STUDY NOTES ON “GALATIANS” 
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(This study utilizes the NASB text)

Introductory Comments: During the Reformation, Galatians became so important to Martin Luther that he referred to the book as “My Kaethe” – the affectionate name for his wife. This Epistle fulfilled a crucial role in early church – it is often seen as a “first draft” of Romans, since it covers the gospel of grace, Abraham, and the law in similar fashion. Galatians was a stern, impassioned effort to save Christianity from becoming a messianic sect of “legalistic Judaism.” Luke gives considerable space in the Book of Acts to Paul’s missionary work in the Roman province of Galatia – Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Paul evangelized southern Galatia on his First Missionary Journey, and revisited it on his Second one. If the letter was penned before the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 (A.D. 49), this would explain why the question of circumcision was still such a live issue. Many scholars believe Paul’s letter to the Galatians was his earliest epistle, and they date it sometime between A.D. 48 and A.D. 55.

After Paul left the area, false teachers entered the churches and introduced wrong doctrine; teaching that salvation was by faith plus keeping the law. Their message was a mixture of Christianity and Judaism, of grace and law, of Christ and Moses. They also tried to turn the Galatians away from Paul by saying he was not a genuine apostle of the Lord, and therefore his message was not reliable. So they sought to destroy confidence in the message by undermining confidence in the messenger. Paul’s concern was whether or not the Galatian believers could be rescued from these Judaistic, legalistic teachings? Or was his work there in vain? Hence, Paul wrote this indignant letter to his beloved children in the faith. In it, he sets forth the true character of salvation as being given by grace from beginning to end, not earned by law-keeping either in whole or in part. Good works are not a condition of salvation, but a fruit of it. The Christian has died to the law; he leads a life of holiness, not by his own efforts, but by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God.

1:1-10 – Paul’s Purpose in Writing. Paul begins his typical formal greeting emphasizing his God-given authority and his Christ-centered message. Paul’s authority was not derived from human agency; rather he was appointed as an apostle by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead (Acts 1:21-26). Paul was called by the risen Christ, in contrast to the twelve apostles, who were called by the Lord Jesus during His earthly ministry. A man who is called by God alone and is responsible to God alone has the freedom to preach God’s message without fear of man. Paul's affirmation of his divine appointment should encourage each of us to affirm our own divine appointments. We may not play the role of apostles, but we are given work to do by God's appointment. If we view our work as just another job to do for a difficult boss, we will soon become discouraged. But if by faith we can see that God has given us work to do for Him, then we can overcome even the most difficult obstacles. All work is sacred if it has been given to us by God.

Grace and peace to you is a combination of the typical Greek and Hebrew forms of greeting. These two words sum up the basis and the consequence of the work of salvation accomplished by God through Jesus Christ. Grace is God's unconditional, unearned acceptance of us – it is the love-gift of Christ. The experience of grace by faith results in peace, a deep sense of harmony and completeness.
in our relationship with God and with one another – “bring together that which has been separated” (Gk definition). In three brief phrases Paul outlines the basic structure of his Christ-centered message:

**First**, Christ gave himself for our sins (v.4). The sacrificial, self-giving work of Christ on the cross is the final answer to the problem of all our moral failure and guilt. For that reason the victory over sin accomplished by the cross of Christ is the main theme of this letter (2:20-21; 3:1, 13; 4:4; 5:1, 11, 24; 6:12, 14) – a rebuke for substituting humanistic solutions for the cross of Christ.

**Second**, the purpose of the cross was to rescue us from the present evil age (v.4). Paul had an apocalyptic view of history (cf. 1:12, 16; 3:23); God in Christ had already intervened and forever changed the nature of human history; the cross inaugurated God's new created order (6:15). All who believe in the cross are rescued from the present evil age and included in the new creation. The present age is controlled by destructive, malignant forces, "the basic principles of the world" (4:3, 9). The works of the law do not offer a way of escape; only the cross of Christ sets the captive free (3:23). Christians can now enjoy the freedom of the new creation; we are no longer prisoners or slaves under the tyranny of this present, dehumanizing system – "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free!" (5:1)

**Third**, the plan for the cross was according to the will of our God and Father. This places the credit where it belongs – not in man’s puny efforts, but rather in the sovereign will of God. The Father planned our rescue according to His plan – at the right time He sent His Son to accomplish our rescue (4:4-5). And now the Father has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts to let us know that we are no longer slaves, but children of the Father (4:6-7). The accomplishment of the Father's plan in history is the expression of His grace and the basis of our peace. According to the gospel of grace, all the glory for man’s salvation goes to God the Father and to the Lord Jesus Christ. Man cannot share this glory as a co-savior by keeping the law.

**Perversion of the Gospel (6-10)** – Right at the outset of his letter, Paul moves to a lengthy rebuke. He begins with a statement about the reason for it (1:6) and a reminder of previous instructions. Later in his letter Paul restates the rebuke in the form of rebuking questions (cf. 3:1-5; 4:8-10) — he rebukes them for foolishness (3:1-3) and negligence in not following the knowledge they had (4:9). The first rebuke deals with a "change of mind" (cf. 1:6 – restated in 3:3 and 4:9), and the tone of this rebuke pervades the entire section of the letter (1:6 to 4:12). The Galatian believers probably thought they were simply adding a few Jewish customs to the gospel in order to enhance the value of their faith in Christ. But what they added to the gospel actually negated the essence of the gospel. Paul blames the confusion on those teachers who perverted the gospel; and he pronounces a solemn condemnation of all who tamper with its truth. Paul is stunned that people who had just recently experienced so much of God's miraculous power by His Spirit in their lives (3:1-5) would now turn away from Him. In effect, they were turning their backs on God for a completely different gospel – a gospel that was not God-centered: instead, it was drawing people away from God to focus on themselves. Preoccupation with racial identity, religious observance and ceremonial rituals robbed them of their experience of God's grace expressed in Christ. The tragedy of the situation was that in their pious pursuit of spiritual perfection (3:3) they were actually turning away from God. These people didn’t view their version of the gospel as heretical, because they were not denying the deity of Christ, the cross of Christ, or the resurrection of Christ. True, they hadn’t taken anything away from Paul's message – but they had added something to it!
**Application:** True servants of Christ will not compromise the truth of the gospel; rather they are marked by unswerving loyalty to Christ & His Word. They resist the pressure to renounce their faith in Christ, and boldly declare with Martin Luther, "Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me."

1:11-17 – Paul Defends his Ministry. At this point Paul sets forth his own autobiographical account, and the story of his own loyalty to the gospel. He begins with a thesis statement about the origin of the gospel, recounts his conversion and call, describes his first visit with Peter in Jerusalem, a conference with the apostles in Jerusalem, his conflict with Peter in Antioch, and then concludes with a personal affirmation of his commitment to live by the gospel. Paul wants his readers to know that the gospel he preached was not made up by human beings, or taught to him by human beings; rather, it was received by revelation from Jesus Christ. The Galatians, however, were adding to the central content of the gospel by requiring Gentile Christians to maintain a Jewish lifestyle. The best evidence for Paul's claim to have received his gospel by revelation from Jesus Christ is his conversion. How could such a fanatical opponent of the followers of Christ become such a devoted preacher of the gospel of Christ? Paul explains that the cause of such a radical change was God's gracious revelation of His Son to him. To appreciate the impact of God's intervention in Paul's life we need to look more closely at three pictures Paul gives of himself –

1. **Paul reviews the record of his pre-Christian life in order to show the wonder of God's grace.** Although he never ceased to identify himself as a Jew (Rom 11:1), he only used his former manner of life in Judaism as a way of describing his life before he became a new creation "in Christ." Jewish identity markers such as circumcision, kosher food, and Sabbath observance were Paul's primary concern before his conversion; but they were no longer significant for Paul after he found his new identity in Christ. As he declares at the end of his letter: "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation" (6:15). The contrast between Paul and the Galatian believers stands out here. As a Jew, he had turned from his preoccupation with the distinctive Jewish way of life to serve the risen Christ; these Gentiles were turning from their focus on Christ to a preoccupation with the distinctive Jewish way of life. No wonder Paul calls them "foolish Galatians" (3:1). Paul draws attention to two characteristics of his previous way of life in Judaism – his intense persecution of the church (1:13), and his zealous devotion to Jewish traditions (1:14). The message of the church, that a crucified Messiah provides salvation for all, contradicted the traditions of Judaism; The Jewish people believed salvation was to be found only in the law-observant Jewish nation. No wonder then that Paul's zeal for the Jewish traditions made him a fanatical persecutor of the church.

2. **In his description of his former life, Paul says – I persecuted . . . I tried to destroy . . . I was advancing . . . and I was extremely zealous (vv. 13-14).** Note Paul's usage of “first person verbs.” In contrast to Paul's ego-centered former life, God Himself is the central subject in Paul's conversion. God is the subject of all the verbs – God, who set me apart . . . God called . . . God was pleased to reveal (vv. 15-16). God abruptly interrupted Paul's life and turned him around. As we study Paul's account of conversion, we observe four dimensions of God's work in conversion –

   **First, God's choice precedes conversion.** Like the prophets, Paul sees himself as being set apart by God before his birth for a special work (see Is 49:1 and Jer 1:4-5).

   **Second, God's decision to set Paul apart from birth was a result of “God’s gracious call;” this call was a life-transforming event.** The two parallel phrases (set me apart . . . called me) teach us that conversion is completely based on God's loving initiative. Before Paul was born,
God chose him. While Paul was in the midst of trying to destroy the people of God, God called him. That’s the meaning of grace – undeserved love. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!" Be careful not to think that you were not a “wretch” that needed saving.

**Third, God's gracious call led to revelation – “God was pleased to reveal his Son in me.”**

This gives us a wonderful view of God’s purpose in calling us – to reveal His Son in us, so that we may represent the Lord Jesus to the world. Paul strongly affirmed the external, objective nature of his encounter with Christ on the Damascus Road. God's revelation of his Son in Paul was a result of God illuminating his mind (cf. 2 Cor 4:6) and heart so that he saw and knew Jesus to be the Son of God. The danger of substituting external observance of the law for an intimate relationship with Christ is the central burden of Paul's message to the Galatian believers. His arguments lead to this point – "God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts" (4:6). His severe warnings alerted them to this danger – "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ" (5:4).

**Fourth, Paul says that revelation was given so he might “preach Christ to the Gentiles”** (1:16). Paul's conversion included his commission – His mission was given to him in the initial experience of conversion. Christ met him on the road to Damascus in order to send him on his mission to the world. As a result Paul interpreted the gospel itself in the light of his mission to the Gentiles. He called his gospel "the gospel to the Gentiles" (2:7).

3. **After his conversion, Paul tells us “he did not consult any man”** (v. 16). That Paul received the revelation from Jesus Christ (1:11-12) is demonstrated by the following facts – he was opposed to the church before his conversion (vv. 13-14); in his conversion, God himself revealed his Son in him; and he did not consult with the church after his conversion (vv. 15-17). Paul's argument is designed to show that he is not dependent on or subordinate to any other church leaders for his authority to preach his gospel to the Gentiles. His authority is derived from the gospel that had been revealed to him by God Himself. Therefore when the Galatians turn away from the gospel preached by Paul, they were turning away from God. Paul was determined to prove that his gospel was given by divine revelation, not human tradition, and that his commission to preach this gospel to the Gentiles was part of that divine revelation. He did not receive his commission from the original apostles. Instead of visiting the original apostles in Jerusalem after his conversion, Paul went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus (v. 17). Many scholars feel every servant of the Lord needs a “time of seclusion and meditation.” Moses had his forty years on the backside of the desert; David was alone with God while he tended sheep on the hillsides of Judea.

1:18-24 – Paul's First Visit with Peter in Jerusalem. After establishing that he was totally independent from the apostles in his conversion experience, his purpose was to demonstrate that his ministry to the Gentiles came not from church tradition but from God, and that he was faithful to this gospel. Paul was careful to number his years and even count his days – three years after his conversion he spent only fifteen days with Peter. The contrast he draws between the comparatively long time apart from any contact with the apostles and the brief time with Peter highlights his independence. The purpose of his visit was not to be taught by Peter, but to get acquainted with Peter (v. 18; cf. Acts 9:26-29). Paul would have been deeply interested in Peter's accounts of Jesus' life and ministry, and his concern for the unity of the church would have compelled him to build a good relationship with Peter. But these understandable interests and concerns did not provide a basis for portraying Paul as a disciple or subordinate of Peter. In Paul's record of appointments for that two-week visit, he states that James, the Lord's brother and the
leader of the Church at Jerusalem (2:9, 12), was the only other apostle he saw (v. 19). According to Acts, James became the most influential leader in that church. While Paul was working for harmony in the church, he was working under a direct commission from God. Paul confirms the complete reliability of his account with a legal oath – *I assure you before God that I am not lying* (v. 20). The power of the gospel had transformed Paul from a persecutor of believers to a preacher of the faith. The light of the gospel that he had tried to snuff out had penetrated and illuminated his heart and was now shining brightly through his life and preaching. That was the report heard about Paul in the churches of Judea. What a contrast to the false, negative reports about Paul that were being circulated in the churches of Galatia. If only they would learn from the example of the Judean churches, they would no longer be mesmerized by the troublemakers who had caused such confusion by perverting the gospel.

