

Introduction to Galatians

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Introductory Matters

Authorship

It is generally acknowledged that Paul is the author of the letter to the Galatians. As far as the internal evidence is concerned, the book identifies Paul as the author two times (Gal 1:1; 5:2). Also, the autobiographical section of the letter (Gal 1–2) harmonizes well with what is presented of Paul’s life and ministry as recorded in the Book of Acts (Acts 9:1-31; 11:19-30). In addition, the theology of Galatians is equivalent to the theological viewpoint that Paul presented in his letter to the Romans. External evidence also supports Pauline authorship. Galatians was both quoted and attributed to Paul by Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and even Marcion.

Audience, Place of Writing, Date

An interpreter’s view regarding audience, place of writing, and date of this letter is dependent upon whether he holds to the Northern or Southern Galatian theory. Paul refers to his audience as those in Galatia (1:2) and the Galatians (Gal 3:1). Such a designation could refer to the Celtic people, later called Gauls, who migrated from Western Europe through Italy and Greece and settled in north central and east central Asia Minor. The predominant cities of this region included Ancyra, Pessinus, and Tavium. Such a designation could also refer to territories added to the south after the area was turned into a Roman province following the conquest by Augustus in 25 B.C. The principal cities of this area included Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.

Those holding to the Northern Galatian theory prefer to interpret “Galatia” in its earlier ethnographic sense. Proponents of this view hold that Paul established churches in Northern Asia

Minor on his second missionary journey after the Holy Spirit had forbade him from preaching in Asia (Acts 16:6-8). On his third missionary journey he visited these churches (Acts 18:23) and later wrote to them either from Ephesus in A.D. 54 or Corinth in A.D. 57. The Northern Galatian theory represents the traditional view of the church. Lightfoot is its best-known scholarly defender.

The Northern Galatian theory has several points in its favor. First, “Galatians” usually identified people in the north. Second, because Luke typically referred to districts rather than provinces (Acts 13:13-14; 14:6), he is likely doing the same thing to describe Paul going through Galatia in Acts 16:6. Third, similarities existed between the way the Galatians are described in the letter and the Gallic inhabitants of North Galatia. Both could be described as fickle, quarrelsome, boastful, immoral, loveable, and exasperating. Fourth, Paul’s audience seems to be comprised primarily of Gentiles (Gal 4:8; 5:2; 6:12)¹ and fewer Jews settled in the north. Fifth, the style of the letter matches that of Romans and 2 Corinthians and these were both written during Paul’s third missionary journey. Sixth, Paul mentions an illness (Gal 4:13) and such an illness is not mentioned in his first missionary journey (Acts 13–14).

However, these points seem to be outweighed by the Southern Galatian theory. Those holding to this view prefer to understand the term “Galatia” in its later provincial sense. This view maintains that after establishing various churches in southern Galatia on his first missionary journey (Acts 13–14), Paul wrote to these churches at the conclusion of his first missionary journey from Syrian Antioch. He wrote the letter in A.D. 49 just prior to the Jerusalem Council. Some nuance the view further. If Galatians 4:13 refers to Acts 16:6, then the book was written after the Jerusalem Council. On the other hand, if Galatians 4:13 refers to Acts 14:21, then the letter was written before

¹ That some Jews were present in Paul’s audience seems implied by the numerous appeals to the Old Testament in Gal 3 and 4:21-31.

the Jerusalem Council. The Southern Galatians theory represents the majority opinion in scholarly circles today. Ramsay is its best-known scholarly defender.

The Southern Galatian theory has the following points in its favor. First, the churches established by Paul in the Book of Acts are all located in the south rather than the north. Second, some of the representatives that accompanied Paul in delivering the offering to the needy saints in Jerusalem were from the south, such as Gaius and Timothy, while none were from the north (Acts 20:4; 1 Cor 16:1). Third, roads from Tarsus, Paul's hometown, pass directly through the cities of South Galatia rather than North Galatia. Fourth, although a trip into Northern Galatia would have constituted a radical detour on Paul's second missionary journey, no similar detour occurred with Paul's trip into South Galatia on his first missionary journey. Fifth, the southern cities were more strategic from an evangelistic point of view given their location, population, and commerce. Thus, Paul's visit to these southern cities would be in keeping with the same evangelistic strategy that he employed elsewhere. Sixth, the size of these cities would have also made them a desirable target for the Judaizers as well. Seventh, the remoteness and isolation of Northern Galatia makes it unlikely that Paul would have traveled there. This is especially true considering Paul's illness (Gal 4:13). Eighth, such remoteness makes it equally unlikely that the Judaizers would have traveled there. Ninth, Paul typically refers to provincial titles rather than districts in his writings.

Tenth, Paul refers to Barnabas with no formal introduction (Gal 2:1, 9, 13). Because Barnabas accompanied Paul only on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:2), Barnabas would have been unknown to the Northern Galatians whom Paul supposedly encountered on his second missionary journey. Thus, Barnabas would be deserving of a fitting introduction in the letter. Eleventh, if Galatians had been written after the Jerusalem Council as the northern theory demands, Paul certainly would have cited this ecclesiastical ruling as precedent in his letter. This ruling dealt

with circumcision and the believer's relationship to the Law. These were the same issues Paul was dealing with in the letter to the Galatians. A related question is why did Peter act the way he did as recorded in Galatians 2:11-21 if the Jerusalem Council decree had already been handed down? Twelfth, it seems likely that Galatians was written prior to the Jerusalem Council since Paul concludes the autobiographical section of his letter by describing himself as being in Antioch (Gal 2:11). Acts 14:26 locates Paul in Antioch just prior to the Jerusalem Council. Thirteenth, Acts 16:6-8 and Acts 18:23 at best offer tenuous support for the Northern Galatian theory. In fact, Acts 16:6-8 seems to say that the Spirit forbade Paul to preach in Northern Galatia. Fourteenth, the details found in the Book of Galatians are consistent with the way the first missionary journey is described in Acts 13-14. Both sections of Scripture mention Paul's reception by the Galatians as a deity (Gal 4:14; Acts 14:12) as well as the injuries inflicted upon him by persecutors (Gal 6:17; Acts 14:19). Fifteenth, according to Ramsay, "Galatians" is a fitting name for the inhabitants of the south.

