

Performing the *Letter to the Galatians*

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I want to share some information about Paul's *Letter to the Galatians* in preparation for my oral presentation and your aural reception of it. In comparison with *Philemon*, *Galatians* is longer and more complex, therefore more of a challenge. This letter takes about a half hour to perform, and the tone changes dramatically throughout the course of Paul's appeal. Here Paul is addressing a whole congregation or group of assemblies, not just an individual as he did with *Philemon*. He is writing because there is a conflict among the Galatians, a conflict that was instigated by outsiders. The crux of this conflict was whether or not gentile followers of Jesus needed to become Judeans (I am using the ancient term "Judeans" to refer to "Jews")—that is, to be circumcised and to follow the Judean Law in order to be justified before God. The outsiders were saying "yes." On the other hand, Paul argued vehemently in the letter that the outsiders' point of view undermined Paul's gospel that all people, in this case gentile Galatians, were justified freely by grace through faith. I encourage you to listen carefully to the introduction so that, in imagination, you can put yourself in the place of the Galatians for whom it was first performed.

Galatians as a Story. I want to interpret the *Letter to the Galatians* as a story. In analyzing this letter, I will use the same procedure that I used with *Philemon*. We will look at settings, plot, characters, and rhetoric. And I want to add one more literary feature: standards of judgment. So what follows is an analysis of these narrative features of *Galatians*.

The Settings. Regarding the location of the sender, we do not know where Paul was located when he wrote *Galatians*. He may have been in Corinth. The recipients were comprised of assemblies in Galatia, a territory in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Although there is some dispute about where in the larger Galatian area these assemblies were located, the key is that they were in Gentile territory, that is, in (predominantly) non-Jewish locations outside Palestine. In fact, we have little reason to think that there were any Jews in the assemblies of Galatia.

The whole point of the letter depends on our understanding of Galatia as Gentile territory and the Galatians as gentiles. The word "gentiles" means "nations" or "ethnic groups." The focus of the letter is on the salvation of the nations of the world beyond Judaism. So Galatia is mission territory for Paul. He was apostle to the gentiles. He proclaimed that gentile communities of believers were accepted as children of Abraham and heirs of the blessings of Abraham (the Spirit and salvation) as *Galatians* and not by virtue of becoming Judean followers of Jesus. Furthermore, as gentiles, the Galatians shared the spiritual location of being "in Christ," a setting in which "there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, no male and female" and in which "neither circumcision nor non-circumcision means anything."

Cosmic Settings of Time and Space. There are other relevant settings in Galatians, namely the cosmic settings of time and space. At the beginning, Paul projects a temporal apocalyptic setting as a time when Jesus “gave himself up for our sins in order that he might snatch us out of the present evil age.” Near the end of the letter, Paul says that “the world was crucified to me and I to the world.” These quotations, among others, make it clear that Paul believed the present evil age was coming to a close and that a new world had already dawned. This was an apocalypse to believers for whom the present evil age had come to an end and they were already living in the values, dynamics, and relationships of the “new creation.” The death of Jesus was the watershed event that inaugurated this apocalyptic change.

At the same time, there are cosmic spatial settings that are relevant. There is the realm of God, above, from which God acts directly—to make a covenantal promise to Abraham, to give grace, to send Jesus, to raise Jesus from the dead, to call Paul as apostle, to give revelations, to grant freedom from Law, and to give the Spirit. Conversely, there is the earthly cosmos, to which belong the “elements of the cosmos” (the Law for Jews and idols for gentiles), human efforts to follow the Law (flesh), evil human traits that thwart efforts to be moral (flesh), honor rooted in human attributions or human achievements (flesh), and all cultural standards. Paul argues that efforts to give allegiance to and to seek justification from anything in the earthly realm results in slavery, whereas the free acceptance of grace directly from God, from the Jerusalem above, brings freedom and spiritual empowerment to live by the fruits of the Spirit. The temporal and spatial settings converge in that, since the death and resurrection of Jesus, believers are living in the freedom of the new creation made possible by the grace and Spirit that come directly from God.

The Plot. So what is the plot of this letter? As with *Philemon*, I am seeing the letter as one moment in a story. There are references in the letter to many things that have happened. None of these references is incidental. Paul has chosen each event strategically so that each event is integral to the purpose of the letter. If we go through the letter and note all references to any event, we can then re-order these events chronologically in the sequence in which they occurred (in contrast to the order in which they are referred to in the letter). This re-ordering of events represents the plot of *Galatians*.