2:1-10 – The Conference in Jerusalem. In the previous section (1:17-24) Paul described the nature of his relationship with the original apostles in Jerusalem, to show that he had been commissioned directly by God (not by the apostles) to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. He was not their messenger boy. In fact, his contact with them had been minimal; he did not visit them until three years after his conversion; and then he spent only two weeks with Peter and James in Jerusalem in order to get acquainted with them. After that time he remained largely unknown to the churches in Judea except for the good reports they heard about his evanglistic work in the provinces of Syria and Cilicia. It was a long time before Paul met again with the apostles in Jerusalem, not until fourteen years after his conversion, or about eleven years after his first visit (2:1). With these facts Paul has sharpened his rebuke for turning to a different gospel. It was ludicrous for the Galatians to discard Paul's gospel as if it were a secondhand, abbreviated version that needed to be supplemented with additional instructions from the Jerusalem apostles. Paul had not spent enough time with the apostles in Jerusalem to get his gospel from them. Since his gospel was given by revelation from God, the Galatian believers should have maintained unswerving loyalty to it. As we follow Paul's participation in the Jerusalem Conference, we observe eight steps in the process which concluded with the giving of the *right hand of fellowship* (v. 9).

1. **Paul attended this conference with a team that included Barnabas & Titus** (v. 1). **Barnabas** was a highly respected Jewish Christian – though his given name was Joseph, the apostles called Barnabas "Son of Encouragement" because of his gift of encouraging the early church (Acts 4:36). **Titus** was a Greek Christian (2:3) – by including him Paul boldly expressed his conviction that it was not necessary for Greek Christians to change their ethnic identity by becoming Jews in order to be included in the church. The presence of Titus forced the conference to resolve the issue of discrimination against Gentile Christians. The best place to start building unity in the church is to start working with a team of diverse people who are united by their common faith in Christ and their mission.

2. **Paul went to the conference in response to a revelation** (v. 2). Here again we see Paul’s insistence that he was taking orders directly from God, not from human beings. Neither the Jerusalem apostles nor any other pressure group summoned Paul to Jerusalem for cross-examination. He went because God told him to go.

3. **Paul went to the conference in order to have his gospel evaluated**. He set before the leaders in Jerusalem the gospel that he preached among the Gentiles (v. 2). The verb *submitted* indicates that Paul was willing to present his ministry and message at the conference for discussion and debate. Paul recognized that his divine commission could not be effectively fulfilled if there was a division between his Gentile mission and the leaders of the church in Jerusalem. His God-given mission did not need to be authorized by them, but it would have been greatly hindered (*in vain*) if it lacked their...
support. Paul was well aware of the fact that if the mother church denounced and disowned his Gentile mission, his work of evangelizing the Gentile world would have been severely hampered.

4. **Paul strongly resisted those who challenged the essentials of the gospel.** His willingness to present his gospel for evaluation did not mean that he was willing to compromise the truth of the gospel. For Paul, the truth of the gospel included his Gentile mission, which presupposed the unity and equality of Gentile and Jewish believers in Christ. This basic presupposition was challenged at the Jerusalem conference when some false brethren tried to require Titus be circumcised – become a Jew – in order to be included in the church. But since such a requirement denied the equality and unity of Gentiles and Jews in the church, Paul did not give in to them. As a result he is able to report to the Galatians that *not even Titus, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised* (v. 3). Titus was accepted as a Gentile believer, and did not have to become a Jew to be included. Paul's firm resistance to pressure protected the unity of the church. Paul informed the Galatians, *we did not yield in subjection to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you* (v. 5). Unity in the church can be secure only when there is no compromise of the essentials of the gospel. Working toward unity does not mean a passive submission to misguided zealots. The truth of the gospel is non-negotiable.

5. **Paul built the unity of the church on the truth of God's impartiality.** Although he respected the leaders of the church in Jerusalem, Paul was not intimidated by them, because he knew that *God does not show partiality because of a person's reputation* (v. 6). Paul recognized that the men he met with at the conference were regarded as the spiritual giants in the church (v. 6). It was well known that Peter and John were the disciples closest to Jesus, and that James was the brother of Jesus. But Paul subtly calls into question the original apostles' basis of authority. He draws attention to the fact that those who were highly respected in the church agreed with his message – *they added nothing to his message* (v. 6). Though they were *reputed to be the pillars* (v. 9), their authority did not rest on their reputation, but on their faithfulness to the truth of the gospel (v. 5).

6. **Unity is maintained in the church by keeping the focus on God's work.** Paul says that when the leaders *saw that he had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised* (vv. 7-8) and *recognized the grace that had been given to him* (v. 9), they gave the “right hand of fellowship” to Paul and Barnabas, and agreed that they should continue their ministry to the Gentiles. They were clearly convinced that “God was at work” in Paul's ministry (v. 8). Just as the miraculous work of God in Peter's ministry validated his call to preach the gospel to the Jews, so also the miraculous work of God in Paul's ministry was irrefutable evidence that God had given him the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles (vv. 7-8). It was precisely because these leaders were preoccupied with God's work, rather than human traditions and prejudice, that they were able to reach an agreement.

7. **Unity at the conference was based on a delineation of different spheres of responsibility.** The leaders in Jerusalem agreed that Paul and Barnabas should go to the Gentiles, while they would be responsible for the evangelization of the Jews (v. 9). Though Paul had a burden for his own people as well, and always began his evangelistic work in a synagogue, he was clear about his primary calling to be the apostle to the Gentiles (v. 7). We also know that Peter was the first apostle to evangelize Gentiles, when he went to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:1-23). So the agreement reached at the conference recognized and approved the different tasks that God had given to the apostles in the church. Paul's mission to the Gentiles was confirmed, and he was not required to change his message; uncircumcised Gentile believers were to be received as full members in the church.
8. **The unity of the church was maintained by practical service.** The practical outworking of the basic agreement regarding Paul's mission to the Gentiles included the Jerusalem apostles' request that Paul and his team *should continue to remember the poor* (v. 10); which probably referred to the poor among the saints in Jerusalem (Rom 15:26). Most scholars interpret this request as an appeal for money to support the poverty-stricken church in Jerusalem – apparently, they suffered extreme persecution by being denied employment? The leaders of the Jerusalem church supported Paul's mission to the Gentiles, but at the same time they asked Paul to keep the needs and welfare of the Jewish church in mind. Paul affirmed his eager desire to express the unity of the church by his practical support of the Jerusalem church (v. 10); obviously, Paul cared deeply for his own people.

2:11-14 – **Paul’s Rebutal of Peter in Antioch.** The next episode in Paul's autobiography presents a painful contrast to the heartwarming expression of unity in the Jerusalem conference. Paul now tells us that he opposed Peter to his face in Antioch (v. 11). How could such a conflict occur between Paul and Peter after they had reached an agreement to support one another? Augustine believed this conflict was one where Paul established the higher claim of the truth of the gospel over the rank and office of Peter. Paul was willing to endure the pain of conflict with Peter in order to defend the truth of the gospel. To understand the nature of the conflict, let's recount the four stages of how the drama developed:

1. Peter's practice of eating with the Gentile Christians.
2. Peter's separation from Gentile Christians after the arrival of the delegation from James because of his fear of the circumcision group.
3. The separation of the other Jewish Christians from Gentile Christians because of Peter's influence.
4. Paul's rebuke and Peter's Practice of Eating with the Gentile Christians (2:12).

In Antioch's fully integrated congregation of Christian Jews and Gentiles, Peter had regularly followed the custom of eating with Gentile Christians. It is difficult to understand how Peter could have been persuaded to stop sharing common meals and the Lord's Supper with Gentile believers. But apparently that is exactly what a group of Jewish Christians with connections to James did when they arrived in Antioch. Paul doesn’t disclose exactly who these men were, but he seems to lay the responsibility on James for the disturbance in the church in Antioch. What did they say that persuaded Peter to separate from the Gentile believers? The only clue we have is Paul's explanation that Peter separated himself from the Gentiles *because he feared the party of the circumcision* (v. 12) – many scholars believe this refers to a group of “Jewish Christians” from Jerusalem.

**If they were “Jewish Christians:”** First, it is important to note that Paul accuses Peter and other Jewish believers in Antioch of hypocrisy, not heresy: *the rest of the Jews joined him in his hypocrisy* (13). Being as their action seems inconsistent with their own convictions about the truth of the gospel, what would explain such behavior? Apparently during the late 40s and early 50s, “Jewish Christians” in Judea were facing bitter antagonism from Zealot-minded Jews for socializing with Gentiles. The fierce Jewish nationalism rampant in Palestine at that time led to harsh treatment of any Jew who associated with Gentiles. It is likely that the delegation from James simply reported to Peter that his open and unrestricted association with Gentiles in Antioch was causing the church in Jerusalem to suffer greatly at the hands of Jewish nationalists. Thus Peter may well have voiced his concern about the “detrimental effect” his table fellowship with Gentiles was having on the Jerusalem church's mission to the Jews. When non-Christian Jews in Jerusalem heard that Peter, a prominent church leader, was eating with Gentiles in Antioch, they would not only turn away from the witness of the church, but also become actively hostile toward the church for tolerating such a practice.
Confronted by these practical concerns for his home church and its mission to the Jews, Peter may have acted against his own better judgment – He separated himself from the Gentiles.

The irrationality of their action is expressed by these words, “even Barnabas was led astray” (13). Paul would have expected Barnabas to remain loyal to him and the gospel even if everyone else turned away. After all, Barnabas, as the first pastor of the church in Antioch, had warmly welcomed Gentile believers, and had stood with Paul in the Jerusalem conference. How could even loyal Barnabas now deny the truth of the gospel? It is sometimes frightening to see how otherwise sane and sensible people can be swept away by emotions in the midst of a church crisis. In the heat of conflict, however, even well-meaning Christians sometimes lose all sense of perspective. Paul had the spiritual discernment to rise above the emotional trauma of the crisis – he saw the terrible consequences of Peter's action; he had contradicted the gospel. The gospel proclaimed that salvation for both Jews and Gentiles was by way of the cross of Christ and union with Christ – but Peter's separation from table fellowship with Gentile Christians implied that salvation for Gentiles required strict adherence to the law and incorporation into the Jewish nation. No doubt Peter would have denied that he meant to communicate this requirement to Gentile believers, but how else could his action ultimately be interpreted? Paul led Peter back to his own deepest convictions by asking him a question: "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile. . . how is it, then, that you compel Gentiles to live like Jews?" (v. 14). By his practice of eating with Gentile believers when he came to Antioch, Peter had already demonstrated that even as a Jew he had complete liberty to live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. In other words, Peter had already made it clear that his convictions permitted him to be free from Jewish food regulations. To put it simply, Peter's separation had violated his own conviction that the racial division between Jews and Gentiles should not exist in the church. As a consequence of his separation, Gentiles were not admitted to table fellowship with Jews in the church; thus implying that the only way for them to gain admission was to become Jews. Divisions in the church negate the truth of the gospel. Healing divisions often requires bold action.

2:15-21 – Paul's Personal Affirmations. This social crisis in the church of Antioch was exactly the same as the crisis faced by the churches in Galatia – Gentiles were being forced to live like Jews in order to be acceptable to Jews. Behind this social crisis, however, was a more fundamental theological issue: Is the gospel or is the law the basis for determining fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians? In this next section of his autobiography, Paul first presents a point of agreement (vv. 15-16), then a point of disagreement (vv. 17-18), and then his own confession of faith (vv. 19-21).