In sum, if the Southern Galatian theory is true, then Paul wrote the letter to the churches he had just established in Southern Galatia on his first missionary journey. Paul wrote the letter at the conclusion of his first missionary journey from Syrian Antioch in A.D. 49 just prior to the Jerusalem Council. Although much scholarly ink has been spilled in the debate between the Northern and Southern Galatian theories, it is unlikely that any interpretive issue within the book are significantly altered if an expositor holds to one view or the other.

Purpose and Occasion for Writing

The Judaizers had quickly infiltrated the churches that Paul had established on his first missionary journey (Gal 1:6). They began to teach these new believers (Gal 4:6; 5:16) that although they had been justified by faith it was necessary that they be sanctified through submission to the

Law (Gal 3:3).² Apparently the Judaizers had succeeded in shifting the Galatians to this new theology by attacking the credibility of the Apostle Paul. Perhaps the argument was made that Paul was not an original apostle (1 Cor 15:8) and therefore his theology is not authoritative. The Judaizers also argued that sanctification without the Law leads to license.

When Paul received word of this departure, he quickly wrote the Galatians a sharply worded letter designed to counter this false teaching. First, Paul writes to vindicate his apostleship by explaining that his gospel originated from God and not man (Gal 1–2). Thus, the Galatians should listen to Paul’s message rather than that of the Judaizers. Second, Paul expounded upon the doctrine of salvation by faith alone (Gal 3–4). Here Paul is primarily dealing with sanctification issues (Gal 4:19) although he also deals with justification in an attempt to explain that the whole salvation experience is accomplished by grace rather than Law. Third, Paul explains that sanctification without the Law does not lead to license but rather a life empowered by the Holy Spirit (Gal 5–6).

Unique Characteristics

First, the letter is extremely autobiographical in nature. Only 2 Corinthians gives more autobiographical information about the Apostle Paul. Second, the letter is the only one that Paul wrote that addressed a group of churches as opposed to a single church or a single individual. Thus, the letter can best be described as a circular letter. Third, the letter reflects a severity of tone coupled by moments of tenderness (Gal 4:19). This tone is best explained by the urgency of the moment. Fourth, Paul appeals to multiple literary features in an attempt to convince his audience. These

² J. Dwight Pentecost sees three types of New Testament phariseeism. The first type argued that adherence to the Law was necessary to be saved. This type of phariseeism was destroyed when Christ uttered the words found in Matthew 5:20. The second type argued that adherence to the Law was necessary in order to become a member of the church. This type of phariseeism was destroyed with the decision of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. The third type teaches that adherence to the Law is necessary in order for the believer to be sanctified. This is the type of phariseeism that Paul is dealing with in his epistles. The Book of Galatians undermines this last form of phariseeism. J. Dwight Pentecost, class notes of Andy Woods in BE2045A Seminar in Pauline Literature, Dallas Theological Seminary, Fall 2003.

include the use of personal experience, Old Testament exegesis, logic, warning, rebuke, rhetorical questions, allegory, and exhortation.

Message and Application

Christians achieve sanctification by depending upon the resources offered by the Holy Spirit rather than through submission to the Law. In other words, the believer is sanctified in the same way he is justified. Both experiences come about through the work of the Holy Spirit. This message is applicable to many modern believers who follow a list of extra biblical “dos and don’ts” in an attempt to please God in their daily life. Such a view is a misguided view of sanctification. Rather, biblical sanctification occurs when believers yield to the resources of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:16).

Outline

- I. Introduction (1:1-10)
 - A. Salutation (1:1-2)
 - B. Gospel (1:3-5)
 - C. Denunciation (1:6-10)
- II. Personal: defense of Pauline apostleship (1:11-2:21)
 - A. Paul’s independence from the apostles (1:11-24)
 - 1. Thesis: origin of Gospel through divine revelation (1:11-12)
 - 2. Before conversion (1:13-14)
 - 3. At conversion (1:15-16 a)
 - 4. After conversion (1: 16b-24)
 - B. Paul’s interdependence with the apostles (2:1-10)
 - 1. Circumstances (2:1-2)
 - 2. Titus not circumcised (2:3)
 - 3. Did not give into falsehood (2:4-5)
 - 4. Apostles added nothing to Paul (2:5b)
 - 5. Apostles accepted Paul into the ministry (2:7-9)
 - 6. Remember the poor (2:10)
 - C. Paul rebukes the head apostle Peter (2:11-21)
 - 1. Description of Peter's conduct (2:11-13)
 - 2. Paul confronts Peter (2:14)
 - 3. Doctrinal explanation for the confrontation (2:15-21)
- III. Doctrinal: Sanctification by Grace (3-4)
 - A. Exposition of the doctrine (3)
 - 1. The charge (3:1)