From *Galatians*, then, we can re-construct a fascinating story—of particular events in the history of Israel; of the Jesus event understood a particular way; of Paul’s personal history; of Paul’s relationship with the Galatians; then of what happened in Galatia after Paul left and how Paul reacted to it; the point at which the letter was written; and what Paul hoped would happen as a result of his letter. What follows is such a re-ordering of events—a sort of storyboard as used in film. Note this sequence carefully, because Paul has chosen to refer to each one of these events as support for his arguments to the Galatians. By attending to the plot of *Galatians* in this reordered sequence, we can best see what Paul’s letter was meant to accomplish and how Paul’s letter was designed to shape the outcome of this story—both for the Galatians and for himself.

Abraham had faith/ God considered it righteousness.
Scripture proclaimed the promise/gospel to Abraham—to be father of gentile nations.
That promise to Abraham and his “seed” was a covenant ratified by God.

Jesus was the “seed” to whom the promise referred.

Four hundred and thirty years later, the Law was given through a mediator.

The Law did not nullify the promise.

The Law was not contrary to the promise but the Law could not make alive/bring life.

The Law was meant only to be a temporary guardian/ disciplinarian until Christ came.

All who do not follow every part of Law are under a curse.

Christ came as “seed” of Abraham to bring in Gentile nations; to fulfill the promise.

Christ was faithful to death and was raised from death.

Christ removed the curse of the Law by becoming a curse in our stead/ Ended Law.

All were crucified with Christ.

All baptized into Christ become part of the “seed” of Abraham.

By faith, they become “children of Abraham”; heirs of the promise; recipients of Spirit.

All are one in Christ Jesus: no Judeans/Greeks, no slave/free, no male/female.

Paul excelled in zeal among Judean compatriots, persecuted the church.

God revealed his son in Paul so Paul would preach Christ among the gentiles.

Paul’s Gospel came directly from Jesus. He was not taught it by others.

Paul did not go initially to Jerusalem, but to Arabia.

After three years, he went to Jerusalem to visit Cephas (Peter) for fifteen days. He saw James the brother of Jesus.

After fourteen years in Syria and Cilicia, he returned to Jerusalem by a revelation.

He presented his gospel for uncircumcised gentiles to the pillars in Jerusalem—Peter, James, and John.

Together they agreed that Paul and Barnabas would offer the gospel to Gentiles; Peter to Jews

In Antioch, Cephas at first eats with gentiles.

When people arrive from James in Jerusalem, he draws back from eating with gentiles.

Paul chastises Cephas and others for hypocrisy and actions against the truth of the gospel.

Paul affirms that he was justified by faith and not works of Jewish Law.

Paul traveled through Galatia, got sick, and was taken in and cared for by gentiles.

Paul preached the Gospel—they were saved by grace, not by doing works of Judean Law.

They loved Paul, received the Spirit by faith, received miracles among them.

They formed a community, children of Abraham and of God—brothers and sisters living by the Spirit.

Paul left to preach his gospel elsewhere.

False teachers came in and said Paul’s gospel without Law was wrong, that he was preaching an easy gospel meant to please people.

They said Paul was not a real apostle, since he did not know Jesus; that he got his gospel second hand from others.

They said the Galatians had to follow the Judean Law to be saved.

Some Galatians were consequently circumcised and observed special days prescribed by Judean Law.

Paul heard about this and was extremely upset. His gospel was in jeopardy and his work might be in vain

***Paul wrote this letter to re-establish his authority as apostle and to re-claim the Galatians for the gospel of grace.*

Paul hoped the Galatians would restore their affection for him and his authority.

Paul wanted them to have faith that they were justified by grace as gentiles and that they would stop being circumcised.

He was confident they would expel the intruders and stop following the Law.

He hoped they would live by the Spirit, carry out the fruits of the Spirit rather than works of flesh, and not grow weary of doing good for one another and for all.

So, I am seeing the letter as a moment in the plot of the story. And if you understand the story leading up to the letter, the events surrounding the letter, and what he hoped would result from his letter, then it will help you better understand the letter and the impact Paul hoped his letter would have on the Galatians.