A Point of Agreement (vv. 15-16) – Paul begins with a point that all Jewish Christians acknowledged and affirmed. He continues the line of reasoning he used with Peter – since Jews must believe in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith, and not by observing the law (v. 16), then Gentiles can also be justified by faith in Christ Jesus, and not by observing the law. Therefore identification with the Jewish people through observance of distinctively Jewish practices is not the basis of membership in the covenant people of God. This point of agreement was confirmed by the experience of the Gentile believers at Galatia (3:1-5).

A Point of Disagreement (vv.17-18) – Paul summarizes the central point of disagreement in the dispute between himself and those who forced the Jewish Christians to separate from Gentile Christians. The Jewish Christians in Antioch were accused of sinning after making a commitment to Christ. From the perspective of his accusers, eating with Gentiles is sinful, because the law forbids it. But from Paul's perspective, eating with Gentile Christians is not sinful, because the gospel demands it. Therefore, withdrawal from table fellowship with Gentile Christians was hypocrisy; a violation of
the truth of the gospel. The conclusion that Christ promotes sin is wrong, because what was judged to be sinful (eating with Gentiles) according to the law is not really sinful according to the gospel. According to verse 14, Peter's real transgression was that he did not live consistently according to the truth of the gospel. The gospel had destroyed all essential distinctions between Jews and Gentiles and rendered inoperative all laws that upheld those distinctions. Whoever observed all the Jewish law – and so maintained such Jew-Gentile distinctions – violated the truth of the gospel.

**Paul's own Confession of Faith** (vv. 19-21) — Paul’s faith in Christ involved both a death and a new life. When Paul says through the law I died to the law, he is speaking of no longer being under the supervision of the law. Paul's death to the law was accomplished through the law (v. 19) — death to the law through the law is accomplished by identification with the death of Christ. By crucifixion with Christ, believers also die because of the curse of the law on the one who hangs on the cross – and so, in this sense, they also die through the law. The perfect tense of the verb have been crucified points to the permanent condition of Christians in relation to the law – we remain dead and fully punished. Therefore the law can no longer condemn us. The result of dying to the law is a new kind of life – a life being lived for God. This new kind of life is not self-centered but Christ-centered; therefore Paul says I no longer live, but Christ lives in me (v. 20). This new life of faith is motivated and guided by the sacrificial love of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (v. 20).

**Participating “by faith” in the death of Christ** (I have been crucified with Christ) and the resurrection life of Christ (Christ lives in me) is the only way to live for God. But attempting to attain righteousness through the law sets aside the grace of God and negates the value of Christ's death (v. 21). Paul's confession of faith reminds us that Christ, not the law, is the source of life and righteousness. The reason for his personal confession was his insistence that Jewish and Gentile believers should not be separated as Jewish law demands, but united as the truth of the gospel demands. His new spiritual identity – I no longer live, but Christ lives in me – is the basis of his new social identity: "There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for you are all one in Christ" (3:28).

**The experience of union with Christ as expressed here by Paul is a “mystical experience” in the sense that it transcends rational explanation – direct, intimate communion with God in Christ cannot be fully described.** The mystical experience of union with Christ is not accomplished by human effort but granted by God's grace (I do not set aside the grace of God); it is not a loss of individual personality but a renewal of true personality (the life I live in the body, I live by faith); it is not a withdrawal into isolation but an involvement in service (serve one another in love – 5:13). The experience of union with Christ includes both passive (being led by the Spirit) and active (walking in the Spirit) dimensions. The very next phrase underscores the necessity of active faith – The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God (v. 20). We do not become just empty pipes that God's power flows through, as some preachers say. I no longer live as an egocentric person in obedience to all my selfish passions and desires, for Christ is now at the center of my life. Now I live in obedience to him, for He loved me and gave Himself for me.

3:1-4:11 — **Paul's Exposition of Promise and Law**. Having concluded his autobiography, Paul addresses his readers directly with a series of piercing questions – all in the form of a rebuke. He rebukes them for their foolishness of exchanging the truth of the gospel for works of the law. Paul then clarifies the relationship of the gospel and the law (3:6-4:7). Last, he rebukes them again for wanting to return to a life of slavery again (4:8-11). Note the flow of Paul’s thought throughout this entire section —

1. Understanding the presence of the Spirit (3:1-5)
2. Identifying the children of Abraham (3:6-9)
3. Facing the alternatives of curse and blessing (3:10-14)
4. Understanding the promise (3:15-18)
5. Understanding the law (3:19-25)
6. Identifying the recipients of the promise (3:26-29)
7. Moving from slavery to freedom (4:1-7)
8. Returning to slavery again? (4:8-11)

1. Understanding the presence of the Spirit (3:1-5) – Paul expresses deep concern for the Galatian believers, because of their perversion of the gospel. They appear to Paul like people who have come under the control of an evil magician with demonic spells – You foolish Galatians, who bewitched you? (3:1). The Galatians are acquiescing to the demands of persuasive teachers of the law in order to attain spiritual perfection without realizing that they are being enslaved by demonic powers (see 4:8-9). Their quest for perfection through the law is a drugged illusion from which they must be awakened. But how can the spell be broken? Paul's questions in these five verses focus on three aspects of the Galatians' experience of the Spirit – their initial reception of the Spirit (vv. 1-2), their progress toward maturity by the Spirit (v. 3), and their experience of miracles by the Spirit (vv. 4-5).

   a. Their initial reception of the Spirit (vv. 1-2) – Paul's first question drives us back to the foot of the cross. This is where we must return when we are drawn away from Christ. We need a renewed vision of Christ crucified if we are to gain freedom from illusions of perfection through law observance – we need to be reminded that the cross, not human achievement, is the basis of God's blessing. Paul's questions move from the experience of the preaching of the cross (v. 1) to the experience of the Spirit (vv. 2-5). The two are linked – the cross opens the door for the Spirit, and the experience of the Spirit is the result of faith in the message of the cross of Christ. Paul questions, Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? (v. 2). The readers are taken back to the roots of their spiritual experience: it was a gift of God's Spirit. The Galatian converts were never a part of the Jewish nation, and they had never observed the law; yet there was no denying that they had experienced God's blessing – the gift of His Spirit. Thus Paul’s readers are confronted with a clear choice between mutually exclusive alternatives, and they cannot accept the both – it is an “either/or” choice.

   b. Their progress toward maturity by the Spirit (v. 3) – The contrast between beginning with the Spirit and trying to attain spirituality by the flesh (human effort) sets up the antithesis between spirit and flesh (which recurs in 4:29, 5:16-23 and 6:8). The alternative is between living by the Spirit, whom they received when they believed the message of Christ crucified, or seeking perfection by circumcision (through various laws and Sabbath observance), which would identify them as proselyte Jews. Paul reminds us here that our beginning in the Christian life was based on our response of faith to the message of Christ crucified, and the subsequent experience of the Spirit; as such, our progress in the Christian life must be on the same basis.

   c. Their experience of miracles by the Spirit (vv. 4-5) – Paul now emphasizes God's gracious work by his Spirit in their lives. The word translated suffer here has a positive meaning. The NEB translates it in this way: "Have all your great experiences been in vain?" Paul questions whether or not all of their marvelous spiritual experiences had a positive effect in their lives; surely God's gracious provision of the Spirit and his miraculous work was not in vain, was it? Such a great experience of God's work cannot be for nothing. The Galatians must be shaken out of their stupor. They must think deeply again about the implications of their own wonderful experience of God's activity in their lives. Paul reminds his readers of God's miraculous work
in their lives so that their faith will be renewed. His questions call for a reaffirmation of faith. A review of God's gracious work in our lives by His Spirit releases us from the demands of religious performance. God's performance, not ours, must be the object of our faith and hope. The alternatives are posed so that Christians will be compelled by their own experience of the Spirit to choose the right answers – "Not by flesh, but by the Spirit!" This clear choice will break the spell of any bewitching influence, and it's a choice that needs to be reconfirmed every day.

2. Identifying the Children of Abraham (3:6-9) – Just as the converts in Galatia were struggling to understand how their new faith in Christ affected their identity, so many Christians struggle with their identity in other countries when they are constantly confronted with the negative references in the media to "Christian/western values." Every Christian struggles to understand his/her identity as a believer. The Galatian believers were adrift in a no man's land between the pagan temples and the Jewish synagogues – they belonged to neither. They had abandoned the gods and religious practices of the temples. . . and they never attended the Jewish synagogues, even though they read the Jewish Scriptures and believed in a Jewish Messiah. As new Christians without a clear sense of identity, they were easily persuaded that if they acquired a Jewish identity they would belong to the people of God. They were probably reminded that the mother church in Jerusalem was a law-observant Jewish church. So if they really wanted to belong to the true church, they would have to be Jewish. They were in the process of receiving circumcision and the law so that they could belong to the people who claimed to be the true recipients of God's blessing. In this section Paul defines the identity of the Galatian believers – first he compares them to Abraham (v. 6); then he identifies them as children of Abraham on the basis of a common family characteristic (v. 7); next he confirms that identification by quoting Scripture (v. 8), and on that basis he includes them in the family blessing (v. 9). Our own sense of identity can be clarified and strengthened as we trace the steps in this identification process.

Consider Abraham. Since Abraham is the father of God's people, his experience with God establishes the norm for God’s people. Paul begins his argument with a comparative conjunction: Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness – and so it was with you. Paul shows the similarity between the experience of the Galatians, who believed the preaching of the cross and received the blessing of the Spirit, and the experience of the great patriarch of God's people, who believed God's promise and received the crediting of righteousness. Paul draws two significant parallels between the Galatians' experience and Abraham's experience – the human response of faith and the divine blessing enjoyed by those who believe.

The Human response of faith. The Galatian believers were being excluded from the family of Abraham because they did not have the required membership badge – circumcision and works of the law. They were probably told something like this – "Circumcision is the sign of the Abrahamic covenant – Genesis 17 declares that anyone without this sign is to be cut off from the covenant family; so you uncircumcised Gentiles cannot possibly be included in the Abrahamic family and blessing. You don't belong!" But Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 to prove that faith is the only entrance requirement for full membership in the family of God. Paul sets Abraham's faith in contrast to the works of the law. Keeping all the requirements of the law is not the way to belong to the covenant family of God. Faith is the way to enter into a relationship with God. So Paul commands the Galatians to draw the appropriate conclusion from this comparison with Abraham – they belong to the Abrahamic family. Miracles (3:5), the heart-cry of "Abba" (4:6) and the fruit of the Spirit (5:22-26) provide solid evidence of the bestowal of the Holy Spirit; and the bestowal of the Spirit indicates that the crediting of righteousness has taken place.
Paul takes his readers back to the beginning of the story of God's family. Receiving the blessing of God by faith is the central theme of the entire story of God's people, from the first page to the last. Hence Paul writes – *Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.* The common family trait – *faith* – is the decisive factor. Anyone characterized by that trait is definitely identified as a family member. The troublemakers insisted that *circumcision* was the indispensable sign of the covenant family. Paul uses Genesis 15:6 to prove that only those who believe can legitimately make the claim that they belong to the people of God as children of Abraham. *Faith* is the true sign of covenant. In the context Paul clearly defines faith as *faith in Jesus Christ* (v. 16). Thus *identification with Christ by faith,* rather than *identification with the Jewish nation by circumcision and works of the law,* provides the basis of belonging to God's covenant family. The continuity between Israel, the children of Abraham, and the church is clearly stated here – Christians have roots; their identity is clear; they belong to the ancient “people of God” that began with Abraham.

**Confirmed by Scripture.** The radical conclusion drawn from Genesis 15:6 is confirmed by a second quotation – *The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham saying – "All nations will be blessed through you"* (v. 8). It was not enough to simply show that those who believe are the children of Abraham. Paul proves that the principle of righteousness by faith attested for Abraham in Genesis 15:6 is explicitly extended by Scripture itself to the Gentiles. Thus Scripture witnesses to the inclusion of the Gentiles in the blessing promised to Abraham. Paul was called to take the good news about Jesus to the Gentiles. When he did so, he saw the incontestable evidence that God accepted the Gentiles who believed the gospel. It was clear that God justified them by faith. The evidence that this had happened was the bestowal of the Spirit on these Gentile converts (cf. Acts 10:44-48).

Paul had learned from his missionary experience that *God would justify the Gentiles by faith* (v. 8). In the light of that missionary experience, Paul understood the Old Testament promise of blessing for the Gentiles as a description and validation of his ministry. Scripture foresaw what happened to the Gentile believers in Galatia. And because Scripture foresaw that God would justify Gentiles when they believed the gospel, Scripture announced the gospel in advance to Abraham. That was the gospel Paul preached to the Gentiles. Justification and the gift of the Spirit are two dimensions of the blessing presented by Paul. God's declaration that Gentile believers are accepted as righteous and God's demonstration of His presence by His Spirit in the midst of the Galatian churches constitute the blessing enjoyed by faith.