2. Four questions appealing to the Galatians' experience (3:2-5)
 - a) How did you receive the spirit? (3:2)
 - b) Are you now being perfected by the flesh? (3:3)
 - c) Have you suffered so much in vain? (3:4)
 - d) On what basis does the Holy Spirit work miracles among you? (3:5)
3. Example of Abraham (3:6-9)
 - a) Abraham is justified by faith (3:6)
 - b) Abraham's sons by faith (3:7)
 - c) Abraham's promise to those of faith (3:8-9)
4. A proper understanding of the law (3:10-25)
 - a) The Law's inability to justify (3:10-12)
 - b) Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law (3:13-14)
 - c) The Law does not nullify faith (3:15-18)
 - d) The purpose of the Law is to lead men to Christ (3:19-25)
5. The believer's present position (3:26-29)
 - a) Sons of God (3:26-27)
 - b) One in Christ (3:28)
 - c) Seed of Abraham (3:29)
- B. Illustration of the Doctrine (4)
 1. Domestic illustration: tutor (4:1-11)
 - a) Illustration (4:1-7)
 - b) Admonition not to return to legalism (4:8-11)
 2. Historical Illustrations: first missionary journey (4:12-20)
 - a) Admonition to remember their commitment to Paul (4:12-16)
 - b) Admonition to recall Paul's commitment to them (4:17-20)
 3. Biblical illustration: allegory (4:21-31)
 - a) History (4:21-23)
 - b) Allegory (4:24-27)
 - c) Applications (4:28-30)
 - d) Conditions (4:31)
- IV. Practical (5:1-6:10)
 - A. Balance in the Christian Life (5:1-26)
 1. Life apart from the Law (5:1-12)
 - a) Admonition not to return to legalism (5:1)
 - b) Legalism destroys grace (5:2)
 - c) Legalism obligates one to keep the whole law (5:3)
 - d) Legalism causes one to fall from grace (5:4-6)
 - e) Legalism thwarts spiritual progress (5:7-10)
 - f) Legalism empties the cross of its offense (5:11-12)
 2. Life apart from license (5:13-15)
 3. Life empowered by the Holy Spirit (5:16-26)
 - a) Promise of victory (5:16-18)
 - b) Works of the flesh (5:19-21)
 - c) Fruit of the spirit (5:22-23)
 - d) Provision for victory (5:24-26)
 - B. Service (6:1-10)

1. To the sinning Christian (6:1)
 2. To the burdened Christian (6:2-5)
 3. To teachers (6:6-9)
 4. To all (6:10)
- V. Conclusion (6:11-18)
- A. Paul's autograph (6:11)
 - B. Paul's adversaries (6:12-13)
 - C. Paul's boast (6:14-15)
 - D. Paul's benediction (6:16-18)
 1. Blessing pronounced upon two groups (6:16)
 2. Paul's credentials (6:17)
 3. Benediction (6:18)

Argument

Paul begins the introductory section of the letter (Gal 1:1-10) with a greeting (Gal 1:1-2). The typical thanksgiving in other Pauline greetings is noticeably absent. Such abruptness reflects the urgency of the moment. Paul immediately emphasizes that his apostleship came not from man but God. Paul does this in an attempt to counter the Judaizers. They have attacked his credibility in their attempt to wean the Galatians away from Paul's message so they can promote their own. Paul also emphasizes Christ's resurrection in order to explain that his apostleship came from the resurrected Christ rather than the earthly Christ. Paul had to counter the charge that his apostleship was not legitimate because he was not one of the original twelve (Acts 1:21-22). By noting Christ's resurrection he shows that his calling came from the highest authority since Christ's resurrection made Him the head of the church (Eph 1:22). Paul also points out that the brethren along with him greet the Galatians. The reference to the brethren probably refers to Barnabas as well as the fellow believers in Syrian Antioch. Thus, not only is Paul's teaching on common ground with that of other believers but also he is not alone in the assertions that he will raise in the letter. Such a consensus would undermine the Judaizer's claim that Paul's message should not be believed because he was not an original apostle.

In Galatians 1:3-5, Paul describes the gospel. Unlike the Judaizers' gospel of works, the gospel is by grace. Unlike the Judaizer's gospel of submission to the Law in order to be sanctified, the gospel of grace is capable of sanctifying the believer by delivering him from the present evil age. Thus, in these first five verses Paul has drawn two major lines of battle that he will develop throughout the letter. First, his message should be believed since his apostleship is divine in origin (Gal 1-2). Second, the gospel of grace rather than submission to the Law is capable of sanctifying the believer (Gal 3-6).

The denunciation of the Galatian Christians follows in verses 6-10. Paul expresses dismay at how quickly the Galatians have deserted the gospel of grace. He then explains that if an apostle or an angel preaches a gospel different than the one Paul originally preached to them on his first missionary journey, then such a preacher is cursed and his message is not the true gospel. The Judaizers had accused Paul of promoting sanctification without the Law in order to curry favor with his audience. Paul counters by observing that if he wanted to please men he would have remained a Pharisee. Instead he had become a bondservant of Christ and lived to do Christ's will rather than his own will.

In Galatians 1:11-24, Paul explains that his message came about solely through the revelation of Christ and was totally independent of man (Acts 9). Such independence was essential toward countering the Judaizers' assertion that Paul's message should not be believed because Paul was not one of the original twelve apostles. Thus, it was necessary for Paul to defend his own credibility in order for his audience to return to the original message that he preached to them and to reject the message of the Judaizers. Paul first lays out his thesis that his gospel was revealed to him by Christ rather than man (Gal 1:11-12). Thus, he received it through the non-conventional method

of a direct revelation from Christ³ rather than from other traditional methodologies such as a teacher or an educational curriculum. Next Paul describes events prior to his conversion (Gal 1:13-14). He emphasizes his advancement in Judaism as well as his zeal for his religion as expressed by his willingness to persecute the church. Thus, only a personal revelation from God could have turned Paul away from this course. Then Paul discusses his conversion (Gal 1:15-16a). Here he notes that God called him, elected him, and revealed Himself to him. God alone was the actor. Only such direct divine intervention could explain Paul's sudden turn from being the great persecutor of the church to becoming the great Christian missionary to the Gentiles.

