**GALATIANS**

**Introduction:**

*Galatians* was a circular letter shared among many churches. It is one of the most important NT epistles, with its themes of justification by faith, Christian freedom, and unity. *Galatians* also emphasizes the Holy Spirit.

Although the epistle contains less than 150 verses, it has had a profound

influence on Christians throughout the centuries. Early Christian church fathers wrote more commentaries on *Galatians* than on any other of Paul’s epistles. *Galatians* had a huge influence on John Wesley and Martin Luther, who wrote a very influential commentary on the epistle. Indeed, the epistle sometimes is referred to as “Luther’s book” or the “Magna Carta of Christian Liberty.”

*Author:*

Scholars uniformly attribute *Galatians* to Paul. But, as with Paul’s other letters, it was written through an amanuensis. The letter contains a great deal of autobiographical information about Paul that is not available from other sources, e.g., his post-conversion time in Arabia (1:17); his 2 Jerusalem trips (1:18; 2:1-10); and his confrontation with Peter (2:11-14).

*Purpose:*

Paul wrote *Galatians* in opposition to certain unnamed agitators/Judaizers. (“Judaism” was a term for Jewish faith and way of life as it had developed during the IT Period. “Judaizers” were Jewish Christians who argued that adherence to Jewish Law and tradition, including circumcision, was necessary for justification with God and to be part of God’s people. Josephus said to “Judaize” meant: to adopt Jewish customs and live like a Jew.) Judaizers were Jewish Christians. They did not dispute the truth of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, but they thought that to be “fully” saved and become part of God’s people, a man must be circumcised, and all believers must adhere to Jewish Law and tradition. In other words, Judaizers taught that Christianity was based on Christ, *plus* Judaism.

The Judaizers’ teachings were diametrically counter to Paul’s teaching, which proclaimed salvation was by God’s grace through faith in Christ alone. Paul declared that Jesus had set His followers free from the Law so that both Jewish and Gentile Christians were equal before God. Paul considered the Judaizers’ teachings a deadly threat to the Gospel, not a mere theological nuance.

*Galatians* was written during a time of great Jewish nationalism. Although the war against Rome that led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple began in 66 AD, rumblings of revolt already could be heard in Palestine and beyond. Zealots were increasing active, even intimidating some moderate Jews.

Also, some Jewish Christians, Judaizers, were unwilling to abandon Jewish tradition and the requirement for circumcision. After all, during Seleucid rule, many Jews had died because they circumcised their baby boys, or they refused to violate Jewish dietary restrictions. The Judaizers could not consider the deaths of those martyrs to have been in vain, and they would not include Gentile sinners who did not comply with the Law among God’s people.

These agitators implied that Paul’s ministry created half Christians, who failed to take the final required step to Judaism. They also may have disparaged Paul, saying he was not a “real apostle” and accused him of increasing the number of his followers by making it easier for Gentiles to join the church.

Paul did not hide his frustration with the agitators. He was open about his anger. Justification was not, and never could be, based on the Law, and it was not only for Jews. What God had done in Christ was unmerited, unconditional love, given freely by God’s grace without merit to everyone, and God had sent His Holy Spirit to allow His children to live the Christian life. No one should attempt to reimpose the Law on those who had been set free in Christ.

*Recipients & Date:*

The debate about *Galatians* is not about its theology or its author; rather, it is about its date and recipients. Scholars and commentators seem to be about evenly split into 2 camps, each of which claims to be the “majority view.” In Paul’s day, Galatia covered a large part of Asia Minor, roughly equivalent to modern Turkey. When Paul’s letter was written and to whom it was directed depends on the part of Galatia to which one believes it was directed.

The earlier view, the “ethnic” theory, was predicated on the 3rdC BC migration of Celts from France/Gaul to No. Galatia. In 277 BC, the king of Bithynia invited Celts/Gauls to Asia Minor as mercenaries. Soon, the Gauls exceeded their authority and began to raid the region indiscriminately. Syrian/Seleucid king, Antiochus I, and Pergamum’s king, Attalus I, quashed the raids, defeating the Gauls (Celts) and resettling them in central Anatolia, now the area around modern Ankara, Turkey. Those Gauls were self-ruled until Rome conquered them in 25 AD.

Paul travelled through Phrygia and N Galatia on his 2nd missionary journey (and on his 3rd trip), but no evidence exists that he founded any churches there. Under the ethnic theory, *Galatians* was written in the mid-50s AD either from Ephesus or Macedonia on Paul’s 2nd journey after he wrote the letters to the *Thessalonians* and before *Romans* (which has similar theological themes to *Galatians*).[Some argue *Galatians* was written in 51-53 AD from Syrian Antioch or Corinth after *Thessalonians.*]

The other theory, the “political” view, is based on Augustus Caesar’s reorganization of the Empire in 25 AD, which expanded Galatia to include the So. section of Asia Minor, including the area between Pontus to Pamphylia, with Psidia, parts of Lycanoia, and Phrygia. So. Galatia had a strong Roman presence in the 1stC AD. The Via Sebaste (Imperial Road) in So. Galatia was completed in 6 BC linking 6 Roman colonies established by Augustus. Psidian Antioch, in the SW corner of Galatia, became a Roman military center where Augustus settled 3000 veterans on 7 hills, with city wards named after Rome’s political subdivisions, and a huge Temple to the god Augustus built to Roman standards.

On his 1st missionary journey, Paul, whose journeys followed major trade routes, traveled the Via Sebaste through So. Galatia- Psidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. (Acts 13,14). Many scholars believe Paul wrote to his beloved converts from the 1st journey when he heard Judaizers were interfering with the freedom of Gentile Christian converts in So. Galatia. If this view is correct, *Galatians* was Paul’s 1st letter and probably was the 1st NT book. It would have been written from Psidian Antioch in 48/49 AD, just before the Jerusalem Council, in 49 AD. (Acts 15). Paul re-visited So. Galatia on his 2nd and 3rd journeys.

In short, the divergence over *Galatians’* date and recipients may not be resolved in this life but here are a few more insights:

* One ancient commentator noted that part of the area Paul evangelized was ethnically Phrygian, but politically Galatian. An inscription in Ancyra identified a group of priests, all of whom were listed as Galatian, though their names were Celtic, Roman, and Greek.
* Ancient Jewish/Roman author, Josephus, said “Galatians” meant all Galatians, including those living in So. Galatia.
* Beginning in 74 AD, after Paul’s letter, Emperor Vespasian gradually limited Galatia to the No. region, which may have influenced early church fathers to believe Paul wrote *Galatians* to the No. group because their experience of “Galatia” only included the No, even though it was unlikely Paul planted any churches there.

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**Background***: (1st Missionary Journey of Paul & Barnabas)*

Acts 13:14-42: *Psidian Antioch*

In early September 46 AD, after being commissioned by the Syrian Antioch church (2nd only in the Jerusalem church), Barnabas and Paul set out on their 1st missionary journey. After several stops, they arrived at Psidian Antioch in So. Galatia. [Pisidian Antioch was a mini-Rome, built on 7 hills at an elevation of about 3600 feet. It was famous for its health spas. Many Roman senators and equestrians, the Roman nobility class just below senatorial rank, made it their vacation home. During Tiberius’ reign, Rome began construction of a temple to Augustus in Pisidian Antioch. It was completed in 50 AD, just after Paul left.]

Pisidian Antioch had a diverse population, including many Jews. As was their custom, Paul and Barnabas first went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. [Luke provided a glimpse into the synagogue of the day. Although synagogues differed, they generally had stone benches along 3 of the 4 walls, with rows of benches in the middle. People were seated based on age and status.

Synagogues had no pastor. They were governed by members- a*rchontes* (leaders) or *presbyteroi* (elders), who held their position for a 1-year term. An officer known as the “*archisyngogus*” (ruler of the synagogue) had special responsibility for public worship. During the service, the congregation recited the *Shema* (Deut.6:4-9); a congregation member was asked to read the Law (Torah/ Pentateuch and the Prophets, usually from the Greek, Septuagint (LXX); then someone was asked to expound on the Scripture (like Jesus was in Nazareth). A prayer and benediction concluded the service.]

Not surprisingly, the ruler of the synagogue asked Paul to expound on the Scripture; he was a travelling rabbi trained by the great Gamaliel in Jerusalem. Paul stood to preach. [In the Holy Land, rabbis sat to teach, but in Diaspora synagogues, they stood.) Motioning with his hand as Greek orators did, Paul began, “men of Israel and you who fear God” = Gentile God-fearers.

Paul’s reported sermon tied the OT history of God’s great acts to Jesus and emphasized the continuity of God’s love for His people. Then, Paul demonstrated how Christ had fulfilled prophecy and Scripture. Much like the earlier sermons of Peter and Stephen, Paul spoke of Israel’s bondage in Egypt and God’s love and care for the Israelites, setting them free.