Abraham is now the prototype of the universal people of faith, not simply the progenitor of the Jewish race. So it is not necessary to belong to the Jewish race to participate in the blessing of Abraham. All that is necessary is faith like Abraham's. Just as the Galatian believers did not need to take on a Jewish identity in order to be Christians – their true identity as full members of the family of faith was based on their faith in Christ, not on their racial or social status – so today believers in every nation need to be encouraged to find their true identity in Christ, not in the attainment of a new ethnic identity.

3. **Facing the Alternatives of Curse and Blessing (3:10-14)** – Robert Frost tells us in his poem *The Road Not Taken* – "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood – he took the one less traveled, and that made all the difference." Choosing a road only because it is less traveled seems to be a risky basis for navigation through life. How can we be sure that we are on the road to blessing? When we read Galatians 3:10-14 we are struck by the antithesis of two words: *curse* and *blessing.* Paul here
describes two alternative roads – the first leads to a curse (10), the second to blessing (14). Faced by this fork in the road on their journey, the Galatian Christians had difficulty knowing which path to take. Some Jewish Christians were pointing to the well-traveled one that Jewish people had taken for centuries. "Join us in the Jewish way of life – only if you identify yourselves with us and come with us will you find blessing," they said. They emphasized the noble, distinctive traditions of the Jewish nation. But Paul argues that identification with the Jewish nation by observing the Mosaic law is not the way that leads to blessing. In fact, the claim that blessing depends exclusively on national identity leads to a terrible curse. Identification with Christ is the only way that leads to true blessing. Four quotations from Scripture are used as signposts at this fork in the road to indicate which way leads to a curse and which way leads to blessing. We may label these four signposts with words – curse (v. 10), faith (v. 11), law (v. 12) and cross (vv. 13-14). The signposts that Paul placed in the fork of the road for the Galatian believers can direct us today.

**Signpost #1: “Curse” (3:10)** – The first signpost issues a harsh warning to those who rely upon observing the law – they are under a curse. The warning is based upon the law itself – Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law (Deut 27:26). In Deuteronomy a long list of terrible curses concludes with severe warnings of complete destruction (Deut 30:11-20). Since the curse is the result of failure to do the law, it is clearly assumed by Paul that all who rely on observing the law will fail to do the law. Paul explicitly asserts at the end of his letter that "not even those who are circumcised obey the law" (6:13). Now if all who rely on observing the law cannot keep the whole law (see 2:14, 6:13), then surely the Galatian believers will not be able to keep it either. Hence they will surely come under a terrible curse for failure to do so. Paul points to this curse to dissuade believers from seeking membership among those who rely on observing the law. If you join a group known for untainted fundamentalism and uncompromising separatism in order to be sure of God's blessing, beware! Since no one, not even the most saintly of all humans, has ever kept the whole law – as such, all members of such groups are under a curse for failure to keep the whole law. Though people may keep much of the law in an “outward sense,” they repeatedly transgress the law “inwardly” (in their hearts).

**Signpost #2: “Faith” (3:11)** – On the second signpost at the fork in the road we find an inscription from the prophet Habakkuk – the righteous shall live by faith (v. 11; Hab 2:4). Since faith is the way to righteousness, the law is not. So Paul says clearly that “no one is justified before God by the law.” This signpost tells us that faith and law are not equals – they are two entirely different ways. The Galatian believers were turning to the way of law because they thought by keeping its requirements they could gain entrance into the Jewish nation and thus be assured of acceptance as God's people. But acceptance by God – justification before God – cannot possibly be found through the law; according to Scripture, righteousness comes by faith in Jesus Christ.

**Signpost #3: “Law” (3:12)** – Paul must have realized that his readers would find it difficult to understand why faith and law are two different ways and why only faith, not law, leads to righteousness (acceptance by God). So he sets up a third signpost that repeats the antithesis between faith and law quoting Leviticus 18:5 which describes the nature of the law – the law is not based on faith. On the contrary, the man who does these things will live by them. The fundamental nature of law is that it requires “doing.” In Galatians 3:12 law must be understood as referring to the specific divine requirements given to the Jewish people through Moses. In the context of Leviticus 18 the things to be done are the "decrees and laws" God gave Israel at Mt Sinai so that the Israelites would be distinguished from the Egyptians & Canaanites (Lev 18:1-4). In the Galatian
dispute, the law refers to a set of requirements (specifically circumcision, food laws and sabbath laws) imposed on Gentile believers which would identify them with the Jewish nation and set them apart from Greeks and Romans. Paul’s rebuke is aimed at the folly of doing the works of the law as a means of participating in the life and blessing of the covenant people of God. The law is not of faith, because it demands doing the works of the law as the way to life; furthermore, Paul has just been demonstrated that righteousness by faith is the way to life (v. 11). The law demands perfect obedience (10) and offers life on the basis of this perfect obedience (12), but in itself the law is not capable of imparting life or righteousness before God (21). So Paul puts up a "stop sign" in front of those who want to follow the law as the way to life. You can't get to life that way – life is found only through faith in Christ.

Signpost #4: “Cross” (3:13-14) – On the fourth signpost we see the cross of Christ. The only way to be delivered from the curse of the law is to turn in faith to the cross of Christ. In large letters this signpost announces the fact that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. How Christ became a curse for us is explained in the citation from Deut 21:23 – cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree. By hanging on a cross, Jesus came under the burden of the curse that all deserve for failure to keep all the law. By bearing the total burden of the curse himself, Jesus set us free from the terrible weight of the curse. Verse 14 tells us that the reason Christ set us free from the curse of the law was to open the way for us to participate in the promised blessings to Abraham. When the Galatian believers received the Spirit by faith in Christ crucified (vv. 1-2), they became recipients of the blessing promised to Abraham. Since the Galatians were already recipients of the promised blessings to Abraham, they were acting foolish (v. 1) by trying to keep the law in order to obtain the blessings they already had. Here they were foolishly trying to earn something they already had! Many Christians today do the same thing.

4. Understanding the Promise (3:15-18) -- Some parents set up “irrevocable trust agreements” for their children; once the trust papers are signed, they cannot be annulled or changed. These irrevocable trusts demonstrate our parents’ generous, unconditional love for us. In this section Paul uses a similar legal document to illustrate the nature of the Abrahamic covenant – Brethren, as is the case with a human covenant, once it has been ratified, no one can set it aside or add conditions to it (v. 15). This "irrevocable trust agreement" that God made with Abraham is described in terms of the beneficiary of the trust (v. 16)... the date of the trust (v. 17)... and the condition for inheritance (v. 18). Our study of these terms of the Abrahamic covenant will enable us to appreciate the gracious, unconditional nature of God's love for us.

The Beneficiary of the Trust (3:16) – Paul carefully examines the terms of the Abrahamic covenant and notes that the promises of this covenant were made to Abraham and to his seed. The term seed, Paul explains, is singular (not plural). Therefore the covenant designated just one person (not many) to be the recipient of the promises, and that one person, says Paul, is Christ. Paul's definition of seed contradicts the Jewish understanding of this term – they were convinced the term seed referred to the physical descendants of Abraham, the Jewish people. Therefore they believed it was absolutely necessary to belong to the Jewish nation in order to receive the blessings promised to Abraham. But Paul's interpretation is based on his conviction that Christ is the sole heir and channel of God's promised blessing – therefore it is not necessary to belong to the Jewish nation to receive the promises – what is necessary is belonging to Christ. Since Christ is the heir of the promises, all those and only those who are in Christ by faith are
beneficiaries of the irrevocable trust agreement God made with Abraham (v. 29). The people of God are no longer identified by ethnic origins, but by union with Christ.

The Date of the Trust (3:17) – Legal documents are signed and dated. Dates establish the precedence of one document over another. In the case of a will, a “new will” can annul or change the terms of a previous document. So lawyers search to make sure they have the document with the latest date which overrides all previous documents. In the case of an “irrevocable trust” agreement, however, subsequent documents cannot overturn the terms of the original document. Paul has this type of document in mind. He carefully notes that the date on the irrevocable trust agreement made with Abraham places that covenant 430 years before the Mosaic law. The fact that the Mosaic law came 430 years after the Abrahamic covenant indicates that the two should be clearly distinguished from each other and that the terms of the Abrahamic covenant should not be confused with or changed by the terms of the Mosaic covenant. In Jewish tradition the Mosaic law had been inseparably linked with the Abrahamic covenant. Influenced by this line of thinking, the Galatian believers had come to think that it was necessary to keep the Mosaic law to inherit the blessings promised to Abraham. In Paul's view, those who seek the inheritance through the law have failed to recognize the precedence of the promise in salvation history. They have failed to realize that because the law came 430 years after the “unconditional promise” it could not annul or be attached to the promise as a condition of inheriting the promised blessings.

The Condition for Inheritance (3:18) – When parents set up the trust agreements for their children, they are very young and cannot possibly have fulfilled any conditions to merit the gift of inheritance that they provided for them. If someone pre-supposed that their inheritance depended on living up to the high standards set in the home, they could easily demonstrate that such a pre-supposition was ridiculous. Besides, no one would be able to keep all the lofty standards set for them, and the irrevocable trust agreements would have been established for them before the standards were communicated to them. So they are beneficiaries by sheer grace. Paul is also concerned with showing the unconditional nature of the promises made to Abraham. He points out the incompatibility between receiving the inheritance as a gift on the basis of a promise, and receiving it as a reward for keeping the law – if the inheritance is based on law; it is no longer depends on a promise; but God by grace gave it to Abraham by means of a promise. Since the “gift nature” of the promised inheritance is clearly established up front, it cannot be received as a reward or payment for keeping the law. This logical argument is developed by Paul to drive home his rebuke for the foolish error of viewing something as a payment which had already been received as a gift. So it is with salvation – it is offered as an unconditional gift. Any thought of working for it is excluded.

5. Understanding the Law (3:19-25) – Paul stops the flow of his argument and asks the question – What, then, was the purpose of the law? (v. 19). If, as Paul contended, the law did not annul or add conditions to the promise God made to Abraham, what was the purpose of the law? How should we as Christians relate to the Mosaic law today? In this section Paul first asks his major, initial question regarding the purpose of the law and replies briefly (19-20); then asks a supplementary question regarding the relation of the law to the promise of God and gives an explanation (21-22); and finally presents two images (Jailer and Disciplinarian) to illustrate more fully God's purpose for the law (23-25).

What Was the Purpose of the Law? (3:19-20) – Paul's brief reply to this question outlines the negative purpose of the Law, the temporal framework of the law, and the origin of the law.
a. **The negative purpose of the Law is that it was added because of “transgressions”** (v. 19).

Paul has already demonstrated what the law does not do – it does not make anyone righteous before God (v. 11); it is not based on faith (v. 12); and it is not the basis of inheritance (v. 18). So if the law is divorced from righteousness, faith and inheritance of the blessing, to what is law related? Paul says that the law is related to **transgressions**. A transgression is the violation of a standard. The law provides the objective standard by which the violations are measured. In order for sinners to know how sinful they really are, how far they deviate from God's standards, God gave them the law. Before the law was given, there was sin (see Rom 5:13); after the law was given, sin could then be clearly specified and measured (Rom 3:20; 4:15; 7:7). Each act or attitude could then be labeled as a transgression of a particular commandment of the law. Laws are passed by legislatures in order to delineate acceptable levels of behavior. For example: the function of traffic laws is to identify bad drivers and prosecute them.

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b. **The temporal framework for the law is that it was added until the “Seed” comes** (v. 19); to whom the promise had been made. Paul has already emphasized that the Mosaic law was given 430 years after the Abrahamic promise (v. 17). The word *added* implies that the law was not a central theme in God's redemptive plan; it was supplementary and secondary to the enduring covenant made with Abraham. As the word *added* marks the beginning point for the Mosaic law, the word *until* marks its end point. The Mosaic law came into effect at a certain point in history and was in effect only until the promised Seed – Christ – appeared. There is clearly a contrast between the permanent nature of the promise and the temporary nature of the law. The law was only in effect for a relatively short period of time as the words *added* and *until* indicate. As we shall see in our study of the next few sections of the letter (cf. 3:23-25; 4:1-4), Paul's presentation of the temporal framework for the law is a major theme of his argument for the superiority of the promise fulfilled in Christ over the law. This theme differs radically from the common Jewish perspective of his day, which emphasized the eternal, immutable nature of the law – Paul's Christocentric perspective led him to see that Christ – the promised Seed – not the law, was the eternal one.