The Characters. We have looked at the plot of Galatians. What about characters? I want to focus on three characters: Paul, the Galatians, and the outside “agitators.” But before I do that, I want to note how the characters reflect either faith in the grace of God (positive examples) on the one hand, or a dependence on works of the Law as a basis for justification (negative examples) on the other hand. The positive examples are the following: Abraham is a progenitor of faith who received the promise; Jesus is the paradigm of faith who fulfilled the promise by his own faith in God and by his faithfulness toward God; Paul now lives by faith in the son of God; all who are baptized into Christ have been justified by faith; the Galatians received the Spirit/inheritance by hearing with faith; and the pillars in Jerusalem (Peter, James, and John) confirmed Paul’s gospel of grace through faith.

By contrast, the negative examples are the following: the opponents of Paul—the outsiders who insist on the importance of keeping the Law—depend on their doing works of Law for justification before God rather than on their having faith; the Galatians who have become circumcised also depend on their own works of the Judean Law rather than on grace through faith; and Cephas in Antioch also acts against the truth of the gospel of grace by requiring Gentiles to follow Judean food laws in order to have table fellowship together.

All the characters serve, by positive or negative example, the message of this letter; namely, that people are justified before God by grace through faith rather than by works of the Law. Now I want to focus in on the three main characters: Paul, the Galatians, and the outside agitators.

The apostle Paul. Three points about Paul are especially significant for understanding Galatians. First, before Paul became a follower of Jesus, his life illustrated all that Paul condemns in this letter. As a Judean, he was extremely devoted to the Law. He tells us in the *Letter to the Galatians* that he advanced in Judaism beyond many of his own age. He was very competitive, very ambitious, very committed, because he was most zealous for

the traditions (the Law) of his fore-bearers. He knew that God had acted to save Israel, and he also believed, as he portrays his own past, that it was necessary for Judeans to follow the Judean Law. God had given the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai, and this was the will of God for the nation of Israel and, ultimately, all the gentile nations. If gentiles were to be brought into the larger orbit of God's people, then gentiles would need to become part of the people of God by following the Law. Paul was so zealous for the Law that he was willing—and this is what the word “zeal” means—to discipline by persecution those who did not follow the Law. In fact, when “God was pleased to reveal his son in me,” he was apparently taking letters from the High Priest in Jerusalem to bring some type of discipline against followers of Jesus in Damascus, Judean followers of Jesus who apparently were not following the Law. Perhaps they had abandoned Sabbath regulations or food laws, or perhaps they were offering hospitality to gentile followers of Jesus who had not been circumcised. Paul is not clear exactly what it was they were doing, but he does clearly say that he was seeking to “destroy” their movement.

The second point about Paul is that his conversion was a call rather than a “conversion,” at least not a conversion from one religion to another. He was not converted from being Judean to being Christian. Remember that there were no Christians yet. The apostle Paul was called to be an apostle as a Judean, with a different understanding of Judaism than he had had before. His new view represented a shift from doing the Law as a basis for acceptance by God to grace as a way of acceptance by God. He was “called”—as in a prophetic call like that of Jeremiah—to be an apostle to non-Judeans, that is, to “gentiles.” And he sees his mission as being an ambassador for the Judean Christ. He is bringing the gospel to the gentiles in such a way that they also can become children of Abraham, *as gentiles* without having to follow the Jewish Law. How could Paul not see his calling as anything other than grace? After all, he had been working in the opposite direction from God-in-Christ; and God was pleased, nonetheless, to reveal his son in him. It was complete grace that the Spirit had come upon him, certainly nothing he deserved. The free grace came as a contrast to the idea of a reward for his avid devotion to the Law. He recognized that salvation did not come to him by his devotion to the Law, but by the pure grace of God through Christ. Paul was called as a Judean to proclaim this gospel of grace to the Gentile nations.

Thirdly, these insights led Paul to embrace a world vision. He imagines the transformation of all the gentile nations—all the world—by the power of the Spirit. And that salvation is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that through him all the gentile nations would be blessed. Of course, Abraham could not be the biological father of many nations, but he could be the father of many nations from the point of view of people who became brothers and sisters *in the faith*, that is, in a metaphorical sense. Paul had a world vision that the new age had begun with the death of Jesus as a watershed event in world history. In Paul's view in *Galatians*, the death of Jesus was not about forgiveness of sins for individuals, although it obviously had implications for every individual in Paul's world. Rather, the death of Jesus was the point in history when the nations were opened by grace to the inheritance of Abraham, the receiving of the Spirit, and ultimate salvation.