Then, Paul began the 2nd part of his sermon with a new salutation. Jewish sermons traditionally began, “men of Israel,” but Paul addressed the audience, “men and brothers,” including both Jews and Gentile God-fearers, and adding, “recipients of the message of salvation,” thus affirming God’s salvation was to all. The key elements of Paul’s sermon were:

* Jesus’ death was the result of the misunderstanding and ignorance of Jerusalem’s residents and leaders, who unknowingly fulfilled the Scriptures by causing Jesus to be crucified,
* No justification existed for Jesus’ death sentence, but He died like a criminal, hanging on a tree,
* Jesus was buried; He really died,
* God raised Jesus from the dead, as was prophesied in Scripture,
* Many eyewitnesses attested to His resurrection,
* God always is the author of salvation,
* Forgiveness is directly related to Christ’s resurrection, and
* Only through faith in Christ can sinners be made right with God.

Paul sought to persuade his audience to accept Jesus as the fulfillment of

God’s promises, correctly assuming his audience knew many details about Jesus’ death. Paul announced that the malevolent killing of innocent Jesus triggered God’s benevolent plan to raise Him from the dead and reverse evil for good. Although Paul accused the Jews, not the Romans, of Jesus’ death, he said they killed Him because they did not understand the Scriptures (even though they read Scripture at synagogue every Sabbath). Jesus suffered a death of humiliation, but God removed the curse and exalted Jesus by raising him from the dead.

Paul supported his preaching with Scripture references and eyewitness testimony. He declared Jesus had many (at least 10) post-resurrection appearances, one of which was to more than 500 people. In Judaism, any fact could be established by 2 witnesses’ testimony. Far more 2 witnesses had attested to Jesus’ resurrection.

The final section of the sermon began with “we,” meaning he, Barnabas, and his audience had received the promise to Israel when God raised Jesus from the dead. Then, he made a very Jewish argument, citing Scripture as authority:

* First, he quoted Ps.2:7, part of regular synagogue liturgy and well known as a Messianic Psalm. [1stC Christians believed it applied to Jesus.]
* Then, citing Isa.55:3, Paul argued that in Jesus, God had continued His covenant with David from whom Messiah would come. [Through Jesus, God fulfilled His promises to His people, and He raised Jesus from the dead to extend His blessings to all believers.]
* Finally, citing Ps.16:10, Paul pointed to Jesus as Messiah, Who never again would experience death and Who would bless all people.

David “fell asleep,” but Jesus’ ministry would last forever. God did not permit decay to take hold of Jesus. He had power over death. Jesus brought forgiveness of sins to all who put their faith in Him.

Finally, Paul quoted the prophet Habakkuk 1:5 (Habakkuk was very popular in the IT Period and 1st C). He wanted to warn those who might reject Jesus that no one can obtain forgiveness of sins through the Law because no one can perfectly follow the Law. Jesus’ death and resurrection were the only way to justification. [This was the only time in *Acts* where the doctrine of justification by faith was clearly set forth.] At the end of Paul’s sermon, the crowd asked Paul to return on the next Sabbath. He agreed and encouraged those who had responded positively to his message to continue in God’s grace.

Acts 13:43-52:

Paul had presented Jesus as the fulfillment of Scripture, but not all the Jews agreed. Some Jews considered Paul’s message a scandalous challenge to God’s Law. They argued that Jesus was a criminal cursed by God, and they hated the thought that God’s privileges to Jews would be shared with Gentiles.

On the other hand, God-fearers, who were attracted by Judaism but had not become proselytes because that required circumcision, also had attended the synagogue. Paul said they could become part of God’s people without circumcision- the suggestion that had infuriated many Jews, who considered it an attack on their status and privilege. [Paul always lived a paradox. He had to go to synagogues first and preach to Jews, but inevitably this led to his rejection. Throughout his ministry, Paul longed for the Jews to come to Christ, but he was the apostle to the Gentiles.]

Throughout the week, the faith continued to spread. On the next Sabbath, almost the “whole city” (hyperbole) came to hear Paul preach. This further antagonized the unbelieving Jews, who spoke abusively about Paul and Barnabas. The missionaries, however, focused on Isaiah’s words (Isa.49:6), sometimes called the OT Great Commission, declaring that since those Jews had rejected the Gospel, they would take the Gospel to the Gentiles. (Paul and Barnabas personified the mission to be a light to the Gentiles.) Salvation was available to all who called on the Name of the Lord, but the Jewish opposition had rejected it.

Many Gentiles were delighted with Paul’s message. Everywhere people were talking about God’s Word. The church grew rapidly, especially among the Gentiles. But the Jews, who had rejected the Gospel, aggressively stirred up powerful opposition. [The opponents may have been more disturbed about the threat Paul’s message posed to their power and authority than to the contents of his message itself.] Among the unconverted God-fearers were powerful men and wealthy women. The opponents encouraged them to act against the disciples. The result: Paul and Barnabas were expelled from Pisidian Antioch.

As Jesus had instructed His disciples, Paul and Barnabas shook the dust from their feet and left. Then, filled with the Holy Spirit and joy, Paul and Barnabas left for Iconium.

Chapter 14:1-20: *Iconium and Lystra*

Paul and Barnabas travelled to Iconium, 150 miles So of modern Ankara, Turkey’s capital. It was known as the Damascus of Asia Minor and was older than Syrian Damascus. Iconium was 90 miles (3-4 days) from Pisidian Antioch along the Via Sebaste at a junction where road diverged in 4 directions.

[Iconium, now Konya, sat high on a fertile plain, with rich vegetation, verdant forests, abundant water, and a gentle climate. It was a beautiful and prosperous Phrygian town, which had been transformed into a Greek city-state by Syrian/Seleucid King Antiochus III, who settled 2000 Jewish families in Phrygia. Its population was a mix of Phrygian and Lycaonian, but it functioned as a Hellenistic agricultural and commercial center. As a Greek city, it was governed by a citizens’ assembly. According to a Greek myth, after a great flood Prometheus and Athena recreated mankind in Iconium by taking mud and breathing life into it.]

In 25 BC Augustus Caesar instituted a political reorganization in the Empire. Iconium became part of Galatia, with Pisidian Antioch and Lystra as the main administrative cities for the district. Iconium remained largely Greek, but Hadrian made it a Roman colony.

Paul and Barnabas stayed longer in Iconium than anywhere else on their 1st missionary journey. Again, they began in the synagogue. Many believed, both Jews and Gentile God-fearers. Again, many Jews refused to believe and stirred up crowds against Paul and Barnabas. The opposition seemed jealous of Paul’s power and popularity. Again, the opposition’s arguments were more about authority than theology or blasphemy. But the Holy Spirit confirmed the authority of Paul and Barnabas with miraculous signs, healings, and exorcisms.

The opposition plotted mob violence against Paul and Barnabas whom they considered troublemakers. They even enlisted people to kill them. (It was unclear whether these opponents were civil or religious leaders.) In Psidian Antioch, the opposition expelled Paul and Barnabas from town. In Iconium, the opponents sought to do them physical harm. But the church thrived through the opposition. People were attracted to the boldness and fearlessness of the preachers. Despite persecution, Christianity grew greatly in Iconium, which became one of Asia Minor’s most important Christian centers.

When Paul and Barnabas learned of the plot in Iconium, they and fled to

Lystra, about 20 miles (1 day) So/SW of Iconium on the Via Sebaste. [Lystra was in the Lycaonian region on a mountainous plateau (3300’ elevation), bordering the Taurus mountains in So. Galatia. The area was very dusty at the end of summer and bitterly cold in winter.]

[Lystra was built by Augustus Caesar in 26 BC as part of his political reorganization. In 6 AD, it became a Roman colony, the So-most in Asia Minor. It was a Roman administrative town in a different political district from Iconium. Many retired Roman veterans settled there, but it was not a very important city. Originally, Lystra was a day’s journey off the Via Sebaste, but the Via was expanded to include it. People retained their Anatolian/Lycaonian dialect, and until late in the 5thC AD, only the most educated citizens spoke Greek or Latin. Paul’s disciple, Timothy, was born and raised in Lystra to a Greek father and a Jewish mother. Greeks generally were more well off and educated than others.]

Paul and Barnabas arrived in Lystra and began to preach, though Lystra had no synagogue. (To form a synagogue, a town needed at least 10 adult Jewish men- heads of household.) Paul and Barnabas performed a healing much like the one in Acts 3:16, where at the temple gate, Peter and John healed a man who had been lame from birth. (The implication= Paul’s role in the Diaspora paralleled Peter’s in Palestine.) Here, the lame man seemed predisposed to Paul’s message of salvation and had faith to be made whole. [The man Peter healed only believed after he was healed.] This man and Paul looked each other straight in the eye; the man listened and believed; healing was confirmation of his salvation. Both here and in Acts 3, the word for healed was the same as “saved.”

[The Venerable Bede, an early church father, noted Peter and John had cured the lame man at the Temple door as a picture of salvation for Jews. Paul did the same as the picture of salvation for the Gentiles.]