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c. **The origin of the law.** Paul says, "the law was put into effect through angels by a mediator" (v. 19), this does not mean that the law was given by angels rather than by God. He is simply pointing to the well-known Jewish tradition that God gave the law through the agency of **angels** as well as by a **mediator** – Moses. References to the agency of angels in the giving of the law can be found in the Septuagint (cf. Deut 33:2 and Ps 68:17); as well as the New Testament (cf. Acts 7:53 and Heb 2:2). The presence of angels and the mediation of Moses in the giving of the law were understood by the Jewish people to signify the great **glory of the law**. But Paul argues that the giving of the law through a series of intermediaries, angels and Moses, actually demonstrates the **inferiority of the law**. Paul contrasts the plurality of participants in a process of mediation and the oneness of God. In the larger context of Paul's argument here, there is also the implied contrast between the promise given directly by God to Abraham and fulfilled in Christ, the seed of Abraham, and the law given through numerous intermediaries.

In the churches of Galatia the “law” was supplanting the central place of Christ. The churches were becoming law-centered – it was necessary, therefore, to put the law back into its rightful place. Its **purpose** is negative – to point out transgressions. Its **time** is limited – 430 years after the promise, until Christ. Its **origin** is mediated through angels and Moses – it does not provide direct access to God, and it divides Jews from Gentiles.
Is the Law Opposed to the Promises of God? (3:21-22) – This is an understandable response to Paul's stark contrast between the law and the promise (vv.15-18), and his confinement of the law to a limited role in God's historical plan (vv.19-20). People who were preoccupied with the supreme value of the law must have been stunned by such a devaluation of it. How could Paul speak against the law? Was the logical conclusion of his line of reasoning the position that the law stood in opposition to the promise? Absolutely not! says Paul. Since both the law and the promise were given by God, they must be complementary rather than contradictory in the overall plan of God. Paul then goes on to explain the relation of the law to the promise. He begins with a contrary-to-fact hypothesis — *if a law could impart life, then righteousness would have been based upon the law* (v. 21). By “life” Paul means living in right relationship with God (see 2:19). Therefore, if the law could empower one to live in a right relationship with God, *then righteousness would come to us by the law* — which was the position of the rival teachers.

The rival teachers of Galatia were promoting the law as the way to live for God — this position actually set the law in direct opposition to the promise, because it contradicted the gospel. As Paul already said, "if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" (2:21). You are faced with an absolute contradiction if you are told that only by believing in the cross of Christ will you be able to live in a right relationship with God, and that only by keeping the law will you be able to live in a right relationship with God. These two positions are antithetical opposites; yet that is precisely what the Galatian believers were being told by their rival teachers. In reality, the law has the negative function of condemning everyone — “the Scripture imprisoned all under sin” (v. 22).

The law was given to show that all humanity is held under the bondage of sin, so that what the promised by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe (v. 22). Now we can see how the law and the promise work in harmony to fulfill the purpose of God — the law puts us down under the curse; the promise lifts us up in Christ. We are left with no way out when the law condemns us — except through faith in Christ. The law imprisons all under sin — Jews & Gentiles — to prepare the way for including all believers in Christ in the blessing promised to Abraham. So the law should not be viewed as contradictory to the gospel. By reducing all to the level of sinners, the law actually prepares the way for the gospel — but that does not mean that we should view the law as if it were the same as the gospel. The law has a negative purpose — it makes us aware of our sin — but it does not (cannot) set us free from bondage to sin. That blessing (promise) comes only through faith in Christ.

The Law Is a Jailer and a Disciplinarian (3:23-25) — Paul expands and dramatizes his explanation of the negative function of the law by personifying the law as a jailer and a disciplinarian; he shows that these negative roles are a necessary part, but only a temporary part, of the entire drama of God's plan of salvation. The law took the part of God's jailer on the stage of history — before faith came, we were captive under the law, locked up until faith was later revealed (v. 23). Notice in verse 22 the whole world is declared by Scripture to be a prisoner of sin; in verse 23 Paul says we were held captive by the law. In the first case the law is related to all people; all are condemned as sinners by the law — both Jews and Gentiles. In the second case the law is related to the Jews — for a certain period of time, they were held in custody under law. When we read the Mosaic law we can see how every aspect of Jewish life was restricted, restrained and confined by the law. In this sense the law was a jailer over the Jews.
The law makes it clear that everyone is a prisoner of sin in order that it may be absolutely clear that the salvation promised by God can be received only by faith in Jesus Christ (v. 22). That is the universal condemnatory function of the law. The condemning sentence of the law against all humanity can never be overturned – it stands as a permanent indictment of the sinful rebellion of the whole world against God. According to Paul's imagery in verse 23, the law functioned as a Jailer to lock up the Jewish people in a vast system of legal codes and regulations. But that lockup was meant to only be temporary. Verse 23 begins and ends with clear references to the time when the imprisonment within the system of the Mosaic law would end – before faith came . . . until faith was later revealed. Of course Abraham had faith in God long before the Mosaic law, as Paul emphasized earlier (Gal 3:6); but the specific nature of this faith that Paul has in mind has just been stated in verse 22 – we [the Jewish people] were held captive under the law, locked up until faith [in Jesus Christ] was revealed. So the function of the law as a jailer was not permanent; it was limited to a certain period in history.

The temporary function of the law is also described as a “Disciplinarian” – the law was put in charge as our tutor to lead us to Christ (v. 24). The NRSV translates this verse well – "The law was our disciplinarian until Christ came." Behind the English word disciplinarian is the Greek word paidagogos, from which we derive pedagogue. Webster’s Dictionary defines pedagogue as "a teacher of children or youth," or as "one having charge over a boy chiefly on the way to and from school in classical antiquity" (this was the function of a slave in the Roman world of Paul’s day). Incidentally, the pedagogue was distinguished from the teacher (didaskalos) – the pedagogue supervised, controlled and disciplined the child; and the didaskalos instructed and educated him. A fascinating dialogue between Socrates and a boy highlights this distinction. Socrates begins the conversation by asking the young boy, "Do your parents let you control your own self, or do they not trust you in that either?"

"Of course they do not," he replied.
"But someone controls you?"
"Yes," he said, "my pedagogue does."
"Is he a slave?"
“Certainly; he belongs to us," he said.
"What a strange thing – a free man controlled by a slave!"
"But how does this pedagogue exert control over you?"
"By taking me to the teacher," he replied.

Josephus tells us of a pedagogue who was found beating the “family cook,” when the child under his supervision over ate. The pedagogue himself was corrected with the words: "We did not make you the cook's pedagogue, did we? but the child's. Correct the child! Help him!" The pedagogue in the Hellenistic world was given the responsibility to supervise and discipline the conduct of children. He did not have the positive task of educating the child – he was only supposed to control the behavior of the child through consistent discipline. The point of Paul's use of this image is that the law was given this supervisory, disciplinary role over the Jewish people. But the supervisory control of the law was only until Christ — until faith should be revealed. In the outworking of God's plan of salvation in the history of the Jewish people, they were under the supervisory control of the law until the coming of Messiah. That supervisory discipline of the law over the people of God came to an end when Christ came.
The purpose of the “disciplinary function of the law” was to demonstrate that God's people could only be justified by faith – that we [the Jewish people] might be justified by faith (v. 24). Under the constant discipline of the law, the Jewish people should have learned how utterly impossible it was to keep the law; the law constantly beat them down like a stern disciplinarian, pointing out all their shortcomings and failures. The pain of this discipline was designed to teach them that they could only be declared righteous by God thru faith.

In verse 25 Paul draws a conclusion that demolishes any argument that Christians ought to live under the supervisory control of the law – now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. The Galatian believers were evidently succumbing to arguments that their life in Christ should be lived under the supervisory discipline of the Mosaic law; but to live under the supervision of the Mosaic law is to live as if Christ had not come. Now that Christ has come, we live, as Paul has already affirmed "by faith in the Son of God" (2:20). To live by faith in Christ sets us free from the disciplinary function of the law.

Since Paul is still speaking here in first-person plural (we), his primary reference is to the freedom that Jewish believers now experience from the supervision of the law because they have put their faith in Christ. If Jewish believers are no longer under the supervision of the law, then it is surely foolish for Gentile believers in Christ to put themselves under the law's supervision. No wonder Paul began this chapter with the rebuke, "You foolish Galatians!" They had received the Spirit by believing the gospel, but now they were trying to make progress in their spiritual life by observing the law.

Paul sees the turning point in his own life as the time he put his faith in Christ. Before that time he lived under the supervision of the law. But after he put his faith in Christ, his life was lived by faith in Christ, under the supervision of Christ. He had immigrated, as it were (see Col 1:13), to the kingdom of Christ. Our new life as believers is now under the rule of Christ by His Spirit, and the freedom we have in Christ from the supervisory rule of the Mosaic law empowers us to "live for God" (2:19).

6. Identifying the Recipients of the Promise (3:26-29) – Paul has been talking in the first-person plural (we) of the past experience of the Jewish people, who were "in custody" under the Mosaic law (23-25). Now he turns to the privileged position of the Galatian Christians who are all united in Christ (26-29). Union with Christ is the main emphasis of these four verses – faith in Christ Jesus (v. 26)… baptized into Christ (26)… clothed with Christ (27)… one in Christ Jesus (28)… belong to Christ (29).

This sharp contrast between the negative consequences of imprisonment within the system of the Mosaic law, and the positive privileges of union with Christ reinforces Paul's rebuke for foolishness at the beginning of the chapter. In the light of this contrast, how foolish it is to think that observing the law could possibly enhance the privileged relationships Christians already enjoy because of their union with Christ Jesus. Imprisonment under the law (vv. 19-25) has been replaced by new relationships in Christ, and these new relationships in Christ are both spiritual (vv. 26-27) and social (vv. 28-29).

New Spiritual Relationships in Christ (3:26-27) – In the old set of relationships under the law, Jews were the children of God and Gentiles were sinners (cf. 2:15). But now Gentile Christians are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. This must have been a shocking declaration for a Jew to hear – in Jewish literature sons of God was a title of highest honor, used only for the members of righteous Israel. But now Gentiles – the rejected, the outsiders, the sinners, those who do not observe the law – are called sons of God. Indeed this is a "new creation" (6:15). How
could a Gentile ever be called a child of God? Paul's answer – through faith in Christ Jesus! (26).
Since Christ Jesus is the "Son of God" (2:20), all who by faith are in Christ are sons of God. The
next verse points to the basis for the new spiritual relationship depicted by this new title – they
are children of God because they have been united with Christ in baptism and, as a result,
clothed with Christ – that's the reality of the believer's new relationship with God in Christ.

in a new horizontal relationship with one another. All racial, economic and gender barriers and
all other inequalities are removed in Christ. The equality and unity of all in Christ are part of the
essence of the gospel. Equality in Christ is the starting point for all truly biblical social ethics.
Paul's own immediate concern is to make sure that the racial equality of Jews and Gentiles is
implemented in the church. Gentiles were being demoted to a second-class status because they
were not Jews. This expression of racial superiority was a violation of the essence of the gospel.
Similarly, any expression of social class superiority (freemen over the slaves) or gender super-
iority (men over women) violates the truth of the gospel – there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave
nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (v. 28). All the divisions and
prejudices that matter so much in the world are abolished in Christ. Paul draws this conclusion
to his argument – if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to
the promise (v. 29). Since the Galatian Christians belong to Christ, they are directly related to
Abraham and recipients of the blessing promised to Abraham – "the seed of Abraham" – it is
granted and maintained simply by union with Christ by faith. Any attempt by the Galatian
Christians to gain status or receive blessing by observing the Mosaic law is foolish, since they
have already been included within the realm of full inheritance in which there is no hierarchy.

7. Moving from Slavery to Freedom (4:1-7) – The contrast presented in the previous chapter between
imprisonment under the law (3:23-25) and new relationships in Christ (3:26-29) is now clarified by an
illustration drawn from a household where sons were treated as slaves until they received the full
rights of sons at the age of maturity. First, the slave-like condition of the sons while they were still
minors is described and applied to the human condition (4:1-3). Second, the sending of God's Son to
liberate slaves & make them sons is announced (4-5). Third, the full rights of sons are disclosed (6-7).