Again, and I want to emphasize this, Paul is operating out of a world vision. As you look at the nations and languages around the Mediterranean world, there was much more diversity than anything we know. Paul has a vision that each of these gentile nations

that come into the people of God will be accepted as they are—as Greeks, as Romans, as Galatians, as Philippians, as Thessalonians, as Corinthians, as Colossians, as Ephesians, and so on—without having to assimilate into the Judean commitment to follow the Judean Law. Each will find their own distinctive cultural way to embrace the faith. In Paul’s view, all these diverse cultures, without relinquishing their distinctive identities, will be united in peace by the Spirit of God. In contrast to the Roman Empire, which had brought violence and injustice, God’s kingdom brings justification—and therefore “justice”—to the world. And Paul is an agent of this new world. And the Galatians are part of the world vision of nations coming to justice and peace.

The Galatian believers. Now, let me say two things about the Galatian believers. First, they welcomed Paul with enthusiasm. Paul travels all over the northern Mediterranean world creating communities of those responding to the gospel. He eventually wants to go to Rome and on to Spain. While he is traveling through the region of Galatia, he gets sick. We do not know the ailment. We think it may have been related to his eyes. This may explain why, at the end of *Galatians*, he says that it is necessary for him to write with large letters. But what it is, we do not know for sure. So Paul had to stop there, and the Galatians took him in, and they loved him. Paul says that the Galatians welcomed him as an angel of God, as if he were Jesus Christ himself.

Second, the Galatians not only welcomed Paul, they also received his gospel with enthusiasm. Paul preached to the Galatians that Christ was crucified and risen, and that the Spirit of Christ was available to the gentile nations. The Spirit would come upon them, and that meant that they were children of Abraham and thereby children of God by being baptized into Christ. Their baptism into Christ would overcome the distinctions that separated and caused domination and victimization—Judean and Greek, free and slave, male and female. Indeed, Paul reports in this letter that they were baptized and that the Holy Spirit did in fact come upon the Galatians and that miracles took place among them. So the Galatians were transformed, and they had several assemblies in the region where they shared love for each other in profound ways. Paul expected that they would continue to be a witness in that place. And he then left Galatia for other mission territories.

The agitators. Despite how they welcomed Paul and his gospel, the Galatians were susceptible to the message of other missionaries of Christ with a different message from Paul’s gospel. After Paul left Galatia, they came to the Galatian communities. We are not certain of the identity of this group. Paul does not name them or characterize them, probably because he does not want to give them any credence. Perhaps they were a delegation from the conservative wing in Jerusalem not represented by the apostles. Paul depicts them as “Judaizers” because they were telling the Galatians that if they wanted to be justified/ saved, they would have to follow the Judean laws of circumcision, sabbath observance, dietary rules, rules for table fellowship, and other aspects of the Jewish Law. Let’s face it; it is a persuasive argument. After all, God gave the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. That was God’s will for God’s people, so it was to be followed by Judeans and any gentiles who wanted to become part of God’s people. The outsiders probably also pointed out that Abraham was circumcised as a sign of God’s covenant with him as the father of the Judean people. Besides, they may have argued, people need Law, especially gentiles born in sin, because people do not stop sinning after they have become followers of Jesus.

In addition, they also said things about Paul. We can infer this from accusations against which Paul seems to defend himself. They apparently said that he did not to proclaim the Law because he wanted a message that would be easy and that would please people. They also said that Paul was not really an apostle, because he never knew the historical Jesus. They had a point. If you read the *Acts of the Apostles*, you will see that the only people who qualified to be apostles were those who had been with Jesus from the time of John the Baptist through the end and who witnessed the resurrection. If Paul was not an apostle because he did not know Jesus, then, they argued, he got his gospel second hand from other humans. His gospel was therefore wrong; and theirs was the true gospel.

Some Galatians began to waiver in their understanding of Paul and his gospel. A few may have become circumcised; some were apparently following Jewish sabbath days and new moons (months), seasonal rituals and new year festivals. When Paul heard about this, he was very upset, not only because it was undermining his relationship with them, but mainly because the agitators were subverting the gospel that he had proclaimed to them. So Paul wrote to reclaim the Galatians for the gospel of grace.