The crowd misinterpreted the missionaries’ healing power and thought they were gods. Ovid, a Roman poet, in *Metamorphosis VIII,* recounted a Lycaonian legend aboutZeus and Hermes who went to Phrygia in disguise. Zeus was the chief god, who controlled thunder, lightning, and weather; Hermes was the spokesman of the gods, son of Zeus and Maia. (His name is the root of the word, “hermeneutics/interpretation.”) The gods went to 1000 homes, but no one gave them hospitality until they arrived at the straw and reed hovel of 2 peasants, Philemon and Baucis who served the gods a meal that strained their meagre resources and made them welcome without knowing they were gods. The gods rewarded the couple by building them a temple on a hill, with a golden roof and marble columns. The gods then had Philemon and Baucis watch as they flooded the earth, killing everyone. Ultimately when Philemon and Baucis died, the gods turned them into 2 trees- an oak and a linden.

When Barnabas and Paul healed the man, the locals determined not to make the same mistake as in the legend. They would worship these miracle workers. [No Scriptural description of Paul’s physical appearance has survived, but in Lystra, Barnabas was called Zeus, and Paul was named Mercury/Hermes, probably because he was shorter in stature and a better speaker. A 2ndC AD work, “Acts of Paul & Thecla,” whose author was from Iconium, described Paul:

“… of a small stature with meeting eyebrows, bald head, bow-

legged, strongly built, hollow-eyed, with a large crooked nose;

he was full of grace, for sometimes he appeared as a man,

sometimes he had the countenance of an angel.”

Some Corinthians also found Paul less handsome than their statues of Apollo.]

Zeus’ priests intended to sacrifice to Barnabas and Paul in the temple outside the city. They brought bulls/oxen adorned with garlands. [Bulls were expensive and only were used for the most important purposes.] When Barnabas and Paul realized what was happening, they were horrified. They tore their clothes and begged the locals not to sacrifice to them, declaring they were only mortals- humans, like everyone else. Many pagan kings called themselves gods, but Paul and Barnabas rejected the attempt to be called gods. Only Jesus was God (and man). They asserted they had not healed the lame man, God/Jesus had.

Paul began to preach- Paul’s first recorded speech to pagans. Although he did not speak in their native language, he probably spoke in Greek, so they understood him. Paul adapted his speech to people with no background in Judaism/Scripture though it was a very Jewish speech. He focused on the one God, Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

The gods Lystra’s people worshipped each controlled only parts of the universe, but Paul’s God controlled it all. God’s love was revealed throughout creation. Idols were “worthless things,” in contrast to the living God, Who had shown great kindness by sending rain and crops and by filling people with joy and blessings. [Church father, Origen, summarized Paul’s speech as a call to his listeners to turn from sacrificing things, like animals, goods or even children, and to giving their lives to Christ, as He had given His life for them.] Even after Paul’s passionate sermon, and with great effort, Barnabas and Paul were barely able to keep the people from worshipping/sacrificing to them.

Then, Jews from Antioch and Iconium, motivated by jealousy and envy, arrived. They may have followed Paul and Barnabas deliberately to undermine their work, or they may have been corn merchants travelling from city to city to buy corn. (This was a corn growing area.) The opponents claimed Paul and Barnabas were wicked magicians whom they had driven out of their cities because of their evil deeds. They said the missionaries rejected both the Greek/ Roman gods and the Jewish God and they won over the fickle crowd.

The people stoned Paul. (No details were given. Stoning was the Jewish remedy for blasphemy, but Paul’s speech had been the antithesis of blasphemy.) Those who did the stoning dragged Paul’s body outside the city, thinking he was dead. But the strong nucleus of a church had been formed in Lystra. Whether in mourning or prayer, the local church members stood around Paul, which took courage under the circumstances, and miraculously, Paul got up. (First, a lame man walked. Now, Paul, who was mostly dead, rose and walked.)

Irrepressible Paul returned to the city to strengthen the local believers and prepare them for the future hostilities. The next day, he left for Derbe.

Acts 14:21-23: *Derbe*

Little is known about Derbe, except that it was a small town 65 miles SE of Lystra in the Lycaonian region of Galatia. [Derbe is Lycaonian for “juniper tree.”] Although the Via Sebaste was wide and paved from Iconium to Lystra, the road to Derbe probably was not paved and was difficult. In 25 BC, when Augustus Caesar incorporated the area into the province of Galatia, Derbe became a provincial border town on the E edge of the So’n Galatian plateau. Emperor Claudius called it “Claudio-Derbe” as an honor to himself.]

Not much was said about the Derbe mission, except the disciples preached the good news and won many disciples there. No opposition was mentioned. Paul and Barnabas did not think they had achieved anything; rather, they spoke of what God had done; they were merely fellow laborers with God.

Then, instead of proceeding directly through the Taurus Mountains into Cilicia and Tarsus (about 150 miles E of Derbe (c. 1 week’s journey), Paul and Barnabas turned around and went back through the same cities they previously had left under threat of great personal harm. Their love and concern for the new believers they had led to Christ caused them to risk their lives again and return through Lystra (where Paul was stoned almost to death), Iconium (where they were plotted against), and Pisidian Antioch (where they were run out of town).

Paul knew these new Christians lived in hostile environments, and the new churches were small and vulnerable. He always was concerned for the churches he founded, e.g., his letters. Paul reminded the new believers they must go through hardships for the kingdom of God, as he had. Then, after prayer and fasting in each church, he appointed elders, whom he committed to the Lord. Many believe these were the people to whom Paul wrote *Galatians*.

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**Galatians 1:**

Verses 1-5:

Paul’s salutation contained a strong statement of his apostolic credentials. (An apostle was one sent by the Risen Lord as His messenger). Paul insisted he was not commissioned by or subordinate to any human; rather, his apostleship was directly from Christ and the Father. But Note: This was Paul’s only salutation that did not express his traditional prayer of thanks for his readers.

The Galatian believers were being besieged by Jewish Christians called Judaizers or agitators who demanded Gentile believers first must become Jews before they could be fully justified by God and become part of God’s people. Paul was so strongly opposed to this contention that he opened the letter in a confrontational tone, distinguishing himself from the agitators. Although their precise arguments were not disclosed, they can be extrapolated from Paul’s letter. Not only were these Judaizers claiming Christians must become Jews to become completely people of God. but they were disparaging Paul and causing the Galatians to doubt his authority. Accordingly, from the outset, Paul affirmed that even though he was not one of Jesus’ original 12 disciples and did not meet Christ until after the resurrection, he had been commissioned directly by the Lord.

[Note: Paul did not say, as he did in *Romans* and *Philippians*, that he was a *servant* of Jesus Christ called to be an apostle. That might have undermined his direct apostleship from Christ and the Father.] He knew the Gospel was under attack and the key issue was faith versus works. Works provided humans a basis to boast, but with grace, God got all the glory. God sent Paul to preach grace- God’s initiative and love; his opponents wanted to please their constituents.

Paul greeted the churches to whom this circular letter would be read with both Greek/Roman and OT well wishes- grace and peace. The Greek word “grace” meant charm, beauty, good will- everything attractive and beautiful. [The Graces were Zeus’ virgin daughters who bestowed feminine charms.] When the term was Christianized, it described God’s unmerited favor to rescue sinners. The Hebrew term, “peace/*shalom,*” was not merely the absence of strife and suffering; rather, it was a wish for believers affirmatively to receive all God’s blessings.

Then, Paul identified Jesus Christ, the One Who gave Himself for His readers by God’s grace. Jesus delivered believers from the current evil age according to God’s will. [Jews identified 2 eras: the current evil age of mankind and the future Messianic age when God would redeem His people and set everything right.]

So, Paul’s salutation previewed the heart of his message. Christ’s death was by the will of the Father and was pursuant to His plan; it was not an accident or a tragedy. Believers needed nothing more. Paul’s opponents advocated for an end to freedom in Christ and a return to bondage under the Law. That message undercut the heart of the Gospel, which declared salvation existed in Christ alone. The agitators erred in saying Christ’s death was insufficient and something more, i.e., adherence to the Law, was required for salvation.

Verses 6-10:

Paul was angry at the sudden defection of members of his congregation to the Judaizers’ view. Instead of his standard opening, Paul began with a rebuke, immediately putting the Galatians on notice something was wrong. He charged the Galatian defectors were like soldiers deserting their posts!

Paul declared he was “astonished” (a common expression of rebuke) at how quickly his readers had deserted the Gospel and had adopted something that was no gospel at all. (Remember, gospel means good news). The false teachers were not offering substitute good news, they were leading people back into the bad news from which Jesus had freed them. No substitute existed for the Gospel.

Then, Paul reasserted that his authority came directly from Christ and God; he was not a disciple of the disciples. His apostleship to the Gentiles came directly through divine initiative. The Judaizers did not threaten him; Paul was defending an attack on the Gospel of Christ, the message of grace- God’s loving disposition toward humanity and creation in Christ Jesus, the liberator.

Judaizers were not God-centered; they focused on humans and their works and were attempting to supplement the Gospel. Paul vehemently denied that Christ needed anything else beyond His death and resurrection. To follow the Judaizers was to go away from Christ- to abandon Him. Christ alone set people free, or His death and resurrection were without meaning. The sufficiency of the cross was at stake!