When Sons were the same as Slaves (4:1-3) – Paul gives us a portrait of a young boy in a
wealthy home. This boy is the legal heir and future master of the entire estate. But as long as
he is a child, his life is just like that of a slave – he is subject to guardians and managers – they
supervise him, discipline him and control him; their orders regulate and restrain his behavior.
He is under their authority until the time set by his father; when he will be free from their control
and enjoy his full rights as heir and master of the family estate. Paul constructed this illustration
to dramatize what life was like under the supervision of the law. But since he has already used
the images of a jailer (3:23) and a disciplinarian (3:24-25) to dramatize the supervisory function of
the law, why does he add yet another illustration of life under the law? Jewish Christians must
have been astonished that their history under the Mosaic law had been compared to being
imprisoned by a jailer and controlled by a disciplinarian; after all, the Jews had been redeemed
from slavery in the exodus. In fact, when God set the Jewish people free, he had called them His
"son" (Ex 4:23).

The giving of the law began with the announcement of freedom for God's people: "I am
the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (cf. Ex 20:2). If
God had redeemed His people from slavery, how could their whole existence under the
Mosaic law until Christ be depicted in terms of slavery? In this illustration Paul clarifies the condition of the Jewish people under the law – this is a much more positive image of slavery than the images of a jailer and a disciplinarian. Even in the best of homes, sons who are loved by their fathers and destined to be heirs of his estate, go through a period of supervision. It is entirely appropriate for immature heirs to be subject to the care of guardians. Once the day comes when they are no longer under the care of a guardian, their love for their father will be a free expression of love from the heart of mature sons.

In verse 3 Paul applies his illustration to the real historical experience of God's people – when we were children, we were held in bondage under the basic principles of the world. This picture of slavery continues the series of images representing slavery under the law – "held in custody under the law" (3:23), "under the supervision of the law" (3:25), “subject to guardians and managers” (4:2). In some sense Paul understood the basic principles of the world as equivalent to the Mosaic law. Although the Mosaic law was given by God, it was not God's last and ultimate revelation; it was the necessary ABCs of God's revelation. To be subjected to the discipline of learning the ABCs is good and proper for an elementary student, but to be kept forever at that level of education would be a tragic kind of slavery. Paul establishes his thesis that all of God's people, Jews and Gentiles, came to the inheritance of salvation in Christ out of a similar situation of slavery. Paul views the Gentile Christians' attempt to observe the Mosaic law as a return to slavery under "weak & worthless principles" (4:8-10). The pagan Gentiles were not enslaved to the Mosaic law, nor were the Jews enslaved to pagan idolatry, but these two situations of slavery were the same in that both of them were enslaved to something less than the knowledge of God enjoyed by Christians (vv.6, 9). So when Paul says, “when we were children, we were held in bondage under the basic principles of the world” (4:3), he is emphasizing how even Jews were caught in the universal condition of slavery. In this common condition all of us are fully dependent on the liberating grace of God.

How Slaves Became Sons (4:4-5) – Slaves were set free to enjoy the full rights of sons only because God acted in history – when the fullness of time came, God sent His Son. This reference to the time of God's action in history is directly related to the date set by his father (v. 2) in the previous illustration. When God sent His Son, the former period of universal slavery ended, and a new era of freedom was inaugurated. God's plan of salvation must be understood in the framework of his actions in history – God gave an irrevocable promise to Abraham... 430 years later God gave the law through Moses... God sent His Son in the fullness of time. The relationship of these acts of God in history provides the framework for understanding the redemptive work of God. The Galatians were confused in that they felt they needed to keep the Mosaic Law in order to inherit the blessing promised to Abraham, and they failed to understand that the Mosaic law had been given 430 years after the Abrahamic promise and could not change the terms of the promise or be a condition for inheriting the promised blessing (3:15-18). In their attempt to make progress in their spiritual life by observing the law after believing the gospel, they failed to understand that supervision under the law ended when faith in Christ came (3:23-25).

At the center of this narrative framework is the narrative of the gospel story itself – God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law (4:4-5). Here we have a simple confessional statement of the essence of the gospel story – the incarnation and birth of Christ... his perfect life of obedience under the law... and His redemptive death on the cross. The phrase God sent His Son refers to the special redemptive mission of Jesus.
The background may be found in the parable Jesus told about the wicked tenants of the vineyard (Mk 12:1-12) – the owner of the vineyard (God) first sent messengers (prophets), who were killed by the tenants (Jewish leaders); then He sent His own Son (Jesus), who was also killed. Before the incarnation, the preexistent Son was commissioned by God to set slaves free and make them children of God. The phrase born of a woman points to the incarnation and full humanity of Jesus. He was also born under law meaning He was born a Jew under obligation to keep the requirements of the Mosaic law. From His circumcision eight days after His birth to His celebration of Passover with His disciples just before His death, every detail of Jesus' life was under the direction of the law. His perfect obedience to God the Father fulfilled all the requirements of the law. Although Jesus did fulfill all the requirements of the law, He still experienced all the conditions of sinful humanity under the curse of the law – He was subject to temptations, suffering, loneliness, and finally, on the cross – God-forsakenness and death.

The purpose of Jesus’ coming to this world was to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons (v. 5). When Paul says that Jesus was born under law, to redeem those under law, he means, as Calvin puts it, "by putting the chains on Himself, He takes them off the other." By taking the obligation and curse of the law upon himself, He set us free from both the obligation and the curse of the law. The two verbs in this verse, redeem and receive, present both sides of our relationship with God – God has already acted in history to set us free; for our lives to be changed by his action we need to respond in faith. In so doing, we receive full rights as sons. This phrase in the NIV is a good translation of a legal term that means "adoption as sons." Adoption was defined by Roman law and widely practiced in Roman life. Several Roman emperors adopted men not related to them by blood in order to give them their office and authority. When a son was adopted, he was in all legal respects equal with those born into his new family. He had the same name, same inheritance, same position, and same rights as the natural-born sons. God sent His Son in order that we, who are not His children by nature, might become His children by adoption and thus receive full rights as sons. We have the same name, the same inheritance, the same position and the same rights as the one who is Son of God by virtue of His divine nature. There is a shift in Paul's images here from the picture of a son who is treated like a slave until he reaches a certain age (vv. 1-2) to the picture of a slave who becomes a son by adoption (v. 5). The sending of the Son concluded the stage of slavery under law and inaugurated the new era when sons receive their inheritance.

Enjoying the Full Rights of Sons (4:6-7) – Paul here describes the way that children experience their full rights – because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts (v. 6). So, by faith in Christ, Gentiles have also entered into a new relationship with God which involves the enjoyment of the full rights of sons and daughters of God. . . and their life is to be lived not "under law" but "in Christ." There is only one condition for the experience of the Spirit in our hearts – because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. There is no other prerequisite for this experience of the Spirit besides receiving the gift of adoption. God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts for one reason – He adopted us into his family. The Spirit sent into our hearts calls out, "Abba, Father" – we call God Abba because the Spirit of Jesus assures us within our hearts, the control center of our emotions and thoughts, that we are children of the Father. Abba is an Aramaic word for "father" used by a young child in intimate conversation with his father. When children addressed their father as Abba, they were
expressing affection, confidence and loyalty. One of the most remarkable aspects of the life of Jesus was that He addressed God as Abba in His prayers and taught His disciples to do the same.

To know at the deepest level of our being that God is our Father and we are His sons and daughters is not the result of theological research or moral achievement, but the result of God's sending the Spirit of His Son to speak to us and to convince us that despite all our guilt, fears and doubts, the Father of Jesus is our Father too. We must remember that when Jesus addressed His Father as Abba in the garden of Gethsemane, He was expressing both confident trust and willing obedience – "Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will" (Mk 14:36). So if the Spirit of the Son is moving us to call God Abba, then we will be expressing the same confident trust and willing obedience of the Son to the Father. The witness of the Spirit within us that God is our Father and we are His children is the center & fountainhead of all our Christian life & ministry.

Paul sums up his argument – “So you are no longer a slave, but a son” (v. 7). The witness of the Spirit within convinces us that we are sons and daughters, children of God – sons and daughters no longer "held captive under the law" (3:23); no longer “under its supervision” (3:25); and no longer subject to guardians and managers (4:2). The children of God are free from the control of the law. This does not mean that we are free to do anything – we are now under the direction of the Spirit, who brings us into such close communion with God that we call Him Abba. Sons and daughters who live in communion with the Father under the direction of the Spirit do not need the law to guide and discipline them – they are directed by a far superior power, the power of the Holy Spirit. To live under the direction of the law, as the Galatian believers were attempting to do, was sheer folly – why turn to the direction of the law when you have the direction of the Spirit? The tragedy of the Galatians was that they had entered into a love relationship with the Father by the activity of the Spirit, and were now acting like slaves, rather than like sons and daughters. They were relating to God on the basis of keeping His law rather than loving, worshiping and serving Him as His children. It’s the same tragedy of the elder brother in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son – although he served his father dutifully, he never called him "Father" or related to him as a son. He thought and acted like a slave – "All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders" (Lk 15:29).

The result of being sons is inheritance – “Since you are sons, God has made you an heir” (v. 7). The Galatian believers had been told that they must be related to the descendants of Abraham through observance of the law in order to inherit the promises God made to him. But Paul has now demonstrated how faith in Christ makes one a child of God and an heir. The promise of inheritance is the promise of the Spirit. Paul said the blessing of Abraham came upon the Gentiles – they received the promised Spirit (3:14). What greater inheritance could there be than the presence of the Spirit of God within our hearts? He not only assures us that we are beloved children of the Father; He also makes us like His Son. When we are sure of our adoption by the witness of the Spirit within, we will also be living in the power of the Spirit, who is in the process of making us like Christ in His death and resurrection. Every day something of His cross will be seen in us as we die to self. Every day something of His resurrection will be seen as He lives through us. One day after the final resurrection, we will be completely like Him – that is our inheritance as the children of God. Our greatest inheritance is not the abundance of things the Father gives us, but the character of His Son which the Spirit of His Son is forming within us.
8. Returning to Slavery again? (4:8-11) – The Galatians, in their attempt to observe the law, had actually turned from their intimate knowledge of God as His children and to the slavery they experienced in their former pagan way of life when they did not know God. To help them see the foolishness of their ways, Paul first reminds them of their former condition of ignorance when they were enslaved by pagan idolatry (v.8). Second, he draws their attention again to the knowledge of God which they now enjoy in their new relationship with God (v. 9). Third, he asks them why they are returning to slavery by observing the law (9-10). Finally, he expresses his deep concern for them (11).

a. When You Did “Not Know” God (4:8) – Paul now contrasts what they are by God's grace with what they were before they believed the gospel – when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods (v. 8). The objects they worshiped as gods, had no divine status whatsoever – they didn’t have the essential attributes of God; they were finite, created things, not the infinite Creator. Paul expands his teaching on pagan worship in Romans – "they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator" (Rom 1:25). People today, no less than the pagan Galatians in Paul's day, continue to worship and serve created things rather than the Creator – they ascribe the “greatest worth” to that which is not God: material possessions, nature, position, accomplishment, pleasure, physical beauty, etc. As a result of placing other things in the place of God, people, whether ancient or modern, do not know God in a relational way; Paul was not talking about theoretical knowledge, he was talking about knowing God in a relational and experiential way (9). Neither philosophical reasoning or human religious efforts are able to lead us to an experiential knowledge of God. As Paul said to the Corinthian Christians, "In the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know Him" (1 Cor 1:21).

b. Now That You “Know” God (4:9) – The result of conversion from paganism to a personal encounter with Christ is the knowledge of God, and this encounter is initiated by God – now you have come to know God, and are known by God (v. 9). Our knowledge of God is the result of His knowing us. Throughout the Bible, the joy of God's people is that God knows them – "O LORD, You have searched me and You know me" (Ps 139:1). The Lord told Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you" (Jer 1:4-5). By contrast, the worst fate of all is not to be known by the Lord. As Paul said to the Corinthians, "The man who loves God is known by God" (1 Cor 8:3). There are no more terrible words one could ever hear than the words, "I never knew you; depart from Me!" (Mt 7:23). To be known by God is to be chosen and loved by Him. Because He chose to know us as His own people, we know Him as our God. This is the knowledge of personal relationship with God that was both initiated by His grace and is sustained by His grace.

c. Why Are You Returning to Slavery? (4:9-10) – It must have come as a shock to the Galatian Christians to read these words. After all, they had no intention of returning to their former way of life in paganism. On the contrary, they were attempting to make progress in their new spiritual life by learning and observing the Mosaic law, which prohibited pagan idolatry. Yet now Paul is asking them why they are turning back to those weak and worthless principles. Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? Pagan religions are weak because they do not have the power to overcome the guilt and power of sin, and they are worthless and impotent because they cannot impart new life. In the same way the Mosaic codes are weak and worthless principles. The Mosaic law "declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin" (3:22), but it is powerless to
set anyone free from the chains of sin; the Mosaic law is not able to impart life (3:21). Therefore to substitute observance of the Mosaic law for complete reliance on Christ is equivalent to returning to pagan worship.