The Rhetoric. This leads to a look at the rhetoric of the letter. Rhetoric refers to the implied impact of the letter on the recipients. They are hearing it, as you are about to hear it. So here is a brief summary of the letter with some reflections about how Paul hoped it would impact the listeners. Overall, the purpose of Paul's letter was to persuade the Galatians to reject the appeals of the agitators to be circumcised and follow the Judean Law and to reaffirm their allegiance to Paul's gospel of justification by grace through faith. He does this in three movements: he defends his authority as an apostle; he recounts the basis for justification by faith in the stories of Abraham and Jesus; and he reminds them what community life in the Spirit is like.

Paul defends his apostleship. In the whole first part of the letter Paul defends his apostleship, because he needs to re-establish his authority as a basis to defend his gospel. Already in the greeting, he introduces himself as an apostle sent not from humans but through Jesus and God the Father. Paul bypasses the usual thanksgiving part of the letter to express his shock that the Galatians have abandoned the gospel of grace for a different, twisted gospel. In order to show that he is not a person who "pleases people," Paul pronounces a curse on anyone who would proclaim something contrary to what he had proclaimed to the Galatians.

Paul explains how he himself used to be zealous for the Law and how he was transformed by the grace of Christ when God called him to be apostle to the gentiles. He shows how he could not have gotten his gospel from other apostles, because for eighteen years the only other apostle he saw was Cephas/Peter and then only for fifteen days. Then he went up to Jerusalem in response to a revelation in order to share with the Jerusalem leaders the gospel he had already been proclaiming. The leaders approved his gospel and added nothing to it. They agreed that Paul and Barnabas should proclaim to the Gentiles, while Peter should proclaim to Judeans. Paul recounts how he confronted Cephas (Peter) in Antioch when Cephas reneged on the agreement they had made in Jerusalem by insisting that gentiles follow Judean food laws. Paul is adamant about all that he is saying in this first part of the letter. At one point, he even swears: "What I am writing to you, look, before God I am not lying!"

Paul recounts the history of grace. Paul now turns to a defense of his gospel of justification by grace through faith. Paul appeals to the experience of the Galatians, namely that they themselves had received the Spirit not as a reward for doing works of the Law but as a gift of God. Then he turns to major arguments from Israel's history. He recounts his version of the story of Abraham and the Law as a contrast to the version of the agitators. Paul recounts the promise to Abraham, that through him all the gentile nations would be blessed. Paul asserts that the giving of the Law did not nullify the promise. Rather, the Law was only a temporary measure given through mediators to serve as a disciplinarian until Christ came. Christ freed people from the slavery imposed by the Law for a life of freedom in the Spirit. Because Christ is the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, all who are baptized into Christ—regardless of nationality, social standing, or gender—are inheritors of Abraham's blessing.

Paul again appeals to their experience in first welcoming him, and he gives an emotional appeal to them as their mother who is still in labor pains with them. Then he offers one more proof from scripture: he contrasts the child born to a slave woman (Hagar/ those under the Law) and the free woman (Sarah/ those freed in Christ). He concludes with a ringing call to freedom and a warning that Galatians who want to follow the Law have become estranged from Christ. At this point in the letter, Paul is confident that the agitators will no longer have authority over the Galatians and that the Galatians will no longer get circumcised, but that they will live together by the Spirit in love, as brothers and sisters who are children of Abraham, children of God.

Living by the Spirit. In the last section of the letter, Paul explains what life is like in the community of believers who live not by the works of the flesh but by the fruits of the Spirit. He ends with a few parting shots against the opponents. He ends with a blessing that "the grace of Christ" be with them.

Standards of judgment. Briefly, I want to introduce a new category of analysis of the letter as a story. The standards of judgment represent the moral backbone of a story. They are the norms by which the author leads hearers to make judgments in the story—judgments about the characters and judgments about the behavior the writer is urging on them as hearers. In regard to these standards, Paul presents two ways, the right way and the wrong way. Paul presents the positive way, and he presents the negative way as the opposite of the positive. The active rejection of the negative way reinforces the choice of the positive way. Knowing these contrasts sharpens our grasp of the letter and its impact. You can listen for this contrast as you hear Galatians being performed. Here are the standards of judgment in *Galatians*.