Paul double cursed anyone who asserted that believers must become Jews and follow Jewish tradition. Any such person, even an angel, even himself, should be condemned/cursed. (LXX/Greek=“*anathema*”; Hebrew=“*herem,*” the word for those who were excommunicated/sent to hell/put outside the covenant- the word for the treatment of Achan in Josh.7:1-26).) Paul was not trying to please men; indeed, if that were his objective, he would not serve Christ.

Verses 11-17:

Paul continued to support his authority with personal history. (This information supplemented *Acts*.) Paul received his commission by God’s revelation (*apokalypsis*) at his conversion. His Gospel did not come to him second hand from any human. Moreover, his life reflected his radical transformation by the Gospel- even the Judean churches recognized this.

Paul’s Jewish credentials were impeccable- probably more substantial than any of the Judaizers. Paul had spent his entire life as a Jew, he had thorough knowledge of Jewish Law and tradition. He was educated at the foremost Jerusalem school under the esteemed Rabbi Gamaliel. He had such zeal for the law that he fanatically rooted out those who followed Christ. (Zeal= his courage and devotion to oppose every pagan, immoral, or compromising influence that might imperil or destroy Judaism, especially in Hellenistic Jewish Christians, like Stephen.) Paul claimed 3 things about his Jewish pedigree:

* He had advanced far more in Judaism than his opponents,
* He had been much more zealous about Jewish tradition than they, and
* His zeal for Judaism had led him to persecute the church.

How could such a rabid opponent of Christ’s followers become a devoted preacher of Christ’s Gospel- only by Jesus’ intervention and revelation. God interrupted Paul’s life and turned him around. He had been a radically conservative Pharisee, a passionate observer of Jewish law and tradition, like Mattathias Maccabee. But God called Paul while he was trying to destroy God’s people and revealed Christ to him. Immediately, Paul went from being a zealous prosecutor of the Gospel, to a Christ-believer zealously proclaiming justification was by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

*Acts* provides 3 accounts of Paul’s conversion (19:1-19; 22:3-21; 26:1-23).

Paul gave 3 conversion accounts: here; Phil.3:7-14; 1 Cor.15:8-11.] After Jesus’ death and resurrection, Paul’s unique conversion may have been the most significant event in church history. Paul’s Damascus Road experience was more than a prophetic call. Paul immediately was united with Christ. He left Damascus and went to Arabia. He did not go to Jerusalem immediately, and he did not seek or obtain instruction or authorization from the mother church or from any apostle. (As in ancient times, Jerusalem had a crucial role in 1stC AD Judaism and Christianity- until it was destroyed in 70 AD.)

[In the pagan/Gentile land of Arabia/Nabatea Paul began his evangelist work. Roman Syria included modern Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Sinai, but in the 1stC AD, the term “Syria” primarily referred to the Nabatean kingdom ruled by King Aretas IV (9 BC-39 AD). Its capital was Petra (in modern Jordan), which King Aretas greatly expanded. The Nabateans were pagans who worshipped many gods and had strong links with Ptolemaic Egypt. King Aretas was the father-in-law of Herod Antipas, who divorced Aretas’ daughter to marry his sister-in-law, Herodias. In 36 AD, wounded ex-father-in-law, Aretas, defeated Herod and took control of Damascus with the aid of Rome’s Emperor. Most scholars believe that was when Paul was in Arabia (c.37-40 AD). Paul left Arabia before Aretas died in 40 AD. Rome annexed Nabatea in 106 AD.]

After 3 years in Arabia, Paul returned to Damascus, the capital of ancient Syria. (Remember: Jews counted days and years by including any part of a day/year as a whole day/year. So, Jesus’ 3 days in the tomb did not necessarily mean 3 full days; it could have been 1 full day and parts of 2 others. The same was true of the 3 years here.) Then, he went to Jerusalem.

Verses 18-26:

In Jerusalem, Paul met Peter, with whom he stayed for just 2 weeks. This was a get-acquainted visit, not a give me your blessing trip. Paul would have wanted to hear Peter’s accounts about Jesus’ life, sayings, and miracles, but Paul was most interested in developing a relationship with Peter to cement church unity between Jews and Gentiles. Peter was the apostle to the Jews; Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles.

The only other church leader Paul visited on that visit was James, Jesus’ ½ brother (not 1 of the 12- apostle and John’s brother, James, was the 1st apostle to be martyred. He was beheaded by Herod Agrippa in 44 AD.) This James, Peter and John were called “pillars” of the Jerusalem church, meaning the primary supports of the church. James was listed first because he was uniformly recognized as leader of the Jerusalem church. The 3 Christian leaders paralleled the ancient pillars of Judaism: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Paul then returned to Syria and Cilicia where he evangelized in the area for about 14 years. (Acts 9:19-25; 2 Cor.11:32,33). [Syria and Cilicia had been in 2 separate provinces, but in Paul’s time, they were in the Roman province of Syria. Paul’s home, Tarsus, was in Cilicia. Damascus was the capital of ancient Syria, but Syrian Antioch, 300 miles No of Jerusalem, was the center of the Gentile mission and the leading Roman city in the area. Indeed, Syrian Antioch was the 3rd leading city in the Roman Empire- after Rome and Alexandria.]

After his visit to Jerusalem, Judean church members glorified God for Paul’s conversion. Few of them knew Paul personally, but they knew he was the one who had been persecuting the church, especially Jewish Diaspora Christians.

**Galatians 2:**

Verses 1-10:

After 14 years, Paul made another trip to Jerusalem. [He was converted on the Damascus Road c. 33/34 AD; 14 years later would have been c.47/48 AD.] This time, Paul was accompanied by Barnabas and Titus. [Some scholars believe Paul and Barnabas carried famine relief funds to Jerusalem on this trip. (Acts 11). Others think this was the visit referred to Acts 15, the great Jerusalem Council when Gentile Christians were permitted into the fellowship of believers without first becoming Jews. *Galatians’* text more closely followed Acts 15. (If so, this would have been Paul’s 3rd to the Jerusalem church in the *Acts* version, but in the *Galatians* text*,* it was his 2nd visit.)]

Barnabas was Paul’s original advocate in Jerusalem when most Christians were afraid of Paul and would not accept him into the church. They did not trust the sincerity of Paul’s conversion. Barnabas, whose given name was Joses/Joseph, was known as the “son of encouragement.” He was a man of means, a Levite from Salamis, Cyprus, and was well-respected by the Jewish establishment. Based on Barnabas’ credibility, Paul was permitted into church fellowship. (Acts 4)

The Jerusalem church later sent Barnabas to Antioch- the 1st place believers were called Christians. It later the primary church in Christendom after Jerusalem was destroyed. When he needed help in his Antioch ministry, Barnabas recruited Paul who had been preaching/teaching in Tarsus. After a year of great success preaching the Gospel, a prophet named Agabus came to Antioch and announced a great famine would befall the Roman Empire. This grieved the Antiochian church, and they gathered a large aid collection. (Acts 11).

The Antiochian church commissioned Barnabas and Saul to take the offering to Jerusalem. They were eager to provide famine relief to the needy and wanted to cement the bond between Gentile and Jewish believers. Also, they considered the offering to be a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy that, in the last days, Gentiles would bring gifts to the holy mountain. (Isa.66:20). [But why were the Jerusalem believers so poor when the famine was Empire wide?

* Some had sold everything and placed the proceeds in the common fund for all believers, but Jesus had not yet returned, and the fund was spent.
* Many Diaspora widows moved to Jerusalem to die and be buried there and meeting their needs cost the church a substantial amount.
* The post-Stephen persecution had led to financial sanctions being imposed against Diaspora Jewish Christians.

Paul and Barnabas returned from Jerusalem to Antioch, taking John Mark, Barnabas’ nephew, with them. In Antioch, the church set Paul and Barnabas aside, laid their hands on them in blessing, and dispatched them on their 1st missionary journey, which went, among other places, to So. Galatia. (Acts 12-14).

After from they had completed their 1st missionary journey, some Judean

Christian men appeared declaring Gentiles must become Jewish to be completely saved. The church sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to speak with the apostles and elders. Paul was willing to do so for the unity of the church, but he did not seek authorization or blessing from Jerusalem. Paul knew he was preaching the true Gospel as God had revealed it to him. He would present his Gospel to the church, but he would not compromise it or abandon justification by grace alone, even in the presence of the most esteemed pillars of the church.

Paul’s other companion on the Jerusalem trip was Titus, a Gentile Christian who lived in Antioch. Titus had not been circumcised but had committed himself to Christ under the preaching of Paul. His presence at the Council focused the issue. Ultimately, the Council did not require him to be circumcised.

Paul and Barnabas told the Council of the miracles, signs, and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. Then, James, citing Amos 9:11,12 and Isa.451 which had prophesied that Gentiles would bear His name, reminded the Council of Peter’s experience when God led him to the Gentile centurion, Cornelius, and his family, who converted. The Jerusalem church agreed God was saving and accepting Gentiles. Gentile Christians did not have to be circumcised and follow Jewish tradition to be accepted into the fellowship of saved believers; however, they ordered Gentile Christians must abstain from sexual immorality, food polluted by idols, meat of strangled animals, and blood.

