership role:

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

The Works of the Flesh

Galatians 5:19-22

19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

The first three mentioned works of the flesh (immorality, impurity, and sensuality) are public and personal sins including participating in evil or showing evil for others to see:

1. Immorality includes adultery which is is unfaithfulness from within the marriage contract. Hebrews 13:4 teaches:

* Scriptures are NASB unless noted otherwise.

4 Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

To Peter in 2 Peter 2:13-14, this evil may be carousing through the church:

They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, **as they carouse with you**, 14 having eyes full of adultery and that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls.

Modern permissive marriage laws promote adultery and unlawful remarriage even among those within the church.

Immorality also includes fornication which is unrestricted sexual abuse outside the marriage contract and often translated as sexual immorality. In our age we are talking about sexually active teenagers, unmarried adults committing sexual misconduct, now called casual sex, and homosexuality, which the Bible condemns in the most clear and certain terms. Paul shows sexual immorality to be a sin of unique and irrevocable dangers and consequences in 1 Corinthians 6:18-20:

8 Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

Homosexuality, in spite of its contemporary publicity and mounting public approval, is a sexually immoral sin of certain condemnation. Paul wrote in Romans 1:26-27:

26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

2. Impurity in the original language indicates relationship between false religion and permissive immorality: “suggestive of the fact that sensuality and evil doctrine are frequently associated.” (from Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.) This easily is illustrated by modern religious festivals which become an excuse for unbridled licentiousness. Mardi Gras comes to mind, and also the reveling and emotional dancing of some praise worshipers.

3. Sensuality is unchaste, vulgar, obscene behavior. Perhaps the meaning is seen best through its synonyms: bawdy, blue, coarse, crude, dirty, filthy, foul, gross, gutter, impure, indecent, lascivious, obscene, locker-room, nasty, pornographic, porno, profane, raunchy, ribald, smutty, trashy, unprintable, vulgar, wanton, X-rated.

The next two mentioned works of the flesh are sins of religious implications (idolatry, sorcery) with a history of promoting false teaching and unrighteous acts:

1. Idolatry with its sins and dangers is clearly defined and condemned in the New Testament; yet, it runs rampant in the world today, finding its expression even in religions that claim to be Christian. From statues of Buddha to the angel of Maroni of Mormons to the many, many graven images of the Roman church, idolatry is alive and well in the 21st century. The prohibition against carved images or statues of worship in the New Testament follow the Old Testament in its condemnation without qualification. The Ten Commandments set the standard with exact words in Exodus 20:4-6; 22-23:

4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing loving kindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

22 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'You yourselves have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven. 23 'You shall not make other gods besides Me; gods of silver or gods of gold, you shall not make for yourselves

The apostle Paul affirmed this teaching in the New Testament in Romans 1:20-23:

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. 25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

For Christians who may think the carved statues of worship make little difference, God warns of his wrath in Romans 1:18-20:

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

And if 21st century Christians are tempted to dabble in idolatry, 2 Corinthians 6:16 forewarns:

16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God.

The most common form of idolatry today and the one Christians are most cunningly deceived by is money—the all mighty dollar. Consider the declaration of Jesus in Matthew 6:24:

24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. [NIV translates: mammon, money].

Paul called covetousness and greed idolatry in Colossians 3:5-6:

5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. 6 For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come,

2. Sorcery is called witchcraft in the NIV. In Bible times, they professed to perform miracles and speak prophetic words called, sooth saying, which is the pretense of prophecy by supernatural means. In this category, fall the modern (new age) prophets and miracle workers. Their fate is certain as stated in Revelation 21:8:

8 "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

The next set of the works of the flesh is the most numerous of all these. They are sins of division and animosity among the brothers and sisters (enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying) which destroy the church.

Whatever else is said of controversy in the church, many times the scriptural truth of a position is offset by the mean and nasty way it is presented and side-picking efforts that go along with it. There are eight of the sins listed, outnumbering the immoral sins and the false teaching sins all together. Their

* Scriptures are NASB unless noted otherwise.

meaning is self-evident; their presence in the congregation where they exist is obvious; their destructive nature moves like wildfire. Alas, opposition by the faithful may be tepid and timid, especially if the leader is popular and charismatic.

1. Enmities has a special prohibition; for we are neither to hate our brothers nor our enemies, as Jesus taught in Matthew 5:43-45:

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.' 44 "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.

2. Strife are tendencies to quarrels and disputes. Paul elaborated in Titus 3:9-11:

9 But shun foolish controversies and genealogies and **strife** and disputes about the Law; for they are unprofitable and worthless. 10 Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, 11 knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.

3. Jealousies find modern meaning in synonyms: covetousness, enviousness, green-eyed monster, envy, resentment.

4. Outbursts of anger are destructive to a congregation in an open and blatant way. God would have us flee from wrath as in 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10

9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him.