Life under Law as bondage

Justification by works of Law

Living up to the Law

Seeking self-justification

Human achievement (works)

Law restraining immorality

Living under the curse (of the Law)

Slave to Law (children of Hagar)

Works of flesh (human efforts)

Destructive (manipulate people)

Life in response to grace as freedom.

Justification by grace

Living in response to grace

Responding to God's justification

Faith in God's action (grace)

Spirit producing righteousness

Having the blessing (of Abraham)

Free (children of Abraham/Sarah)

Fruits of the Spirit

Life-bringing (love for sake of other)

Results in boasting and envy
Results in division
Death (corruption)
This present evil age

Results in love for the neighbor
Fosters community of love
Life (eternal)
The new creation

Regarding the negative way, human efforts to justify ourselves—by Law, by achievements, by status, by cultural standards—is bondage. These standards do not produce righteousness. In life under law, people cannot produce righteousness, because they use people to prove themselves. They love others for the benefits that others can bring them. Justifying themselves leads to boasting and arrogance for those who succeed in keeping the Law and to self-deprecation and envy for those who do not—resulting in strife and division in human relationships and among nations. The outcome is corruption and death. By contrast, regarding the positive way: When people are justified freely by grace, there is no bondage. Because there is no longer need to prove ourselves or live up to certain standards as a basis for acceptance, there is no need for boasting, envy, or strife. There is the capacity for peace and justice. Faith receives justification as a gift, so that there is a new creation with no distinctions between people or nations or genders or social stations. Because all people equally depend on grace, they are freed from laws and expectations and free to follow the Spirit of love. Grace enables people to love others for *their* sake. The outcome is eternal life.

Paul considers that the individual and communal life represented by each of these ways is so different as to be an apocalypse—the end of one way of being in the world and the onset of another way. The present evil age has been crucified with Christ, and the new creation has begun. Paul calls believers to live out this new creation in the present.

What follows is my translation of Paul's *Letter to the Galatians*. I have not included chapter or verse designations so that you have a sense of reading the letter as a whole.

I will, as I believe performers did in ancient times, speak as Paul. I invite you to imagine yourselves as Galatians who have loved Paul and received the Spirit and lived with a new sense of joy in a community that is an eschatological community. However, you are nevertheless questioning Paul, because other missionaries have come in and some of you have begun to think differently. And some of you have begun to be circumcised and follow the Sabbath regulations and adopt other the Jewish rites and practices. You then receive this letter from Paul.

Note to the reader: What follows is my translation of Paul's Letter to the Galatians. I have not given chapter or verse designations so that you have a sense of reading the letter as a whole. I encourage you to read it at one sitting. Perhaps aloud or have someone read it to you. It will take about twenty-five minutes.

The Letter to the Galatians

Paul an apostle, sent not from humans nor through a human but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead, and all the brothers who are with me, to the assemblies of Galatia. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins in order that he might rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

I am shocked that you are so quickly abandoning the one who called you through the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel—not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are upsetting you and who want to distort the gospel of Christ.

But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that person be cursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: if anyone is proclaiming to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that person be cursed. For am I now persuading people or God? Or am I seeking to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be Christ's slave.

For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel proclaimed by me is not human in origin. For I did not receive it from a human, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you yourselves have heard of my former way of life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it and that I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people who were of the same age since I was far more zealous for the traditions of my fore-bearers.

But when it pleased God, who had set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through his grace, to reveal his son in me so I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with 'flesh and blood,' nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me. Rather, I went off to Arabia and again I returned to Damascus.

Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and I stayed with him for fifteen days. And I saw none of the other apostles, except only James the brother of our Lord—now what I am writing to you, look, before God, I am not lying! After that I went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I remained personally unknown to the assemblies of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard, "The one who once persecuted us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy." And they praised God because of me.

Then after fourteen years I went back up to Jerusalem, together with Barnabas, taking along also Titus. And I went up according to a revelation. And I set before them the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles—but privately before the so-called "eminent ones"—lest I might run or had run in vain. However, not even Titus who was with me, though being Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.