The Council sent a letter to Antioch via Paul and Barnabas declaring the message of the men who told them they must be circumcised was not church authorized. The pillars of the church unanimously extended the right hand of fellowship (more than a handshake, fellowship meant *koinonia*/partnership in mission) to Paul and Barnabas. They recognized God had sent Paul to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been sent to the Jews and acknowledged Paul’s success, considering it evidence of God’s blessing on the message about God’s grace in Christ Jesus. The Council ordered Paul not to neglect the poor- a core Jewish value and one Paul heartily endorsed.

Verses 11-21:

Peter was one of Paul’s main advocates at the Jerusalem Council, but then he went to Antioch. Initially Peter participated with Gentile believers in common meals and Lord’s Supper. [Antioch was the bastion of Hellenism within Syria- a meeting place of 2 worlds. It was far more liberal than Jerusalem. Gentile Christians had been welcomed into the Antioch church for some time, and they had shared common meals and the Lord’s Supper.] Peter’s acceptance was very encouraging to Gentile believers.

Then, certain “false brothers” came from Jerusalem, claiming their authority was from James (though that was doubtful). Peter cut himself off (play on words, Pharisee meant “separated one”) from the Gentile believers and no longer shared their common meals. Why Peter changed his behavior was a mystery. Perhaps, he did so to preserve his ritual purity. Perhaps, Peter was attempting to accommodate his mission to the Jews. Perhaps, Zealots were threatening Peter’s life or the health of the Jerusalem church. Zealots were active in Jerusalem in the 40s/50s. But Peter already had fought this battle after he welcomed Cornelius and his family into the faith. (Acts 11:2,3). Why should a few Jews cause him to change his behavior?

Soon, other Jewish Christians, including even Barnabas, joined Peter, and walked away from Antioch’s Gentile Christians. Paul had to stand alone against everyone. He openly labeled Peter and the others “hypocrites.” They were playing the Pharisee (LXX= “ungodly people”). To Paul, neither James nor Peter could dictate what the Gospel required, and the Gospel called for Christian unity. Christians could not compromise the Gospel to meet the demands of Jewish Christian nationalists. To do so would be to deny God’s grace in Christ.

Paul did not cite the decision of the Jerusalem Council to support his argument. This was not a power struggle between men, to be supported by the decisions of men. It was about the truth of the Gospel. The future of the Gentile mission was at stake, as was the principle of justification by grace. Peter could not be allowed to set a precedent for the future which would destroy the unity of the church. So, Paul publicly challenged Peter.

He said, “We who are Jews by birth, and not ‘Gentile sinners’ know that a man is not justified by observing the Law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.” But that did not mean Christ promoted sin; rather, Christ was the only way anyone could be free from sin. The Law did not save. Then, Paul famously affirmed:

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the Law, Christ died for nothing!”

In the end, Peter agreed with Paul. Salvation was not earned by following Jewish practices and being circumcised. Justification came solely by God’s grace, which was mutually exclusive from works of Law. To insist on circumcision and works was to repudiate God’s grace and Christ’s crucifixion. Why would anyone set aside all Christ had done for them to return to the old treadmill of the Law?

[Some early church leaders, like Origen, Chrysostom, and Jerome, could not believe the confrontation between Peter and Paul really had occurred. They thought Paul and Peter staged it to demonstrate faith was God’s gift of grace, and not a possession or status that could be controlled or earned by adherence to Law. Augustine, believed the confrontation was real.]

**Chapter 3:**

Verses 1-5:

Paul again addressed friends saying, “You foolish Galatians.” That was an especially strange and tough way to speak to friends. He followed that by asking, “Who has bewitched you?” [This was the only time in the NT “bewitched” was used, but it was common in Greek literature. It was the language of pagan magic, which many Jews and Christians felt was demonic. It was as if a magician had cast a spell on the Galatians, like with the “evil eye,” a Greek expression meaning to place someone under a curse with an execration text or amulet.]

Paul continued with a series of rhetorical questions designed to make his readers think. He asked the key question- Did the Galatians receive the Spirit by works of the Law or by believing what they heard? That was the point of the letter= to make Paul’s readers/spiritual children understand the Spirit came to them as a matter of God’s grace by faith in Jesus, not by works of the Law. [This is the first time Paul used the word “Spirit” in the letter.]

He listed 4 characteristics of the Spirit:

* It came through preaching Christ crucified,
* It was a radical contrast to the flesh,
* It was the power of the new age and the source of mighty works,
* It came to the whole community, not just to a few select leaders.

Living in the Spirit allowed one to avoid sin and self-indulgence. The Law, like a dictator, demanded and condemned, but was not able to grant freedom. The Spirit provided the power to deal with the desires of the flesh and liberated.

No sooner did Paul articulate this question, than he again declared, “Are you so foolish?” He just could not fathom why his people were heading in such a ridiculous direction. The Galatians had powerfully and personally experienced the Spirit by faith before they even heard about works of Law. God had given them His Spirit without any merit of their own. [The Greek word for “give,” here *epichorēgeō*, meant to provide a theatre chorus, referring to generous, patriotic citizens who contributed to the state in Athens, among other things, financially sponsoring theatrical choruses- *chorēgoi.*]

It was as if the Galatians no longer appreciated the message of Christ crucified, which they had held so close when they had first believed and saw the miracles done by the Spirit among them due to their faith not works. The agitators claimed works of Law/circumcision were like frosting on a cake, they completed Christian salvation. Paul responded that pursuing works of Law was a step backward. [Note: This was not the material vs. spiritual dichotomy of the Greeks/Platonists and Gnostics; it was about the of sufficiency of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection to justify sinners.] [Contrast the Galatians and Corinthians: The former wanted to be bound by the Law= legalism; the latter sought to abandon the Law= libertineism. Life in Christ was neither.]

Verses 6-9:

Early Christians were considered a Jewish sect. [Some scholars believe Christians were “excommunicated”/removed from Judaism at the end of the 1st or early 2ndC AD, when the rabbinic school at Jamnia/Yavneh, under the leadership of Yohanan ben Zakkai, established the rules of Judaism (codified the *Mishnah*, a compilation of the oral law) and established the OT canon. But this letter was written before their work was concluded.]

The Galatian Christians were lost between the pagan temple and the Jewish synagogue without a home. They had accepted a Jewish Messiah, so they were open to claims that they needed to be Jewish to belong. [Christians have done similar things when taking the Gospel to other cultures- implying converts must set aside their own culture and become Westernized. But faith in Christ is the only thing required for salvation, not some any cultural baggage.]

In his letter, Paul addressed the Galatians, but he also was engaged in a very Jewish debate with the Judaizers. The question was: Who were God’s people? The traditional answer was Abraham’s descendants- He was the father of the faith and the example of righteousness for future generations. The Judaizers claimed all believers must follow Abraham’s example and be circumcised. (Gen.17 :9-14). Jews interpreted Abraham’s “faith”was his behavior- his fidelity, integrity, obedience. (Gen.15:6). In other words, Abraham’s faith was a work God rewarded as his contribution to a treasury of merit. (Alexandrian Jewish philosopher, Philo, and other rabbinic sources used a similar approach.)

[In the Roman world, circumcision was considered the physical mark of Jewish identity. Although Egyptians and other ancient cultures/religions circumcised their male children, generally at puberty, Jews were the only ones that removed the entire male foreskin 8 days after birth. For Jews, circumcision was the fundamental mark of God’s covenant with Israel. It was especially important to Diaspora Jews because other aspects of Jewish identity were not so apparent, like using stone vessels instead of clay for ritual purity. Most Diaspora Jews could not attend the 3 high feasts each year in Jerusalem, so the only thing that set Diaspora Jews apart was circumcision. On the other hand, Romans and Greeks considered circumcision shameful, a barbaric custom. Some Jews wanted to pass as Gentiles and opted for an operation to conceal their circumcision so they could attend gymnasia and exercise in the nude without criticism. Many Gentiles did not to become proselytes, even though they admired Jewish moral and religious standards, because they would not agree to be circumcised.]

Paul interpreted Abraham’s faith very differently from the agitators. God’s reckoning of Abraham as righteousness was by grace, not as payment for his good works. Abraham’s faith was separate from his behavior. Abraham accepted God’s gracious promise by faith within a covenant relationship. Paul said the Abraham family trait was faith, his acceptance of God’s grace, not works.

Paul pointed out that Abraham demonstrated his faith before he was commanded to be circumcised. (Gen.15:6). So, circumcision was not required to be one of God’s people. Moreover, God promised Abraham he would be the ancestor of all nations, not just Jews. (Gen.12:3; 18:18). [The LXX indicated “nations” meant Gentiles. Jews often omitted/overlooked Gen.12:3 because of its universalist tone.] Paul concluded saying the true descendants of Abraham were related to God by faith, and God’s promise was that Gentiles would be blessed through Abraham’s faithful line.