Paul now moves to a discussion of carefully retracing his steps immediately after his conversion (Gal 1:16b-24). The point Paul seeks to emphasize is that men had no influence on his reception of the gospel message. Rather, this message was given to him directly by God. Thus, immediately after his conversion Paul did not consult anyone (Gal 1:16b) nor did he go to Jerusalem where all of the other apostles were. Instead he went to Arabia and then returned to Damascus (Gal 1:17). Then after three years of independence from human influence upon his theology did he go to Jerusalem. He only went to get acquainted with Peter rather than to get his theology from Peter. Because Paul was only with Peter for fifteen days in Jerusalem there would not have been enough time for Peter to transmit his theology to Paul (Gal 1:18). Paul's contact with the apostles in Jerusalem was limited. He also had contact with James, the Lord's brother (Gal 1:19).⁴ Paul is so certain of the chronology of these events that he swears by God that they are accurate (Gal 1:20). Paul then went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia (Gal 1:21) and had no contact with the churches in Judea (Gal 1:22). Despite this lack of contact, these churches rejoiced over what

³ The words "of Jesus Christ" in the phrase "revelation of Jesus Christ" can be classified as a subjective genitive emphasizing the source of the revelation rather than merely the content of the revelation.

⁴ Trudinger translates Galatians 1:19, "Other than the apostles, I saw no one except, James the Lord's brother." L. Paul Trudinger, "A Note on Galatians 1:19," *Novum Testamentum* 17 (1975): 200-202.

they had heard regarding Paul (Gal 1:23-34). Thus, Paul was preaching the same message that they were preaching despite the fact that they did not know one another. The point here is that Paul had received the right theological message independent of human transmission.⁵

In Galatians 2:1-10, Paul emphasizes his interdependence with the apostles. Although Paul received his gospel directly from God, his message was on equal par with that taught by the apostles. Thus, Paul stresses his unity with the apostles in these verses. Pointing out such unity and interdependence would effectively counter the Judaizers' charge that Paul's gospel was somehow inferior since he was not one of the original twelve. In A.D. 47,⁶ he made a trip to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus to deliver a famine relief gift (2:1).⁷ Paul made this trip so that he would not run

⁵ Galatians 1 must be correlated with Acts 9 in order to gain a complete picture of the chronology of Paul's post conversion steps.

Year	Event	Acts 9	Galatians 1
34	Conversion in Damascus	9:3-17	
34	Baptism in Damascus	9:18	
34	Preaching in Damascus	9:19-22	
34	Trip to Arabia		1:17
34	Trip to Damascus		1:17
37	Trip to Jerusalem	9:26	1:18
37	Meeting with apostles	9:27-29	1:18-19
37	Trip to Cilicia (Tarsus) via Caesarea	9:30	1:21

⁶ This trip was made fourteen years after Paul's conversion.

⁷ There are five trips that Paul made to Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-30 and Gal 1:18-20; Acts 11:27-30; Acts 15:1-29; Acts 18:22; Acts 21:15-23:35). Scholars debate whether the Acts 11 or Acts 15 visit is the one mentioned in Gal 2:1-10. Some view it as the Acts 15 visit on account of the fact that both sections of Scripture have Paul and Barnabas consulting the Jerusalem church, discuss Paul and Barnabas overcoming opposition, make mention of Peter and Jerusalem, and involve issues relating to submission to circumcision and the Law. However, against this view stands a literal interpretation of the word "again" in Galatians 2:1, the reference to the meeting as being a private affair (Gal 2:2), the omission of any reference to Titus in Acts 15, the presupposition of the validity of the Northern Galatian theory, the fact that Peter would not have acted the way he did in Galatians 2:11-21 after the decree of the Jerusalem Council, and the fact that Galatians 2 does not mention the decree of Acts 15. It seems better to view the events of Galatians 2:1-10 as pertaining to Acts 11:27-30. This view has in its favor a literal interpretation of "again" in Galatians 2:1, an explanation of the omission of the Jerusalem decree in Galatians 2, a better explanation of Peter's behavior in Galatians 2:11-21, a connection between the word "revelation" in Galatians 2:2 and Agabus' vision in Acts 11:27-30, a

his race in vain. He wanted to make sure that the apostles were preaching the same gospel that he was preaching so that they would not undercut his progress (2:2). The apostles did not compel Titus, a Greek, to be circumcised. Certainly they would have insisted that he be circumcised if they were promoting the Judaizers' method of sanctification (2:3). During this time Paul refused to submit to the false message of the Judaizers that had infiltrated the Jerusalem church (Gal 2:4-5). The apostles added nothing to Paul's stance (2:6).⁸ In fact, the apostles recognized that Paul was called to minister to the Gentiles just as Peter was called to minister to the Jews (2:7-9). The only request made by the apostles of Paul is that he remember the poor (2:10). Thus, the apostles accepted Paul without altering his doctrine.

Now that Paul has buttressed his own authority by appealing to his independence and interdependence with the apostles, he provides a final argument for his authority by recording the story of how he rebuked the Apostle Peter. This event enhances Paul's authority over the Judaizers. Peter was the leader of the other apostles (Matt 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13), the one to whom Christ gave the keys of the kingdom (Matt 16:19), the most dominant figure in Acts 1–10, and the apostle to the circumcised (Gal 2:7-8). If Paul could rebuke this high-ranking apostle because of legalism, he certainly had a right to rebuke the Judaizers on account of legalism as well.

Shortly after Paul returned to Antioch from Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30), Peter also came from Jerusalem to Antioch (Gal 2:11).⁹ Peter began to withdraw from fellowshiping with the Gentiles

connection between the admonition to remember the poor (Gal 2:10) and the famine predicted in Acts 11:27-30, and the assumption of the validity of the Southern Galatian theory. See Stanley Toussaint, "The Chronological Problem of Galatians 2:1-10," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120 (October-December, 1963): 334-40.