James 1:19-20 addresses the appropriate behavior of Christians, leaving no room for wrath:

19 This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

5. Disputes (Selfish ambitions in NIV) is the subject of Paul's illustration of preachers who have sinful motivation in Philippians 1:15-17:

15 Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; 16 the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; 17 the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.

The appropriate attitude toward our brothers and sisters contrasts to selfish ambition in Philippians 2:3-4:

3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

6. Dissensions depend on factions and cliques to survive. By definition they are destructive and dangerous: disagreements; especially partisan and with contentious quarreling.

7. Factions denotes "'a choosing, choice' . . . then, 'that which is chosen,' and hence, 'an opinion,' especially a self-willed opinion, which is substituted for submission to the power of truth, and leads to division and the formation of sects . . . such erroneous opinions are frequently the outcome of personal preference or the prospect of advantage; . . ." (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.)

In short, opinions versus scripture lead to division and the creation of factions and sects: our world sees many of these opinions championed by sectarianism: new age prophecies; homosexual approval; God did not create man; there are many churches; rowdy, reveling church services; permissive sex among all peoples; non-contested divorce—to mention only a few common factions.

* Scriptures are NASB unless noted otherwise.

8. Envy speaks to our desire to have what belongs to another: their beauty, wealth, family, knowledge, wisdom, etc. The sin of envy is coupled with self-seeking according to **James 3:14-17**:

14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

How different this spirit is than the one described as the mind of Christ in Philippians 2:3-6:

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

The Fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

This writing will save the specific definitions of the wonderful fruit of the Spirit until another lesson. For now, note the repetition of these traits in the various scriptures. Paul wrote in Philippians 4:8-9:

8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things. 9 The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you.

Peter's rendition of these works (fruits) of the Spirit tells us to add them in 2 Peter 1:5-8 in order not to be unfruitful:

5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; 6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Galatians 5:24-26

24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. 26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

If we are Christ's we have crucified the flesh with the passions and desires. We, who were baptized into Christ, did put on Christ. Paul called it doing away with the body of sin, in Romans 6:3-13:

4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to

* Scriptures are NASB unless noted otherwise.

die again; death no longer is master over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts,
Thus ends the war between the Spirit and the flesh: Let us live in the Spirit; let us walk in the Spirit.

GALATIANS 6

Galatians 5 concluded with two statements of admonition, which follow the discussion of the fruits of the Spirit—let us walk in the Spirit; and let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another-- found in Galatians 5:22-26:

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. 26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

These admonitions set the attitudes necessary to deal appropriately with our less fortunate brothers and sisters in Christ, our preachers and evangelists, the poor, and those in need of discipline. The rules are in chapter 5; the applications are in chapter 6.

Bear and Share One Another's Burdens

Galatians 6:1

1 Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted.

Paul gave a comprehensive list of the works of the flesh in Gal 5:19-21. The sins will, sooner or later, catch up with all Christians. When this happens what are we to do? Restore the overtaken one with a spirit of gentleness. In humility, we should always be conscious that we also might be tempted and fall into the devil's snare. Urgency and gentleness are the watch words for restoring the fallen. The gospel gives us examples of how to proceed. First we should consider ourselves, lest we too fall. Even in our prayers we are charged to forgive those who sin against us. Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 6:9-15

9 "Pray, then, in this way:

'Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.

10 'Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven.

11 'Give us this day our daily bread.

12 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

[For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.]'

14 "For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 "But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

Gentleness begins with forgiveness, if the sin is against us. Given that the sin is persistent, the Lord has given a process for that sin to be dealt with in Matthew 18:15-17:

15 "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by

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the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. 17 "And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer.

The sin against us may be a sin not unto death, in which case, we may pray for our brother, and that is the end of it, according to 1 John 5:16-17:

6 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. 17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death.

Sins unto death are willful sins and continuing sins. Peter speaks of those who forthrightly turn back to the world from where they came, in 2 Peter 2:20-22

20 For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. 21 For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them. 22 It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A dog returns to its own vomit," and, "A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire."

Willful sins bear a certain condemnation from the Lord, creating the upmost urgency for resolution in Hebrews 10:26-27:

26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.

For sins unto death, Paul has prescribed our action in 1 Corinthians 5:11:

11 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one.

And again in 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15:

14 And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame. 15 And yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

Although we must deny fellowship to those sinning unto spiritual death, we also must admonish them as brothers and show gentleness in the process. Paul elaborates on our attitude in 1 Thessalonians 5:14-16

14 And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men. 15 See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men.

Galatians 6:2-5

2 Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. 5 For each one shall bear his own load.