Verses 10-14:

Paul pivoted to another typically Jewish argument, which probably shocked the Judaizers. Between vs.6-14, Paul cited 6 OT quotes to support his contention that the Law did not offer salvation. (5 were from the Pentateuch; 1 was from the Prophets). He announced that those who relied on observance of the Law were under a curse because anyone who did not fulfil everything in the Book of the Law/*Torah* was cursed, citing Deut.27:26).

[*Torah* includes 2 types of writing- narratives and legal codes:

* *Haggadah*= narrative/story; answered Israel’s question- Who are we?
* *Halakah*= the collective body of Jewish laws, oral and written, moral and ceremonial, plus later tradition, and customs from Talmudic and rabbinic law (the “way to behave” or “way of walking” from the root word to “behave”) answered the question- What do we do?

*Torah* blended both together. Rabbinic Judaism tended to emphasize H*alakah* (the code for life.) Paul often stressed *Haggadic* stories about God’s works of righteousness among his people, with Jesus as God’s decisive act. The Judaizers believed in Jesus, but they focused on *Halakah.*]

Everyone knew no one could perfectly fulfill the Law, but Paul said the logical conclusion was that circumcision was a false hope. Indeed, only when a person quit trying to save himself, could he be redeemed by Christ. Jesus bore the judgment for sin on the cross and took the curse of the Law on himself to free humans from the death they deserved. He paid the full penalty for sin and shared the human plight, even to a degrading death, thereby effecting redemption. Accordingly, as declared at Hab.2:4, the righteous live by faith.

Paul concluded: Christ redeemed “us” by becoming a curse for us. (Now writing in the 1st person.) In other words, Jesus paid the price for human sin by suffering the curse of death on the cross. [Greeks and Romans considered the cross a symbol of shame and horror, not mentionable in polite society. Scripture, Deut. 21:23, declared a curse on everyone who was hung on a tree. [Originally, this meant post-death impalement of a body rather than Jewish burial. Later, Christians and the Qumran Covenanters interpreted it to refer to crucifixion.]

[Greco-Roman slavery was different from American, race-based slavery. Ancient slaves were “redeemed” from bondage by buying their freedom. Money was paid into a temple, such as the one at Delphi. The record of redemption then was recorded on the temple walls. The master ultimately received the payment.]

So, the Galatians had a choice: blessing or curse. Law brought the curse; it never was a path to salvation, and it separated Gentiles from God and from Jews. But Christ opened the way for all. Legalism was the opposite of trust. As Charles B. Cousar wrote in the *Interpretation* series on *Galatians*:

“It is a remarkable story of how a curse is turned into a blessing. The pride of those who trust their own accomplishments, the frustration and guilt of those who continue to fail despite their good intentions, the estrangement of the outsiders who have to sacrifice their identity if they want to be included- Christ assumes it all.” (pg.77).

[Note: Paul was passionately writing to people with whom he had labored to address a particular situation confronting them. He was not saying the Law was a curse, *per se,* but he was saying the Law was not intended to give life or justification. Paul’s view on the Law is more balanced in *Romans.]*

Verses 15-18:

Finally using softer language, “Brothers,” but still applying Jewish interpretative methods, *Midrash,* Paul moved to yet another question- Doesn’t the Law of Moses supersede the Abrahamic covenant because the Law came later? Paul emphatically answered: NO!

The rabbis said the Jews were in captivity in Egypt for 400 years, and before that, 30 years elapsed between Abraham’s promise until the Jews moved to Egypt. The agitators claimed Mosaic Law superseded God’s promise to Abraham because the Law came 430 years after the promise.

Paul adamantly responded, NO! He analogized God’s promise to Abraham to a covenant/will/trust. (The best analogy probably is an irrevocable trust- a unilateral, unconditional promised gift. Wills are unilateral, but they can be modified/superseded. Covenants are bilateral and require performance on both sides. Although some Jews believed Torah had pre-existent status, it still was a 2-party conditional bargain that people continually breached.) Although Torah came centuries later, it could not supersede God’s unilateral, unconditional promise.

Paul continued the promise to Abraham was to his “Seed,” singular- not plural. He concluded that therefore, God’s promise did not refer to many people; rather, He was speaking of one person- Jesus Christ. God made a promise to Abraham, and He never revoked it. (Although this argument had precedent in rabbinic literature, most Jews believed “Seed” referred to the Jewish people= collective singular, so they concluded that from the beginning one had to be a Jew to be part of God’s people.) Paul countered that the promise was to one Seed, Christ, Who opened the way for all believers, Jew and Gentile, to be God’s people.

Verse 19-29:

Paul anticipated the responsive question that would arise- so what was the purpose of the Law? He was ready for that. The Law shed light on human transgressions until the Seed/Christ/the Promised One came. (This was like Jesus saying Moses allowed divorce to accommodate human sin/weakness). Sin had been in the world since Adam, but the Law turned unconscious wrongdoing into willful disobedience. The gift/promise and the duty/Law were opposites. Persons must choose and live with the consequences.

Paul also declared the Law was inferior to the promise. The Law was handed down through angels, via a mediator/Moses, to the people. [Jewish tradition and many extrabiblical writers believed God handed down the Law via angels to Moses. See: Stephen’s sermon- Acts 7.] On the other hand, the promise was given directly by God to Abraham. The Law did not provide direct access to God, but believers in Christ have direct access through the Holy Spirit.

Nonetheless according to Paul, the Law had value because it prepared the way for Jesus. For the almost 1500 years- between the Mt Sinai covenant and Jesus- the Law’s role was to reveal people’s sin and point them to Christ so they might be justified by faith. Paul analogized the Law to a *pedagogues*- a person, usually an educated slave, who cared for a free-born child while he was not at school. The *pedagogues* (not a teacher) went with the child whenever he left home. He took the child back and forth to school; kept him out of trouble; helped him with schoolwork; taught him manners; and had some disciplinary authority. Often a strong bond of affection developed between the child and the custodian. The *pedagogues’* job ended when the child reached maturity (at age 13-14).

In summary, Paul declared all who have faith in Jesus Christ are God’s sons and Abraham’s descendants. No distinction existed between Gentile/Jew, slave/ free, male/female-all are in Christ. Jesus did not change the differences between people, but He made the differences irrelevant to how people should be treated- equally. All believers were adopted sons and daughters of God in Christ.

Believers were united with Christ in baptism, the initiation ceremony. Paul considered the baptism liturgy to be a metaphor. [In ancient Judaism, the convert was immersed in the baptismal pool (*mikveh* bath)- naked. When they emerged, they were given new clothes.] The new vertical relationship with God gained at baptism also included a new horizontal one with other believers in unity.

**Chapter 4:**

Verses 1-7:

Paul next discussed persons who inherit, contrasting slaves and sons. In the ancient Greco-Roman world, childhood for free, wealthy, young male children constituted a time “under control,” which he analogized to slavery. An underage heir had no right to his inheritance until maturity; hence, he was essentially a slave, owning nothing. A guardian/steward (different from a *pedagogues*) was responsible for the heir during the time set by his father. (The father, not governmental regulations, set the age of maturity for each son.)

To Paul this was metaphor which seems strange to Western readers but was typical Jewish *Midrash*. He said that when the time came (analogous to the son’s maturity date set by the father), God sent His Son. So, when Jesus came, the time was right. [Indeed, the known world was enjoying Augustus Caesar’s “*Pax Romana,*” good roads allowed widespread travel, 1 language, or perhaps 2, Roman/Greek, were universally understood. All the factors necessary for widespread spread of the message were present for once in history.]

At that time, God’s Son was born of a woman; hence, He was fully human and encountered the full range of human experiences. Also, Jesus, like Paul, was born under the Law. Paul already established that one who sought justification through the Law was a slave to the Law and subject to its curse for violating it in any respect. But Jesus, was the only human to perfectly keep the Law. Still, He voluntarily suffered the curse of the Law and suffered a horrendous death. Therefore, only Jesus could, and did, redeem those under the Law and give them the full rights of God’s sons. Calvin said, “By putting the chains on Himself, He took them off others.”

The Jews claimed they were freed from slavery at the Exodus. Thereafter, God called them His sons, but would have agreed the Gentiles were slaves. Paul argued Jews, like young sons, were under the control of guardians until Jesus redeemed them. Hence, both Jews and Gentiles were under a form of slavery until God set both groups free in Christ.

Paul distinguished Jewish Christians, who were redeemed from slavery under the Law, from Gentile Christians, who were redeemed from enslavement “under the basic principles of the world” = pagan forces/things that were not gods/bad religion, like star worship where life was controlled by cosmic elements outside human control, like the zodiac or magic. Just as natural sons were freed on maturity at the time set by the father, slaves were redeemed by payment, usually of money. Christ’s death and resurrection redeemed all former slaves, both Jews and Gentiles, who believed in Him, and He made them all God’s children with full rights of inheritance and a benevolent Parent.