But because of the false brothers surreptitiously brought in, who slipped in so as to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so they might enslave us—to them we did not yield by submission for a moment, in order that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

Now as for the "eminent ones"—what they had once been makes no difference to me, God does not show partiality!—those 'eminent ones' added nothing to me. On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel of the non-circumcision just as Peter had

been entrusted with the gospel of the circumcision—for God who worked through Peter for the apostolate of the circumcision also worked through me for the Gentiles—and when they recognized the grace given to me, James and Cephas and John, the so-called ‘pillars,’ gave to me and to Barnabas the right hand of partnership, agreeing that “we go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcision.” They only requested that we remember the poor, which also I myself was eager to do.

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned. For before certain people came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles. But when they came he drew back and separated himself, because he was afraid of the party that advocated circumcision. And also other Judeans committed the same hypocrisy with him, so that even Barnabas was complicit in their hypocrisy. However, when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of all of them: “If you, being a Judean, live like a Gentile and not like a Judean, how can you turn around and compel the Gentiles to live like Judeans?”

We who are Judeans by birth and not sinners from among the Gentiles know that a person is not justified by doing works of the Law but only through faith in Christ Jesus. So we also have come to have faith in Christ Jesus, in order that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the Law, since it is not by works of the Law that anyone will be justified. If, however, we who are seeking to be justified in Christ are also ourselves found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Absolutely not! For only if I build up again those things I tore down do I set myself up as a transgressor. For through the Law I died to the Law, so I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and, the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up on my behalf. I do not nullify the grace of God. For only if justification comes though the Law has Christ died for nothing.

O you foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose very eyes Jesus Christ was so graphically portrayed as crucified? Just one thing I want to learn from you: did you receive the Spirit by doing works of Law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending up with the flesh? Have you experienced such things in vain? If so, it really was in vain! So, does God who supplies the Spirit to you and who works miracles among you do so because you have done works of the Law or because you hear with faith?

As it is written, “Abraham had faith in God, and it was counted for him as righteousness.” Recognize, therefore, that it is people of faith, these are children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles through faith, proclaimed the gospel ahead of time to Abraham: “In you shall all the Gentile nations be blessed.” So, it is people of faith who are blessed together with Abraham who had faith.

For those who are people of works of the Law are under a curse. For it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not keep all the things written in the book of the Law to do them.” It is obvious, then, that no one is justified before God by Law, because “The righteous will live by faith.” Also, the Law is not by faith. Rather, “Those who do them shall live by them.”

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of Law by becoming a curse in our place, because it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs upon a tree.” The purpose was that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ and we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Brothers and sisters, I give you a common human example: in a similar way, no one annuls or adds a codicil to the testament of a person after it has been ratified. Now the promises were spoken to Abraham “and to his seed.” It does not say “and to his seeds,” as though it were about many people, but as about one, “and to your seed”—which is Christ. Now this is what I mean: the Law which came four hundred and thirty years later does not nullify a testament previously ratified by God so as to make void the promise. For if the inheritance comes by Law, it no longer comes by promise. However, it was by promise that God had granted the inheritance to Abraham as a gift of grace.

So what is the Law? The Law was added because of transgressions until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made. It was ordained through angels, by the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not one, but God is one. Is the Law, then, contrary to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could generate life, then righteousness would indeed come by law. But scripture confined everything under sin, in order that the promise, by the faith of Jesus Christ, might be given to those who have faith. Before faith came, we were guarded under Law, confined until the coming faith should be revealed. Therefore, the Law was our disciplinarian until Christ, so that we might be justified by faith. But since faith has come, we are no longer under a disciplinarian.

For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus! For as many of you as were baptized into Christ, you have clothed yourselves in Christ. There is neither Judean nor Greek; there is neither slave nor freedman; there is no male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, you are Abraham’s seed, heirs and heiresses according to the promise.

I tell you this. As long as an heir is a minor, he is no different than a slave, even though he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and administrators until the time set by the father. So also with us. When we were minors, we were enslaved under the “elements of the cosmos.” When, however, the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so he might redeem those under the Law, so we might receive the adoption as children. And because you are children, God sent forth the Spirit of his son into our hearts, crying “Abba! Father!”—with the result that no longer are you slaves but children, and if children, then also heirs and heiresses through God.

But before, when you did not know God, you were slaves to beings that by nature are not gods. Now, however, since you have come to know God—rather, to be known by God—how can you turn back to the weak and impoverished “elements of the cosmos,” whose slaves you want to become again? You are observing special days and moons and seasonal celebrations and annual festivals. I am afraid for you, afraid that I have expended my labor on you in vain.