⁸ When Paul speaks of "those who were of high reputation," he is not disparaging the apostles. Rather, he is simply responding to the Judaizers' position that Paul's gospel was inferior to that of the original apostles since Paul was not one of the original apostles.

⁹ This event is difficult to precisely date since Luke did not record it in Acts. Some say it occurred after the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:30). However, if the Southern Galatian theory is true, the letter to the Galatians was written before the Jerusalem Council.

when the party of the circumcision was present.¹⁰ Because of Peter's status, his behavior negatively impacted others, such as other Jews and Barnabas (Gal 2:12-13). Such a public sin required a public confrontation. Paul then rebuked Peter for inferring that the Gentiles should go back under the Law (2:14). Paul then offers the theological justification for the rebuke (2:15-21).¹¹ He explains that justification is by faith alone and not by the works of the Law (2:15-16). In order to counter the charge that Paul was promoting sin by setting aside the Law, he responds by noting that it is actually the Judaizers' adherence to the Law that promotes sin since the Law's function is to reveal sin (Gal 2:17-18). Furthermore, because of the believer's co-crucifixion and co-resurrection with Christ, Paul's obligation to the Law and his sin nature has been broken. Thus, he is able to live a sanctified life because of his union with Christ. The source of this sanctified life is Christ rather than the Law (2:19-20). Therefore, Paul's setting aside the Law did not promote sin. On the other hand, if righteousness could be achieved by the Law, Christ's death was unnecessary (2:21). This is why Peter's actions, which communicated a return to the Law for purposes of righteousness, deserved such a harsh, public rebuke. This doctrinal summation serves as an appropriate transition into the doctrinal section of the letter (Gal 3-4).

In Galatians 3:1, Paul charges his readers with being under a spell. Such an insinuation implies that they had suffered a loss of their rational faculties. Although they had been bewitched, the continuing benefits of Christ's crucifixion were available to them. In Galatians 3:2-5, Paul appeals to the experience of his readers by asking four rhetorical questions. These questions are designed to get his readers to understand that the spiritual benefits that they now enjoy have come to

¹⁰ Although those of the party of the circumcision are described as being "from James," (Gal 2:12) this designation in all likelihood simply means that they came from the same church as James. It does not mean that James endorsed their views (Gal 2:9).

¹¹ Some believe that Paul's words to Peter continue all the way until verse 21 (NASB, NIV, NKJV). Others contend that they end with verse 14 (RSV, NRSV, NET).

them as a result of faith rather than through adherence to the Law. For example, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, their initial walk with God, and the performance of miracles in their midst had all come into their life as a result of faith (3:2-3, 5). Therefore, the continued benefit of sanctification will also come to them as a result of faith rather than legalism. For the Galatians to attribute these blessings to works would be to categorize their previous understanding as erroneous. Since they came to their former position through suffering (Acts 14:22), such suffering would be in vain if the Galatians were to change their position from one of faith to works (3:4).

The Judaizers claimed they had the Old Testament on their side of the argument through their constant appeals to the Law. However, in Galatians 3:6-9 Paul appeals to Old Testament precedent in the life of Abraham that precedes the Law by nearly 600 years. Such precedent goes back to the very foundation of Judaism. Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 to show that Abraham was saved on the basis of faith alone (3:6). Then Paul cites Genesis 12:3 to show that the declaration of righteousness of the Gentiles by faith alone was anticipated in the universal blessings aspect of the Abrahamic promises (3:8). Then Paul explains that those who similarly come to God through faith rather than works are blessed just as Abraham was blessed. Thus, they are called Sons of Abraham (3:7, 9).

Because the Judaizers argued that salvation was found in the Law, Paul attempts to counter their theology by providing a proper understanding of the Law (3:10-25). First, the Law lacked the power to justify (3:10-12). This is because the one who seeks to be justified by the Law is obligated to keep it in its entirety (Deut 27:26). Thus, those who try to be saved by the Law live under a curse because they are saddled with an impossible burden. That the Law's purpose was never meant to save is seen in the fact that even in the dispensation of the Law, God's people were justified and

sanctified on the basis of faith (Hab 2:4).¹² Because life under the Law involves performance (Lev 18:5), it is the opposite of faith.

Second, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us (3:13-14). Christ paid the penalty for all of our infractions of the Law. Just as criminals in Old Testament times were hung on a tree to illustrate divine rejection that had come upon them (Deut 21:23), Christ suffered similar divine rejection when He bore the wrath of a holy God against sin by dying on the cross. However, such rejection was necessary so that the Gentiles could receive the blessing of Abraham (justification by faith) and the Holy Spirit. Now that the Galatians enjoy these benefits how foolish of them to place themselves back under the curse of the Law.

Third, the Law does not nullify faith. Perhaps the Judaizers could argue that the faith alone principle established with Abraham was somehow changed with the coming of the Law centuries later. Paul explains that such a premise is wrong (3:15-18). Even in the natural world a contract or a covenant remains inviolable once it is ratified. The same is true with the principle of faith as delineated in the Abrahamic Covenant.¹³ By way of comparison, Israel always recognized the coming of the messiah since the time of Abraham (Gen 13:15; 17:8) and this promise was never altered by the coming of the Law.¹⁴ The principle of faith, which was made long before the Law was

¹² The emphasis of Habakkuk 2:4 as cited here is probably upon the prophet's faith rather than God's faithfulness. Only this understanding fits the context of Galatians. It also fits the context of the Book of Habakkuk, which teaches that the Chaldeans live by strength while the righteous live by faith.