Thus, we must not only restore the one overtaken by trespass, but also bear one another's burdens. This grand effort to bear one another's burdens fulfills the law of Christ. Fulfilling the law of Christ is

set in juxtaposition to the works of the flesh. James laid down the rule governing our support of one another in James 2:8-10:

8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.

Christ, himself, fulfilled his own law, in his baptism by John in Matthew 3:13-15

13 Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. 14 But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" 15 But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him.

When the brother is sinning or weak—overwhelmed by burdens, as it were—it is easy to gloat and hold them in disdain; yet we who look down on others are deceived, not know the devil lies in wait. We may ourselves fall, and so we must look to ourselves and not judge to be something great when compared to the weak one.

Be Generous and Do Good

Sharing with Teachers and Preachers

Galatians 6:6

6 And let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches.

The straight forward obligation of the church and its individual members is to support those who teach them. This includes elders, preachers, and teachers, as the circumstance dictate. When the Lord sent his disciples out on the limited commission, he charged them in Luke 10:7:

"And stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages.

Of elders, Paul instructed Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:17-18:

17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages." 1

It is not often the churches pays elders in this modern age. However, it is important to note that scriptures provide this option to the church. Paul included himself and Timothy with a similar admonition in 1 Corinthians 9:9-12:

9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing." God is not concerned about oxen, is He? 10 Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. 11 If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you? 12 If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.

Paul, Barnabas, and Apollos lived almost destitute lives to preach the gospel, according to 1 Corinthians 4:11-13:

11 To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; 12 and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are

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reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; 13 when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.

Our obligation to the preachers of the gospel is as clear and pointed as any given in scripture. 1 Corinthians 9:14 teaches succinctly:

So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.

Do Good to All

Galatians 6:7-10

7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life. 9 And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. 10 So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

The story is told that Billy Sunday, a denominational evangelist, of the 20th century, would hold huge meetings under three pole circus tents. He often started by flying down the center aisle on his motorcycle, slamming on the brakes, going into a side, jumping off and onto the stage, slapping the podium with his Bible, and yelling, "There will be a payday someday!"

This scripture teaches that what we sow, we reap. Sow to the flesh; reap corruption. Sow to the Spirit; reap everlasting life. Yes, indeed, there will be a payday someday.

Our sowing and reaping cannot be seasonal, nor just when we feel like it. But as we have opportunity, do good to all. Nor can our good works be selective; but contra wise, we must do our good to all. Yet, there is a special duty to those of the household of faith. If we do not grow weary and if we do not lose heart, we shall reap.

The Law and the Prophets hung on the premise of doing good to all to all men. Jesus was confronted with this issue Matthew 22:36-40

36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 "This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 "The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

Paul in chapter 5 and here affirms this as the dominate theme of the law of the gospel in Galatians 5:13-15:

13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another.

Finally, James—right along with keeping oneself unspotted from the world—gives caring for the destitute the special designation of pure and undefiled religion in James 1:26-27:

26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. 27 This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Our pure lives and our benevolent lives are equal obligations before God.

* Scriptures are NASB unless noted otherwise.

Glory Only in the Cross

Galatians 6:11-13

11 See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. 12 Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13 For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised, that they may boast in your flesh.

This is Paul's summary statement:

One cannot think a good showing in the flesh (physical circumcision) is suffering for the cross of Christ. This is boasting in the flesh. Paul has explained that such suffering profits one nothing in Colossians 2:20-23:

20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21 "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" 22 (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using) — in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

Galatians 6:14-16

14 But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. 16 And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

The crux of the matter is that the world—including circumcision—has been crucified to us; and these and other worldly matters avail us nothing. What does matter then? We are a new creation!

The purpose of the cross of Jesus and our baptism into his death is to create us anew:

John 3:4-8: 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Romans 6:4: 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

2 Corinthians 5:17-18: 17 Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

Titus 3:4-8: 4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, 5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

The Israel of God is the spiritual kingdom established by God with Christ its king just as God had promised. Romans 9:6-8 explains:

6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; 7 neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "through Isaac your descendants will be named." 8 That is, it is not the

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children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants

The law of the Israel of God is the gospel of Christ; and there is no other as taught in Galatians 1:6-10 where we began this study:

6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; 7 which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed. 10 For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.

Blessing and a Plea

Galatians 6:17-18

17 From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus.

18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.

Under the gospel, the new covenant, Christians are marked as servants (slaves) of Jesus who own us by his gospel. The Greek word here is stigma:

Stigma (stig'-mah); from a primary stizo (to "stick", i.e. prick); a mark incised or punched (for recognition of ownership), i.e. (figuratively) scar of service: (Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright © 1994, 2003, 2006 Biblesoft, Inc. and International Bible Translators, Inc.)

Many versions use only the word *mark* which does not fully express the true relationship of the Christian servant and the Lord Jesus. We are his through the gospel.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is with our spirit, if we are his.