Roman adoption was very common. Typically, an adult man was adopted with his whole family, so a childless man was assured of continuation of his family name. Lower class people sometimes climbed the social/economic/political ladder this way. Julius Caesar adopted his great nephew, Octavian (Augustus Caesar). Augustus adopted his stepson**Tiberius,** who in turn adopted (and later killed) his nephew [Germanicus](https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=c993d6f6bc9e4922JmltdHM9MTY2MzM3MjgwMCZpZ3VpZD0zZWJiN2YxZS02Mjk0LTYxYjgtMDBkOS02ZWY3NjM4ZTYwZTMmaW5zaWQ9NTQ2OQ&ptn=3&hsh=3&fclid=3ebb7f1e-6294-61b8-00d9-6ef7638e60e3&u=a1L3NlYXJjaD9xPUdlcm1hbmljdXMmZmlsdGVycz1zaWQlM2EwOWM2OGUzZC1hZTU3LWQ3ZDQtYTA1MC00Yjk2ODE4ZWYyZDcmZm9ybT1FTlRMTks&ntb=1), the father of Caligula, who became Caesar. Germanicus also was the brother of Claudius, who thereafter became Caesar. An adopted Roman son had equal rights to a natural son- same name, inheritance, and rights. Jesus, God’s only Son, opened the way for all believers to be God’s adopted children. [No one can made themself an heir or adopted son- only the father could adopt a son.]

Completing the thought, Paul said that, because believers became His sons, God sent Christ’s Spirit into their hearts giving them the ability to call God, “*Abba*”/Daddy or Papa. [Jewish people sometimes formally called God Father, but they never used such an intimate term as *Abba*. That was why Jesus’ Lord’s Prayer addressing God as “*Abba”* was such a shocking departure from the norm.]

[Note: In this passage, are the seeds of the doctrine of the Trinity. It was not formally articulated until more than 300 years later, at the Council of Nicaea (381 AD). Augustine, in the late 4th/early 5thC, more fully expressed it. But Paul here declared that the Father’s grace had initiated salvation; He sent the Son to make adoption possible by His death and resurrection; and the Spirit of the Son confirmed the adoption allowing believers to call the Father “Abba.”

Verses 8-20:

Paul agonized over his beloved Galatians. Before they received the message of Christ’s salvation, the Galatians did not know God. Their conversion from paganism to Christianity allowed them to know God as their Father. So, why would they return to slavery?

Paul’s statement must have shocked the Galatians. They did not think they were returning to slavery; they were not going back to paganism. They thought they were improving their spirituality by following Mosaic Law. But Paul considered anything that took the place of Christ alone to be paganism. The Law had no power to overcome sin and impart life.

Both Jews and Gentiles observed special days/seasons/months for worship. The Galatians must have been returning to pagan worship days or beginning to observe Jewish Sabbaths and holidays to bring them closer to God. To Paul, that was foolishness. Frustrated, Paul feared he had wasted his efforts with the Galatians and pleaded with them to become like him in loyalty to the Gospel.

Paul, whose language had been harsh, now became tender, begging his readers saying, “Brothers,” and reminding them of his condition when he first came to them. [No one knows the malady from which Paul suffered. Many believe it was an eye problem since he mentioned the Galatians had been willing to pull out their eyes for him. Some think that in the lowlands of Pamphylia before he went to the high plateau of Psidian Antioch, he contracted malaria, which can cause severe headaches and vision problems. Others suggest Paul suffered from epilepsy. Still others believe he had migraines which also can cause vision problems. Finally, some indicate his vision may have been impaired as the result of persecution, like receiving one or more stones to the head.]

Paul declared he was repulsive when he arrived in Galatia. [In ancient times, many believed a person who was suffering from an illness or weakness did so as punishment for sin (good looks were a blessing).] But the Galatians received Paul as an angel of God. Why had their attitude toward him changed so much?

Paul was suffering emotionally because those he loved were being led away and isolated from the church. The agitators were zealous to win over Galatians for no good reason except their own jealousy against Paul. They wanted to alienate the Galatians from him. Paul said zeal itself was not wrong if it were for the right purpose, but the agitators were wrong. He was in pain as if he were going through the birth pains over them, and the situation perplexed him.

Verses 21-31:

Paul then interposed another circumcision argument which is particularly difficult for moderns to follow. Some commentators label the argument *midrash*, the typical Jewish, rabbinic form of Scriptural interpretation, which among other things, applied OT texts to the new, changed context of the day. The commentary here was on *Torah*, Gen.21. [The *First Century Study Bible (NIV)* suggests this was not *midrash*; rather, it was an extended allegorical exegesis in the Greco-Roman style. Allegories can alter the literal/original meaning of a text. An allegory corresponds to something, but it is not necessarily historically grounded and does not purport to reveal the text’s true meaning. Jewish historians generally shunned allegories, but early church fathers favored allegorical interpretations, e.g., Origen said all Scripture had 3 levels of meaning and the allegorical was most important.]

Other scholars also referred to Isaac and Ishmael in other contexts. Paul’s Alexandrian Jewish contemporary, Philo, claimed Ishmael symbolized elementary learning, whereas Isaac represented true wisdom. One must move beyond Ishmael. In the IT *Book of Jubilees*, Gentiles were called sons of Ishmael, who did not approach Mt. Sinai and receive the Law. Rabbinic literature generally considered Ishmael wicked. Early church father, Tertullian noted that believers belonged to the free child, Isaac, who was born of Abraham’s wife Sarah; hence, Christians should have only one wife, using this *Galatians* test as authority.]

Although the Judaizers’ arguments are unknown, they claimed to be the descendants of Isaac, Abraham’s true heir, and argued that to be Abraham’s sons, one must be circumcised and follow the Law. Paul reminded the Judaizers that Abraham lived in a house with 2 women and a lot of tension. Each woman bore Abraham a son. The mother of Ishmael was a slave woman, Hagar, so he too was a slave. The other son, Isaac, was born of a free woman, Abraham’s wife, Sarah. Ishmael was born in the natural way (the “flesh”), but after a very long wait, Isaac was born super-naturally- the product of God’s promise/a miracle. Both Isaac and Ismael were circumcised and had the same father, but only one, Isaac, was the child of the promise and was free.

Paul contrasted the Abrahamic covenant of righteousness with the Sinai covenant of the Law which led to slavery. [In Paul’s time, Mt. Sinai was in Roman Arabia, not in modern Saudi Arabia; hence, Paul tied the Sinai covenant to the Arabs, Ishmael’s descendants, who at the time were the Nabateans.] He compared the children of the Sinai covenant to slaves who sought justification by following the Law. [Note: Scripture indicates the Sinai covenant was given to Isaac’s descendants.] This is one of the difficult aspects of Paul’s argument.

Jews interpreted Isa.54:1 to mean Israel would be fully restored and multitudes of Gentiles would become Jews and worship in Jerusalem. Instead, Paul said the prophecy pointed to the church which would encompass the whole world. He contended the earthly Jerusalem from which the agitators came emphasized strict adherence to the Law. But the Galatians were from the Jerusalem above, which was the consummation of God’s promise, just as Isaac was the consummation of God’s promise to Abraham. In the heavenly Jerusalem, God’s people would experience perfect peace and harmony with God, each other, and a new creation. Indeed, the Galatians already were citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem which encompassed all races, ethnicities, genders, and religions. Citizenship in an earthly city, even Jerusalem, separated people. Why would anyone choose earthly Jerusalem?

Finally, Paul pointed to a tradition about Ishmael persecuting Isaac to argue the Galatians should throw out the Judaizers. In Gen.21:9, 10 (MT), Ishmael was said to have played with Isaac, but the LXX and rabbinic tradition indicated Ishmael tormented/mocked Isaac. Paul depicted the agitators’ efforts to make the Galatians follow the Law and be circumcised as the same. Sarah’s cure in *Genesis* was to get rid of the slave woman and her son; they never would inherit the promise. That was what Paul wanted the Galatians to do with the Judaizers.

**Chapter 5:**

Verses 1-12:

Paul’s understanding of slavery and manumission must be considered in the context of his time. In Paul’s day, “for freedom,” was part of the ceremonial language used in formal manumission proceedings setting slaves free. So, Paul declared Christ set the Galatians free “for freedom,” meaning freedom from spiritual slavery- whether it was slavery to the Law or to the world (*stoicheia*). Many in Paul’s audience were, or had been, slaves. They knew what that life, and possible death, entailed. No slave would voluntarily revert to slavery after being freed! [Again, Paul’s tone and language were strident and emotional.]

The Judaizers may have been preaching circumcision was the sacred act which brought people into fellowship with God. But Paul referred to it as bringing the crushing weight of the yoke of the Law from which Jesus had set them free. (Mat.11:30, Jesus said, “My yoke is easy.”) Why would the Galatians put that yoke back on?

Christ had set believers free “for freedom.” They had not liberated themselves by their own effort. Much like Israel was freed from slavery in Egypt by the direct power of God Who gave them a special identity as His special people, who were to be holy (separated) to God as His possession, Christians had been set free to serve God (not sin, Law, and death.) But God’s freedom never was the privilege of a select few or a license to do as one wanted. God’s freedom carried with it responsibilities to bear others’ burdens in love.