¹³ The four ways to enter into a covenant in the Old Testament world involved the parties clapping hands, exchanging salt, exchanging a shoe, or a blood covenant. Of these methodologies the blood covenant was considered the most solemn. The Abrahamic Covenant of Genesis 15 was a blood covenant since it involved the severing of animal pieces. Thus, the solemnity of the Abrahamic Covenant prevents it from being set aside by the coming of the law.

¹⁴ The noun "seed" is a collective singular, which can refer to many descendants or a single descendant. By way of comparison the word "sheep" can refer to many sheep or a single sheep. Paul interpreted the word seed in the singular sense as a prediction about the coming messiah.

given,¹⁵ could not be altered by the coming of the Law. At any rate, if the inheritance could come through obedience under the Law then it would no longer be a promise. Yet God granted the inheritance to Abraham on the basis of promise.

Fourth, the Law had an entirely different purpose than to provide salvation (3:19-25). The Law was added alongside faith in order to keep sin in check (3:19a).¹⁶ In comparison to the Abrahamic Covenant, the Law was inferior. It was bilateral, given indirectly through a mediator, and temporary in that it only lasted until the seed came. By contrast the Abrahamic Covenant was unilateral, given directly with no mediator, and permanent (3:19b-20). Faith and Law have different functions in God's redemptive purposes. While the Law cannot provide salvation, it shut men up under sin until the coming of the messianic seed (3:21-22). The Law functioned as a *paidagogōs* or a guardian and harsh disciplinarian placed over a child until he reached maturity. In the same way, the Law functioned as a tutor leading men to Christ (3:23-25).

Because they have been transferred from the *paidagogōs* to Christ, believers enjoy three privileges in their present position (3:26-29). First, they are sons of God, having been baptized into and clothed with Christ (3:26-27). Second, they enjoy equal status with one another. All national, social-political, and gender distinctions have been obliterated (3:28).¹⁷ Third, believers are the Sons of Abraham. They are heirs of Abraham's promise of justification by faith alone.¹⁸

¹⁵ The 430-year time period mentioned in verse 17 refers to the time period between the reiteration of the covenant to Jacob as he left Canaan for Egypt in 1875 B.C. (Gen 46:1-4) and the giving of the Mosaic Law in 1446 B.C. See Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Galatians," online: www.soniclight.com, accessed 29 June 2005, 33.

¹⁶ Other possible interpretations include to restrain sin, to reveal sin, to provoke sin, to awaken transgression.

¹⁷ Removal of such distinctions in no way implies that all gender roles have been removed. God still requires different roles for different genders within marriage (Eph 5:22-32) and leadership within the church (1 Tim 2:12).

¹⁸ Many will use this text to argue for replacement theology. However, in order for someone to be a Jew, the designation "sons of Abraham" is not enough. Ishmael and his descendants were also sons of Abraham. For someone to be a Jew they must not only be a son of Abraham but a son of Isaac, and Jacob as well. Also, it is important to recognize that the word "seed" is used four different ways in Scripture. These uses include natural seed (Gen 12:1-3, 7), natural spiritual seed (Isa 41:8, Rom 9:6, 8), spiritual seed (Gal 3:6-9, 29) and the ultimate seed (Gal 3:16; Heb 2:16-17). The third sense is in view in this passage. See Constable, "Notes on Galatians," 32-33. It is also worth pointing out that the

Now that Paul has explained the doctrine of justification and sanctification by faith alone in chapter three, he moves on in chapter four in order to illustrate the doctrine. He uses three illustrations. First, he uses a domestic illustration (4:1-11). A minor is under the care of a custodian before reaching the age of maturity necessary to enjoy the privileges of adulthood.¹⁹ Similarly, the Galatians were under the slavery of the elemental teachings of the world and the Law before the coming of Christ. However, at the right time God sent forth His son in order to usher believers into the privileges of spiritual adulthood and adoption.²⁰ They now have a spiritual freedom, intimacy, and experience with God they had not known previously (4:1-7). How foolish to give up these spiritual blessings and to return to the weak and beggarly elements of the old system. Now that they know God, the Galatians were returning to things that are not of God. Thus, Paul expresses concern that he has wasted his efforts on them (4:8-11).

Second, in an attempt to free the Galatians from the Law (4:12), Paul uses a historical illustration (4:12-20). Here, Paul appeals to the experience that he had with the Galatians when he first encountered them on his first missionary journey. He reminds them of their previous commitment to him (4:12-16). Their appreciation of Paul was unlimited. They did not despise him on account of his illness (4:13). On the contrary, they treated him as an angel or Christ Himself. They would have torn out their own eyes if it could have helped Paul.²¹ Had Paul suddenly become their enemy simply for telling them the truth? Paul then reminds the Galatians of his commitment to

noun “promise” in verse 29 is singular. Thus, the promise is the singular blessing of justification by faith alone rather than a taking over of all of the provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant.

¹⁹ The point at which the child reached the age of accountability was signified by a ceremony in which the child’s father gave to his son the *Toga Virilis*.

²⁰ “The fullness of time” (Gal 4:4) refers to the right time that God sent His son into the world. The world was ripe for rapid evangelism with its universal roads, language, and peace (*pax romana*) and messianic expectation. The reference to Christ being “born of the woman, born under the Law” refers to both his humanity and deity. He was human in the sense that He was born of a woman. He was deity in the sense that He qualified to bear the penalty of the Law’s curse by keeping the Law completely (Matt 5:17).