Some Chinese Christians in Singapore are in danger of turning their faith into a version of Confucianism, which was what they followed before their conversion to Christ. In their Confucian background they maintained high moral standards. But they were not able to enter into a personal relationship with God by their moral achievements. In fact, they experienced unresolved guilt for not being able to live up to their own standards. When they first met Christ, they focused on their newfound personal relationship with God the Father, which they enjoyed through faith in Christ by the presence of his Spirit in their lives. But slowly their center of attention changed – they began to put more and more emphasis on the high moral standards of their Christian faith. As such, they began to lose sight of what God had done for them in Christ and began to concentrate on what they must do to inherit "the good life." They were especially drawn to the Old Testament's legal codes. Then they formulated those moral laws in the familiar terms of their own Chinese cultural background. Sadly, many believers in Singapore "sound more Confucian than Christian."

d. Paul's Expression of Concern (4:11) – Paul treats the change of direction in the Galatian churches as an extremely serious matter. He is deeply troubled and upset. He even wonders if all his efforts in planting these churches will prove to be in vain. Do legalistic-type changes in our churches grieve us? Are our churches becoming more and more law-centered rather than Christ-centered? Do we see a destructive shift in focus? With his expression of heartfelt concern for his converts, Paul closes the entire rebuke section of his letter – he now moves on to request a change of direction.

REQUEST SECTION (4:12-6:10) – In Paul's day, letters that were written to rebuke someone for misbehavior often ended with a request for a renewal of friendship and a change of behavior. Paul turns from rebuke to request – I plead with you, brothers, become as I am (v.12) – this imperative sets the focus for the rest of the request section of the letter. This personal appeal (4:12-20) is followed by a scriptural appeal (21-31). Then Paul sets forth his authoritative appeal (5:1-12), followed by his ethical appeal (5:13–6:10).

Personal Appeal (4:12-20) – In order to understand Paul's personal appeal – become as I am – we need to see how the entire rebuke section of the letter (1:6–4:11) establishes the background for this appeal. Paul rebuked the Galatian believers for disloyalty to the gospel (1:6). Under the influence of false teachers, they were turning from the true gospel and following another gospel which required circumcision and observance of the law for inclusion in the people of God. Paul reinforced his rebuke for disloyalty to the true gospel by telling the story of his own loyalty to the truth of the gospel (1:11–2:21). Since he was called by God to preach the gospel to Gentiles, he firmly resisted anyone who excluded Gentiles on the basis of the law. Paul also rebuked the Galatian Christians for foolishness about the gospel (3:1-5). In their confusion they thought that works of the law were required to enjoy the blessing of God. Paul undergirded his rebuke for foolishness by an exposition of the promise to Abraham fulfilled in Christ (3:6–4:11). Since Gentile Christians were children of Abraham and included in God's promise to Abraham because they believed in Christ, they could not be excluded from the blessing of God on the basis of the law.
Paul is calling for the Galatians to “imitate him” in his loyalty to the truth of the gospel (2:5; 2:14). He challenges them to die to the law so that they might live for God (cf. 2:19-20). He is pleads with them to be as free as he is from the tyranny of the law, and to enjoy all the benefits of the gospel – the Spirit, righteousness, blessing, adoption and inheritance of the promise – which are already available to them by faith in Christ (cf. 3:6-4:7). He demands that they resist the false teachers who were trying to bring them under the tyranny of the law. What they needed was a renewal of their experience of union with Christ. The first step toward that renewal was to imitate Paul.

Most of us would probably say, "Don't follow me, follow Christ!" We are too aware of our own inconsistencies and failures to set ourselves up as models for the Christian life. But this was Paul's way – he said to the Corinthians, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). Paul was well aware that the imitation of Christ needs to be illustrated by our peers. Without mentors who show us what it means to follow Christ in the rough-and-tumble of our contemporary world, imitation of Christ often seems an unattainable, other-worldly ideal. But when someone like ourselves gives us a living model to follow, we have a tangible, realizable pattern to guide us. After his command, Paul gives various reasons to follow his example.

Paul's Identification with the Gentile Galatians (4:12) – The first reason Paul gives to his readers for following his example is his identification with them – I became like you (v. 12). In his evangelism of the Galatians, Paul did not preach at them from a distance. He entered into their culture, adapted to their ways and became as one of them. Even though he was a Jew, trained as a Pharisee to be totally separate from Gentiles, he lived like a Gentile in order to reach the Gentiles for Christ. His practice of identification illustrated the principle he addressed to the Corinthians – "I made myself a slave to all, that I might win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. . .  To those not having the law I became like one not having the law . . . so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some" (1 Cor 9:19-22). The same practice of identification is necessary today – if we are going to communicate the gospel effectively to people, we must put ourselves in their place, eat what they eat, dress as they dress, talk their language, experience their joys and sorrows, and enter into their way of thinking. If we want people to become like us in our commitment to Christ, then we must become one with them. Paul's identification with the Galatians served as a compelling reason for them to stand with him in his commitment to Christ and freedom from the law. After all, if Paul as a Jewish Christian was willing and able to live like them, then it was clear that living like a Jew or a Gentile is not what matters – what matters is simply faith in Christ.

The Galatians' Identification with Paul (4:12-16) – After reminding the Galatians of his identification with them, Paul recalls how they identified with him during his first visit. Their early enthusiastic response to him was a good reason for them to return to their "first love." In the last phrase of 4:12, Paul reassures his readers – you have done me no wrong. Since he moves right on to remind them how well they treated him when he was with them the first time, Paul is probably telling them that he is still thankful for their kindness toward him, despite whatever may have happened during the recent crisis. Sometimes when a friendship is strained in a time of crisis, it is helpful to stir up memories of the initial warmth of the relationship. That’s what Paul does here. And his
description of the way he was received by the Galatians sets an admirable pattern for the way all true ministers ought to be received.

**Paul recalls that it was because of an illness that he first preached the gospel to them** (v. 13). Many speculate that he had some kind of eye problem by his statement in v. 15 – the Galatians were so concerned for him that they would have given him their own eyes if they could have done so. And Paul's use of "large letters" when he wrote (cf. 6:11) is also taken as evidence that he had eye trouble. Others believe Paul had malaria; others suggest epilepsy. The truth is, we don’t have sufficient evidence to make an accurate diagnosis. Whatever his illness, it is common to view illness as a hindrance to preaching the gospel or an excuse not to do our duty. But Paul realized that God's grace is sufficient for us in our weakness (cf. 2 Cor 12:7-9), and the fact that God's power is actually best expressed through our weakness. Verse 14 indicates that Paul's illness was repulsive. It would have been understandable if the Galatians had turned away from him in disgust. But even though his illness was a trial for them to bear, they did not treat him with contempt or scorn. Instead, Paul says *you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus Himself* (v. 14). Paul was like an angel of God, since he was an apostle sent from God (1:1), so the Galatians were right to welcome him as such.

**Though they initially welcomed him, their attitude toward him changed drastically** – *what happened to all your joy?* he asks. The question looks back longingly to those joyful days when Paul first preached the gospel in Galatia – they loved him, but now their relationship had soured. Paul describes their fickle change of heart – "Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?" (v. 16) – the truth that they were deserting Christ and the true gospel (1:6) and their foolishness about the gospel (3:1). The dramatic shift from the Galatians' warm welcome to their cold rejection of Paul serves as a sober warning to both pastors and their churches. Pastors should not be so naive as to think they will always receive a warm welcome if they consistently teach the truth. In fact, teaching the truth always run the risk of alienating some people. Parishioners should remain loyal to their pastors precisely because they have the courage to preach the truth even when it hurts.

**The Rival Teachers' Ulterior Motive (4:17-18)** – The negative example of the rival teachers provides another reason for following Paul's example. They were exclusive and divisive in their relationships; they had launched an aggressive campaign to *win your allegiance* (v. 17). They were jealous of the affectionate relationship they had with Paul, so they sought to *alienate* them from Paul – the verb *alienate* literally means "shut out" or "exclude." All too often leaders in the church seem to be more interested in the exclusive personal attachment of their followers to themselves – narcissism is a common malady – than in the spiritual growth and unity of the entire body of Christ. Though it is not wrong to be zealous to win the affection of others, as long as it is for their welfare (v. 18), Paul calls us to be careful lest we court others or are being courted by others for selfish advantage.

**Paul's Ultimate Concern (4:19-20)** – In contrast to the selfish motive of the rival teachers, Paul expresses his own deep, *heartfelt concern for his dear children.* He portrays himself as a pregnant mother, *experiencing the pains of childbirth for them a second time.* This rather shocking maternal image captures the extent of Paul's identification with these Christians. In his love for them, he has had to go through labor pains for them twice – when he preached the gospel to them the first time, and now as he seeks to bring them back to the true gospel.
This is more than a mother goes through for her child, yet Paul tells them that he is willing to endure labor pains for them not just twice but until Christ is formed in you. The contrast between Paul and the rival teachers is striking – their selfish motive is to attach the Galatians to themselves so that they will be the center of attention; Paul labors to attach them to Christ so that the full moral character of Christ will be expressed in them. Paul's personal appeal, become as I am, is not simply a demand for personal attachment to him; it expresses his longing for them to wholeheartedly declare, 'I no longer live, but Christ lives in me!'

Paul concludes this section with a desire to be with them and change his tone (20). If he were with them, he would want to change from his tone of rebuke for their past foolishness and give them parental counsel for their future conduct. He does just that in his letter, which is a substitute for his personal visit. Up to this point in his letter, his dominant tone has been one of rebuke, but now he has called for a renewal of their friendship in this paragraph (vv. 12-20); thus he turns his attention to instructions — he still has a heavy heart, and he is perplexed about them (20). What will their foolishness lead them to do? What will be the outcome of their confusion? Such questions move Paul to give clear directions in the rest of his letter, to guide his readers out of their slavery to false teaching into the freedom of the true gospel of Christ. We cannot help but be moved by Paul's passion for his people. He feels their pain; he identifies with their struggle. He has the heart of a good mother caring for her newborn. He has a genuine “shepherds heart.”

Scriptural Appeal (4:21-31) – After his personal appeal – become as I am – Paul begins to give specific direction to the Galatians. He does this first of all by taking their own perspective – since they want to be under the law, Paul asks if they are aware of what the law really says to them (v. 21). Paul tells them they have not yet fully understood or accepted all the obligations of the law — if they are into observing the Jewish calendar (v. 10), and getting circumcised (5:2), they need to know that they are under obligation to keep the whole law (5:3). Paul then takes their position and says, "Now if you really want to keep the law, let me tell you how the law applies to your situation."

Paul's application of the law to their situation is taken from the story of Abraham's two sons – Isaac and Ishmael. When we read through Paul's use of Scripture in this section, we encounter a strange allegorical interpretation. In all the New Testament, there is perhaps not a more difficult passage to interpret. Paul explicitly calls attention to his method of interpretation in verse 24 – these things may be interpreted allegorically. Paul obviously knew that his use of this method of interpreting the biblical text would cause difficulty for his readers. In order to appreciate what Paul is doing here, we first need to get an overview of the passage, to look at the whole matter before looking at the individual parts. Let's consider Paul's purpose for his allegorical interpretation, the false teachers' interpretation, and Paul's method of interpretation.