Paul wondered how the Galatians could have begun their Christian journey so beautifully and then been led astray by the agitators advocating they should submit to bondage under the Law. Paul had experienced the life of adherence to the Law, and he knew the difference in life with Christ. He testified to the fruitlessness of religious practice. Only faith could justify the Galatians. So, Paul begged the Galatians not to tack circumcision on to the Gospel of grace. (Although Paul indirectly had referred to circumcision earlier, this was his first direct reference to it in this letter.)

Paul announced any believer who opted to be circumcised to gain God’s blessing and justification would be declaring they had stopped trusting Christ and He had died in vain. Freedom and circumcision were mutually incompatible. Moreover, anyone who chose circumcision would be bound to follow every bit of the Law (all 631 commands). They could not pick just circumcision, dietary requirements, Sabbaths, and holidays (“Judaism light,” which the Judaizers may have been suggesting). [Rabbinic literature confirmed that before a Gentile could be baptized and become a Jew, they had to be circumcised (if male) and vow to follow the whole Law.]

To underscore his argument, Paul declared that those who were trying to be justified by the Law were alienated from Christ and had fallen away from grace. “Alienated” meant to be cut off from (perhaps a play on words?). Fallen from grace = forfeiting salvation by faith and choosing instead to save oneself by Law. “Falling away” depicted a flower falling from the bush. Paul pled with his readers not to let go of something good (Christ) in exchange for something that could not help them gain acceptance with God (Law).

Paul added believers were saved by God’s grace. They did not need to look for something more to have a relationship with God. Believers should wait for righteousness with hope through the Spirit. (Paul was speaking of sanctification through the Spirit, not salvation, which the Galatians already had received.) God had freely acted in Christ to save them even though they were totally without merit. The only proper response was to rely on God’s faithfulness in Christ, who had removed all distinctions between circumcised and uncircumcised.

Paul analogized to athletic (race) imagery, as he often did to describe the strenuousness of Christian life. The Galatians had taken the first steps in the race by faith. So, he asked, who had cut them off/blocked/tripped them while they ran? The picture was vivid. Paul was calling the agitators cheaters.

He continued by suggesting the Judaizers were like politicians with polished oratory skills -who used “contrived persuasion” (*peismonē)* to attract people. Perhaps they had suggested the Galatians should identify with Christ’s Jewishness and circumcision. Paul demanded they must identify only with Christ crucified and resurrected. Then, he reminded the Galatians that a little bit of yeast (believed by the Jews to be an evil, corrupting influence) works through the whole batch of dough, tainting it all. That was what the agitators were doing.

Appealing to his Gentile Christian readers as “brothers,” Paul referred to the “scandal of the cross,” which the Judaizers sought to abolish by circumcision. “Scandal,” *skandalon*, referred to the stick onto which bait was set in a trap, that which tripped up and caused one to stumble. For Jews, the cross was a curse. A crucified Messiah was a contradiction in terms to them. Messiah was to be a strong deliverer; the cross was demeaning/offensive. Paul maintained being circumcised to obtain justification invalidated the cross. People must choose the means of salvation-Christ’s cross or circumcision; the 2 were incompatible.

Then, in an angry, perhaps offensive, sarcastic, outburst, Paul announced he wished the agitators had gone all the way past circumcision and emasculated themselves. [Paul may have been referring to the Galli, the So. Galatian priests of Cybele, the mother goddess of earth. These priests castrated themselves with ritual pincers and placed their testicles in an engraved box. One such box is on display at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, England.]

Verses 13-15:

Then Paul turned to positive aspects of the life of freedom in Christ, in which God’s Spirit enabled people to serve one another in love rather than to indulge one’s sinful nature. Some may have been attracted to the restraining power of the Law over human sinful desire (often spoken of in Jewish literature.) The Law was considered a disciplinarian to guard and protect. But Paul pointed to a better way- Love. Love of one’s neighbor was the fulfillment of the Law. (Jesus and Lev.19:18). No rules exist with love; it is expressed in relationships. Christian love is not coerced to satisfy legal demands. It is motivated by God’s Spirit.

But the Galatians also may have been confronted by another group, the libertines from within the Hellenistic culture, who claimed Christian freedom allowed people to do whatever they wished. Self-indulgence- *sarx*- “the flesh” referred to the human desire to live as if one were immortal and allowed to do as one pleased. Paul rejected this premise and exhorted believers to enslave themselves to each other in love, so they did not abuse their Christian freedom.

The Galatians’ bondage to the Law had made them competitive and judgmental toward one another instead of loving. Paul used the metaphor of cannibalism for the Galatian’ abuse of each other. [Ancient Mediterranean societies abhorred cannibalism.] The church was destroying itself.

Verses 16-26:

The only absolute vocation was the calling to love God and one’s neighbor. The way to continue in the Christian life was by the power of the Spirit, Who allowed Christians to avoid sin and self-indulgence. The Law included well-defined moral codes for every situation (a dos and don’ts list for life), but it was like a dictator demanding and condemning, though unable to grant freedom. The Spirit provided the power to deal with the desires of the flesh and liberated.

Paul listed acts of a sinful nature. [Many Jewish and Greco-Roman had articulated lists of vices and virtues.] People knew evil when they saw it. Paul’s list was a sample of 15 commonly accepted vices and virtues, ending with “and the like.” These were open public actions. The rabbis said every human had 2 impulses: *Ytser tob*=good, and *yester ra*=bad. They conflicted with each other.

The flesh/*sarx a*nd the Spirit were forces under which life might be lived. Paul was not saying material things were inherently evil or human desires/feelings must be suppressed, but he was saying the world of the flesh was transient/dying. The Spirit was eternal and led to love. Christians must live by the Spirit and allow it to produce fruit in them, which could not be accomplished by human ability. [This was not dualism with 2 equal forces locked in struggle and the outcome in doubt. Christ already had delivered His people. The outcome was not in doubt.]

Paul listed behavior from the sinful nature in 4 general categories:

* Irregular sexual practices= sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery,
* Perverted religion= idolatry, witchcraft,
* Anti-social behavior= hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and
* Personal lapses= envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

He also listed the fruit of the Spirit, which reflected the character of the Tree:

* Those about one’s relationship with God= love, joy, peace,
* Those which related to the fellowship among believers= patience, kindness, goodness,
* Those about oneself= faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Love, the first and greatest fruit of the Spirit, included all the virtues. Self-control was listed last for emphasis because all the works of the flesh involved lack of self-control. Acts of a sinful nature were self-centered, gratified one’s desires, and destroyed community life, but the fruit of the Spirit promoted it.

The solution was not to fight the flesh but to welcome the Spirit. Though the Spirit’s coming involved warfare that continued throughout life, the Spirit helped in the fight. Those who belonged to Christ had crucified the sinful nature. They had renounced evil. Christians lived by the Spirit and allowed it to produce fruit in them, which could not be accomplished by human ability. [This was not dualism with 2 forces locked in a struggle, the outcome of which was in doubt. Christ already had delivered His people, but the present, evil age had to be dealt with still. Its rulers would pass away, but God could not be thwarted.]

Paul admonished Christians not to become conceited. C.S. Lewis said: The devil laughs when he sees us overcome by pride “He is perfectly content to see you becoming chaste and brave and self-controlled provided all the time, he is setting you up in the Dictatorship of Pride… For Pride is a spiritual cancer: it eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or common sense.” (1943:45).

**Chapter 6:**

Verses 1-10:

Paul concluded with instructions for daily life and church life, admonishing the Galatians to persevere in doing good. God’s final judgment would come. In the meanwhile, church discipline must not be by inquisition and punishment. It must be about sensitivity and bearing each other’s burdens with an awareness of one’s own failings and weaknesses and a sharing of the pain of failure.

Paul wanted the church to restore sinners gently. [“Restore” was the term for setting a broken bone.] Spiritual restoration required love and bearing one another’s burdens= *phortion* = carrying a soldier’s pack. The agitators had divided/broken the church. Just as the body suffers when any part is broken and needs gentle mending, the methods of which varied with the situation, the body of Christ needed gentleness, humility, and closeness to the Holy Spirit to heal.

Paul saw teachers and student as partners, and unlike others, he believed teachers should be paid. [The *Mishnah* provided teachers should be paid for interpreting Torah but not for teaching it.]

Verses 11-18:

Paul had dictated the letter to this point, then he added his own post-script in his own hand. It was common in ancient letters for the author to write the closing and summarize his main points. The rest was professionally penned. Paul also did this in other letters, but *Galatians* had his longest, most intimate, personal closing- as if it were written in bold type/large letters, though not necessarily because he had eye problems.

Paul returned to the reasons for the letter: circumcision, flesh, Law, the cross of Christ, boasting, persecution. The agitators’ nationalist pressure to push Gentile Christians to be circumcised and become Jews nullified Christ’s saving grace. That could not be allowed to prevail. The rule (*kanōn*)= measuring rod of justification by faith, was critical.

Paul declared his scars (battle wounds) were symbols of loyalty to Christ – perhaps referring to those he had received (at Iconium and Lystra). The Judaizers insisted the mark of God’s people was circumcision. Paul, calling the Galatians brothers, admonished them to be the Israel of God by faith in Christ alone, ending on the same note that he began- grace.