²¹ It is probably best to treat this expression as a hyperbolic figure of speech indicating the Galatians affection for Paul rather than a literal tearing out of the eyes. Jesus employed similar hyperbolic expressions (Matt 5: 29-30).

them (4:17-20). He contrasts his motives with that of the Judaizers. Although it is appropriate to be zealously courted as long as such courting is for noble purposes, the Judaizers were courting the Galatians solely for the purpose of converting them to their system and not because they were genuinely concerned about their well being. The Judaizers sought to alienate the Galatians from Paul. By contrast, Paul analogizes himself to being their caring mother who is in labor for their sanctification just as he was once in labor for their justification.

Third, Paul uses a biblical illustration (4:21-31). Since the Judaizers are so zealous for the Law, Paul uses an illustration from the first book of the Law (Gen 16, 21). He recounts the story of the birth of Abraham's two sons. Ishmael was born naturally through the slave woman Hagar. Isaac was born supernaturally through the free woman Sarah (4:21-23). Paul builds an allegory from these historical events.²² Hagar represents the Mosaic Covenant and the Law and those enslaved under that system. She also represents the earthly city of Jerusalem that was enslaved by the Romans at the time Paul wrote. Presumably, Sarah represents those who have been emancipated by the gospel of grace. She also represents the freedom of the celestial, New Jerusalem. Paul also uses Isaiah 54:1 to explain that Sarah's progeny will be numerous. Israel had a husband before the captivity, was barren during the captivity, and will have many children during the millennium. Similarly, Sarah was barren, begat Isaac, and ended up with greater progeny than Hagar. Paul's point in all of this is that those who partake of the gospel of grace as represented by Sarah will experience far greater blessing than those who partake of the Judaizers' works oriented gospel as represented by Hagar.

²² Several points must be considered when discussing Paul's use of allegory. First, Bible readers are not to find allegories whenever they want to. The text itself will alert the reader to the reality of an allegory (Gal 4:24; Rev 11:8). Second, believers are not to follow Paul's practice of finding allegories. Paul could allegorize because he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Paul was in a special class of persons. We do not enjoy this same privilege today. Third, Paul was not allegorizing in the Augustinian or Origenistic sense, which had a tendency to dehistoricize the biblical events. Here, Paul is not dehistoricizing these events but rather finds within them an additional spiritual meaning. Fourth, Paul probably uses allegorization here because that is the approach that the Judaizers were employing. In other words, Paul was using the Judaizers' own tactic against them.

Paul draws three points of application from this allegory (4:28-31). First, Christians are like Isaac in that they have experienced a supernatural birth (4:28). The implication is that they should continue on in sanctification through the same supernatural means rather than through natural means (3:3). Second, Paul explains why the Judaizers are persecuting the Galatians (4:29). Legalists always persecute those who walk in faith. Unbelief always persecutes belief. Paul illustrates this by calling attention to Genesis 21:8-9. Ishmael, the child born of works, mocked Isaac, the child born of promise, at Isaac's weaning celebration. Ishmael did this because he was the eldest and therefore the inheritor of the estate. Third, the Galatians are to excommunicate the Judaizers (4:30). Just as Sarah had Ishmael expelled so he could not receive the inheritance (Gen 21:10, 12), the Galatians are to expel the Judaizers since the Law brings no inheritance (5:12). Paul concludes by observing that his readers are children of Sarah rather than children of Hagar (4:31). Thus, they are to repudiate the bondage of the Law and instead live in the freedom offered by the Holy Spirit.

Would Paul's setting aside of the Law lead to license as the Judaizers had suggested? In these final two chapters Paul explains that it would not (Gal 5-6). In Galatians 5, Paul explains the proper balance in the Christian life. First, Paul explains that sanctification occurs without the Law (5:1-12). After admonishing the Galatians to stand firm in grace (5:1), Paul explains why the Galatians should not return to the Law. He notes that legalism is mutually exclusive from grace (5:2, 6), obligates one to keep the entire Law (5:3), causes one to fall from grace (5:4-6),²³ thwarts spiritual progress (5:7-10), and empties the cross of its power (5:11-12). In this paragraph, Paul reiterates several familiar themes, such as the believer's continuing sanctification and hope emanating from the Spirit rather than the Law (5:5), the call to excommunicate the Judaizers (5:9,

²³ Although Paul uses the word justification here, he still has sanctification issues in mind. Paul is looking at the totality of the salvation experience. He wants his readers to be sanctified in the same manner in which they were justified.

10, 12), and Paul's defense against the charge of setting aside the Law solely for the purpose of currying the favor of the Gentiles (5:11).

Second, Paul explains that the setting aside of the Law does not lead to license (5:13-15). To counter the false argument that he was teaching license, Paul explains that the Galatians should not use their freedom for the purpose of catering to the sin nature. Instead of behaving as if they were obligated to the sin nature, their true obligation is to love one another. If they were so concerned about the Law, they could automatically fulfill all of it by loving one another (Lev 19:18). If those who advocated Law and those who advocated grace within the church did not love one another, then they would consume each other.

Third, Paul explains that setting aside the Law does not lead to license but rather a life empowered by the Holy Spirit (5:16-26). Paul promises that overcoming the sin nature is possible through dependence upon the Holy Spirit (5:16-18). The Spirit counters the flesh (5:17).²⁴ Life in the Spirit is mutually exclusive from life under the Law (5:18). Paul further explains how the Spirit counters the flesh by contrasting the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit (5:19-23). After observing that the works of the flesh obviously emanate from the sin nature (5:19a), Paul goes on to enumerate these works of the flesh (5:19b-21). The works of the flesh can be categorized on the basis of sins related to sexuality (immorality, impurity, and sensuality), religion (idolatry, sorcery), societal discord (enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying), drinking (drunkenness, carousing), and generic activities (and the like).²⁵ Paul warns that

²⁴ The situation depicted in Galatians 5:17 seems to be different than the situation depicted in Romans 7. See Stanley Toussaint, "The Contrast Between the Spiritual Conflict in Romans 7 and Galatians 5," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123 (October-December, 1966): 310-14. For a helpful chart see Constable, "Notes on Galatians," 59.