Become as I am, because also I have become as you are, brothers and sisters, I beg you! You have done me no injustice. You know, it was because of an illness of the flesh that I first proclaimed the gospel to you. And though tested by my flesh, you did not treat me with contempt or spit on me. Instead, you welcomed me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus!

What then has become of your blessing? For I testify to you that, had it been possible, you would have torn out your own eyes and given them to me! Is the result that I have become your enemy for telling you the truth? Those people, they court you zealously but not in a good way, for they threaten to exclude you so that you will court them. But good is always to be courted in a good way, and not only when I am present with you. My children, with whom I am again in labor pains until Christ takes form in you, I wish I were present with you now and I were able to alter my tone, because I am perplexed about you.

Tell me, you who want to be under the Law, do you not hear the Law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and one by the free woman. The one by the slave woman was born according to flesh, while the one by the free woman was born through promise. These things have an allegorical meaning, for they are two covenants, one from Mount Sinai giving birth into slavery—which is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, but she also corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. By contrast, the Jerusalem above is free—which is our mother. For it is written, “Rejoice, barren one who does not bear; break forth and shout you who are not in labor pains; for the children of the desolate one number more than the children of the one who has a husband!”

But you, brothers and sisters, are children of promise, like Isaac. And just as at that time the one born according to flesh persecuted the one born according to Spirit, so it is now also. But what does scripture say? “Drive out the slave woman and her son; for the son of the slave woman will definitely not share the inheritance with the son of the free woman.” Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of a slave woman, but of the free woman!

For freedom Christ has set us free! Stand firm, therefore, and do not be subjected again to a yoke of slavery. Look, I Paul tell you that if you become circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you. I testify again to every man who has become circumcised that he is obliged to keep the entire Law. You have become alienated from Christ, you who are being justified by Law; you have dropped out of grace! For it is in the Spirit, by faith, that we ourselves await the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor non-circumcision means anything, but only faith working through love.

You were running well. Who got in your way toward obeying the truth? Such persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. A little yeast leavens the whole lump of dough. But I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will take no other point of view. And the one who is unsettling you will bear his judgment, whoever he may be. But if I, brothers and sisters, am still proclaiming circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been removed. I wish those who agitate you would also cut it all off!

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters. Only do not let your freedom be an opportunity for the flesh, but through love become slaves of one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one saying, in the saying “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” If, however, you keep on biting one another and tearing each other to pieces, see to it that you are not devoured by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, so that you do not do the things you intend to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

Now the works of the flesh are obvious, which are sexual immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of rage, quarrels, dissensions, factions, fits of envy, drunkenness, gluttony, and things like these. In regard to these, I forewarn you as I have forewarned before: “Those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, self-control. Against such things there is no law! Besides, those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires.

So if we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become boastfully vain—provoking one another, envying one another. For example, brothers and sisters, if a person is caught in some transgression, you who are endowed with the Spirit should restore

such a person in a gentle spirit--looking also to yourselves lest you too be tempted. Bear each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the 'law of Christ.'

For if people think they are something when they are nothing, they deceive themselves. Let each one examine their own conduct, so that their reason for boasting is in relation to themselves alone and not in comparison with someone else. For each one will bear their own load. For example, let the one who is taught the word share all good material things with the one who teaches.

And do not be fooled. God is not mocked. For whatever people sow, this also will they reap. For whoever sows into their own flesh will reap corruption from the flesh. But whoever sows into the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary of doing what is good, for in due season we will reap the harvest, if we do not give out. So then, as we have time, let us work for the good of all but especially for those who belong to the households of faith.

See with what large letters I have written to you in my own hand. It is those who want to make a big impression in the flesh who compel you to be circumcised—only so they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ! For not even the circumcised themselves keep the Law, but they want you to be circumcised, so they might boast in your flesh. But far be it from me to boast—except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the cosmos has been crucified to me and I to the cosmos.

For neither circumcision nor non-circumcision means anything, but only new creation. As for those who will follow this principle, peace be upon them and mercy and upon the 'Israel of God'! From now on, let no one give me trouble, for I bear the scars of Jesus on my body. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.

For Further Reading

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