²⁵ This phrase indicates that the list is exemplary rather than exhaustive.

those whose lives are characterized by the works of the flesh will not have an inheritance in the millennium.²⁶

Similarly, after observing that the fruit of the Spirit emanates from the Holy Spirit (5:22), Paul enumerates the various aspects of the fruit of the Spirit (5:22-23). They can be categorized on the basis of mental characteristics (love, joy, peace), interpersonal characteristics (patience, kindness, goodness), and general characteristics (faithfulness, gentleness, and self control). Paul explains that there is no need for the external requirement of the Law when these traits are evident in a person's life. Paul concludes the paragraph by pointing out the believer's provisions for victory. If believers acknowledge their co-crucifixion with Christ (5:24; 2:20) and depend upon the Spirit (5:25, 16), they can overcome the power of their old nature (5:26).

Paul makes it clear that the life in the Spirit should manifest itself in tangible service to others. In Galatians 6:1-10, Paul mentions four groups that believers should be devoted to serving. Paul first mentions service toward other believers caught in sin (6:1). The reference to "any trespass" in this context may refer to those caught under the spell of the Judaizers or perhaps even the Judaizers themselves. Those believers who are more spiritual²⁷ should restore²⁸ the erring brother gently (2 Cor 2:7). Second, Paul mentions service toward believers caught under an oppressive load (6:2-5). Paul describes the process of alleviating a fellow believer caught under an oppressive load as fulfilling the Law of Christ (John 13:34) rather than fulfilling the Law of Moses (6:2). Because pride prevents such burden sharing (6:3), it is necessary for believers to first humble themselves by testing their own actions rather than comparing themselves to others. Then the

²⁶ Because Paul's audience is comprised of believers (Gal 3:3; 4:6), he is not questioning their salvation. He presupposes it. Rather, he is saying that a life after the flesh will disqualify the Galatians from rewards in the kingdom age.

²⁷ The more spiritual brethren in this context refer to those whose lives are controlled by the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:16, 25).

²⁸ The verb "to restore" is the same word used to describe the mending of a fishing net (Matt 4:21).

Christian can take legitimate pride in himself (6:4). The believer can test his own actions based upon his willingness to carry his expected load (6:5).²⁹

Third, Paul mentions service toward teachers (6:6-9). Because supporting teachers is a normal burden believers are expected to carry, these verses logically flow from the previous verse. Perhaps the Judaizers had dissuaded the Galatians from supporting teachers of the gospel of grace. Here Paul explains that such support is the normal expectation of the believer (Gal 6:6; Luke 10:7; 1 Cor 9:11, 14; 1 Tim 5:18). If believers do not shoulder this responsibility of supporting teachers they will not be placing themselves under sound teaching and thus they will reap a bad spiritual harvest. By contrast, if they do shoulder this burden, they will reap eternal life (6:7-8).³⁰ Because the harvest may not come when the believer expects it, Paul admonishes Christians not to give up. God will bring the harvest at the proper time (6:9). Fourth, Paul mentions service to all. However, charity begins with those who are Christians (6:10).

Paul concludes by reiterating many of the key concepts already dealt with in the letter (6:11-18). It is at this point for the sake of emphasis that he takes the pen from his amanuensis and writes the conclusion in his own handwriting (6:11).³¹ Paul contrasts his motives with those of the Judaizers (6:12-15). While the Judaizers avoided persecution and boasted in the number of converts they won, Paul's boast was only in the cross rather than circumcision. His motives were not worldly.³² Paul then promises a blessing upon both Gentile and Jewish members of his audience

²⁹ The Greek noun translated "load" in verse 5 is *phortion*. It refers to normal load that all believers are expected to carry. This word is different from the noun translated load in verse 2, which is *barē*. This latter word refers to an oppressive, abnormal load.

³⁰ This verse is not talking about earning salvation. Rather, it speaks of some believers enjoying a richer quality of spiritual life by obeying their responsibility of supporting teachers.

³¹ Use of an amanuensis or secretary was common in the New Testament world (2 Thess 3:17; 1 Cor 16:21; Col 4:18; 1 Pet 5:12).

³² Paul had lost his interest in the world and the world had lost its interest in Paul (Gal 6:14).

who adhere to his gospel of grace (6:16).³³ Paul then reinforces the purity of his motives toward his audience by reminding them of the suffering he experienced on their behalf (Gal 6:17; Acts 14:19-20). Paul closes the letter with an emphasis upon grace (6:18), which has been the dominant theme of the letter.

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³³ Although replacement theologians use the reference "the Israel of God" to support their belief that the church has replaced Israel, several reasons make it more plausible that this phrase refers to believing Jews within the Galatian audience. These reasons include the repetition of the preposition "upon," the fact that the appositional use of *kai* is rare in Paul's writings, the fact that the 65 other references to Israel in the New Testament always refer to national Israel, the fact that the name Israel was never used to refer to the church until A.D. 160, the fact that it makes no sense for Paul to introduce something as sweeping as replacement theology this late in the letter when it could have been easily introduced in the doctrinal section (Gal 3-4), and the fact that Paul wanted the Galatian, Jewish believers not to think that he was anti-Semitic given the anti Judaistic tone of the letter. See S. Lewis Johnson, "Paul and the 'Israel of God': An Exegetical and Eschatological Case-Study," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, ed. Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 181-96.

³⁴ Critical commentaries include DeWitt and Best. Exegetical commentaries include George, Longenecker, Lightfoot, and Fung. An expositional commentary would be MacArthur. A devotional commentary would be McGee.