Paul introduces his interpretation of the Old Testament text by pointing out the difference between the two sons of Abraham – one was born of the slave woman in the ordinary way; the other was born by the free woman as the result of a promise (vv. 22-23). Paul concludes his interpretation with these words – believers are not children of the slave woman, but the free woman (31). His introduction and conclusion make it clear that his primary purpose is to identify them as the true children of Abraham… children of the free woman… children of promise. Paul has already stated in chapter 3 – "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, and heirs according to promise" (3:29); we need to keep this in mind to understand where he is headed.
Paul constructed the allegory to call for decisive resistance to the false teachers. He began the body of his letter by rebuking the Galatians for giving in to the pressure of troublemakers who were leading them to accept a false gospel (1:6-7). In his autobiography Paul illustrated how he decisively resisted pressures from Jewish Christians at Jerusalem (2:3-5) and at Antioch (2:11-14) similar to those faced by the Galatian churches. The request section of the letter begins with the initial request of the letter in 4:12 – become as I am – which calls for the Galatians to resist the false teachers just as he had resisted the false brothers. His own stand against those "Ishmaels" is now supported by the command of Scripture (Gen 21:10 in Gal 4:30), so Paul asks his converts to get rid of the slave woman and her son (v. 30). In 5:1 Paul states the call for decisive resistance expressed by the command of Genesis 21:10 – "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery." So Paul's purpose for his allegorical interpretation of Genesis 21 is to identify them as the children of freedom and to instruct them to resist those who would lead them into slavery under the law.

**The Story of Hagar & Sarah is Symbolic / Allegorical**

Galatians 4:22-31

This story has a deeper meaning than at first appears. The real significance of the events is not expressly stated, but is implied. The true story of Isaac and Ishmael “represents” deep spiritual truth, which Paul goes on to explain. The two women represent “two covenants” – Hagar the covenant of law, and Sarah the covenant of grace. The law was given at Mount Sinai – the covenant given at Sinai produced slavery; thus Hagar the slave was a type of the law. Hagar also represents earthly Jerusalem, the capital of the Jewish nation, and the center for the unsaved Israelites who were still seeking to obtain righteousness by keeping the law. These, together with their children (followers) are in “bondage.”

Law and Grace cannot be mixed – It is impossible to inherit God’s blessings on the basis of human merit or fleshly effort. Those who have trusted Christ have no connection with the law as a means of obtaining divine favor. They are children of the “freewoman,” and they follow the social condition of their mother. The last verse of Gal 4 describes the believer’s position – he is free. The first verse of Gal 5 refers to his practice – he should live as a free man. Here we have a good illustration of the difference between law and grace. The law would say: “If you earn your freedom, you will become free.” But grace says, “You have been made free at the tremendous cost of the blood of Christ – therefore, in gratitude to Him, stand fast in the liberty with which He has made you free.” The law commands but does not enable. Grace provides what the law commands, and enables us to live a life consistent with our position by the power of the Spirit... and He even rewards us for it! The choice is yours – law or grace?

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(31). His introduction and conclusion make it clear that his primary purpose is to identify them as the true children of Abraham... children of the free woman... children of promise. Paul has already stated in chapter 3 – "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, and heirs according to promise" (3:29); we need to keep this in mind to understand where he is headed. Paul constructed the allegory to call for decisive resistance to the false teachers. Paul began the body of his letter by rebuking the Galatians for giving in to the pressure of troublemakers who were leading them to accept a false gospel (1:6-7). In his autobiography Paul illustrated how he decisively resisted pressures from Jewish Christians at Jerusalem (2:3-5) and at Antioch (2:11-14) similar to those faced by the Galatian churches. The request section of the letter begins with the initial request of the letter in 4:12 – become as I am – which calls for the Galatians to resist the false teachers just as he had resisted the false brothers. His own stand against those "Ishmaels" is now supported by the command of Scripture (Gen 21:10 in Gal 4:30), so Paul asks his converts to get rid of the slave woman and her son (v. 30). In 5:1 Paul states the call for decisive resistance expressed by the command of Genesis 21:10 – "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery." So Paul's purpose for his allegorical interpretation of Genesis 21 is to identify them as the children of freedom and to instruct them to resist those who would lead them into slavery under the law.

In light of the evidence for the false teachers' own use of the Abraham story, including the Hagar-Sarah story, we can conclude that Paul deemed his allegorical treatment of the Hagar-Sarah story necessary, "because his opponents had used it and he could not escape it; Paul's allegorical treatment of Abraham was evoked not by a personal love of fantastic exegesis but by a reasoned case which he found necessary to answer" (Barrett 1982:162). When we work through Paul's interpretation, it is helpful to keep in mind that it is a rebuttal of a number of strong points in the rival teachers' argument.

Paul saw a real correspondence between the historical situation of the two sons of Abraham and the two kinds of descendants of Abraham in his own day – those born according to the flesh and those born according to the Spirit. This correspondence is emphasized by the grammatical construction of 4:29 – at that time . . . so it is now – then, as now, the son according to the flesh persecuted the son according to the promise. Paul depicts the hostile activities of the troublemakers in Galatia throughout his letter (cf. 1:7, 3:1, 4:17, 5:7-10 and 6:12-13). Since the Galatian believers were the persecuted and not the persecutors, they were obviously the children of the free woman through the promise. They were experiencing the fulfillment of a situation in the life of Isaac recorded in Genesis 21. On the basis of this real correspondence between the historical event in the life of Isaac, and the fulfillment of that event in the present life of the Galatian churches, Paul rephrases the words of Sarah in Genesis 21:10 as a divine command for the Galatian churches – What does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son" (4:30). The natural conclusion Paul draws from this interpretation is this – brethren, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman (v.31). Paul's application of the Genesis account to the Galatians is not based not on arbitrary definitions, but on actual parallels in history – at that time. . . so it is now.

When the Genesis account is interpreted allegorically, it is not surprising that Sarah and her counterpart – the Jerusalem above, our true mother (v. 26) – should be identified as the mother of the Galatian believers in Christ. It follows naturally enough that Sarah can also be equated with
the covenant of promise – a promise that included Abrahamic blessings for Gentiles as the seed of Abraham. A natural consequence of Paul's definitions of these terms in the allegorical equation is that Hagar becomes a symbol of the covenant at Mount Sinai. How can Paul make the "Hagar Mount Sinai" and "Sinai present Jerusalem" equations in the face of the fundamental Jewish conviction that the Mosaic law was given to the descendants of Isaac at Mount Sinai and had nothing to do with Hagar? Paul's allegorical equations is simply stated in verse 25 — because she is in slavery with her children.

In Paul's allegorization of the text, slavery is the common feature that links Hagar (the slave woman), the covenant given at Mount Sinai, and the present Jerusalem. Paul has already attributed this feature of slavery to the Mosaic law (3:22-24; 4:1-10) and to a certain faction of "false brothers" at Jerusalem (2:4). His allegorization therefore must be seen as a counterattack on that Jewish-Christian faction within the church at Jerusalem which had tried to rob Gentile believers of their freedom by requiring them to be circumcised (2:3-6) and which was now attempting to do the same thing at Galatia. This actual experience of "false brothers" in the church gave rise to Paul's allegorical treatment of the text and is the key to its interpretation. Now that we have taken time to get an overview of this complex passage, we can turn to verse-by-verse exposition. After his introductory question (v. 21) –

- First, Paul sets forth the historical contrast between the two sons of Abraham (vv. 22-23);
- Second, he develops this contrast by means of allegorical comparisons (vv. 24-26);
- Third, he then adds a scriptural confirmation (v. 27);
- Fourth, he then addresses his readers directly and spells out the personal consequences of his interpretation for their lives (vv. 28-30).
- Fifth, he underscores the main point again in his conclusion (v. 31).

1. **Historical Contrast (4:22-23)** – The contrast between Abraham's two sons is established in terms of their social status (v. 22) and the manner of their birth (v. 23). Ishmael's mother, Hagar, was Abraham's slave; Isaac's mother, Sarah, was Abraham's wife, a free woman. Since the social status of the mothers determined the social status of their sons, Ishmael was a slave and Isaac was free. Furthermore, there was nothing supernatural about Ishmael's birth – it happened according to the flesh as a natural result of sexual union between Abraham and Hagar; i.e., Ishmael's birth was simply caused by the natural biological processes of conception and birth. On the other hand, Isaac was born as the result of a promise. The only way that Abraham's sexual union with his aged, barren wife Sarah could have resulted in conception and birth was by the supernatural fulfillment of the promise of God. What a dramatic contrast – slavery by natural birth and freedom by supernatural birth. The spiritual application of this truth is as follows – if you have only experienced natural birth, you are by nature a slave; but if you have experienced supernatural birth by the fulfillment of God's promise in your life, you are by God's grace set free. Next Paul sets up a series of allegorical comparisons.

2. **Allegorical Comparisons (4:24-26)** – Since contemporary Jewish exegesis of the Hagar-Sarah story would have supported the position of the false teachers in Galatia, it was necessary for Paul to redefine the terms of the story so that he could draw out its real
meaning. The purpose of his allegorical comparisons is to establish the identification of the false teachers with Hagar and Ishmael (vv. 24-25) and the identification of the Galatian believers with Sarah and Isaac (vv. 26-28). The identification of the false teachers with Hagar and Ishmael is developed in four steps.

a. The first step identifies Hagar with the covenant from Mount Sinai and the children of Hagar with the children of the Sinaitic covenant – the women represent two covenants: one covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves – this is Hagar (v. 24). This comparison is based on the common understanding that the children of slave women are slaves. If Hagar represents the covenant from Mount Sinai, then the children of that covenant are destined to be slaves, since the children of the slave woman were destined to be slaves. Paul has already argued that those who adhere to the Sinaitic covenant are enslaved by it (3:19–4:10). Thus Paul identifies the rival teachers with Hagar's children, so that he can appeal to the Galatians in the words of Genesis 21:10 to resist the influence of those teachers.

b. The second step undergirds the Hagar-Sinaitic covenant comparison. Such a comparison contradicts the common Jewish understanding that the Sinaitic covenant was given to the descendants of Isaac and was therefore not related to Hagar and her descendants. Thus Paul sets forth a Hagar-Mount Sinai equation to support his Hagar-Sinaitic covenant equation – now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia (v. 25). Paul appears to be connecting Hagar with Mount Sinai on the basis of her name and the geographical location of Mount Sinai.

c. The third step in identifying the children of Hagar as the false teachers in Galatia is the assertion that Mount Sinai corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem (verse 25). Paul's addition of Jerusalem to his allegorical equations makes sense only if the false teachers themselves were closely identified with the Jerusalem church. Perhaps Paul's declaration in the next verse – but the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother – was his response to one of the claims of the false teachers: "We come from the mother church in Jerusalem."

d. The fourth step supports the "Mount Sinai Jerusalem" equation by drawing attention to the common characteristic of slavery of both the children of the Sinaitic covenant and the children of Jerusalem – because she is in slavery with her children (v. 25). Jerusalem was the proud capital city for all the recipients of the covenant given at Mount Sinai. And the center of life in Jerusalem was the study and teaching of that covenant. The goal of life in Jerusalem was to regulate all of life by the law given at Mount Sinai. Since the Sinaitic covenant enslaved all who relied upon it and tried to regulate their lives by it (cf. 3:19–4:11), it followed that Mount Sinai and Jerusalem could be equated on the basis of this common characteristic of slavery. Furthermore, since the false teachers were characterized by their emphasis on the demands of the Sinaitic covenant, and their appeal to the authority of the Jerusalem church, it follows that they were themselves in slavery and could therefore [allegorically] be identified as the children of Hagar, the slave woman.

Paul's allegorical comparisons are not easy to follow; as such, they have raised some difficult problems for interpreters. What we need to remember is this—whatever rationale Paul used for his equations of Hagar with Mount Sinai and the present Jerusalem, the goal of these comparisons was the identification of the false teachers with Ishmael as the children of slavery because of their emphasis on the Sinaitic covenant. Once this
identification was established, Paul could then appeal to the Galatians in the words of the law itself to get rid of the slave woman and her son. The identification of the Galatian believers with the children of Sarah begins with a contrast between the present Jerusalem, whose children are in slavery, and the Jerusalem above [which is free]; she is our mother. Paul declares (v. 26). In Jewish prophecy the Jerusalem above was the consummation of all of God's promises for His people. In the heavenly new Jerusalem the people of God would experience the perfect rule of God in peace and harmony with Him, one another, and all of the new creation. But Paul does not put the heavenly Jerusalem in the future. His use of present tense indicates that the Galatian believers are already citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. Since they are already experiencing the Spirit of God, they are already enjoying the fulfillment of the promises of God. This means that they have already entered the heavenly Jerusalem, and can shout with joy, she is our mother! This contrast is a dramatic way to show how foolish it would be to follow the demands of the false teachers. There was no good reason for those who were experiencing the freedom of life as citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem to be bound by slavery to the law, which was characteristic of the present, earthly Jerusalem.

3. Scriptural Confirmation (4:27) – The capital city of those who are justified by faith is the heavenly Jerusalem – it is the mother of all believers, both Jew and Gentile. Paul confirms the identification of his converts as the children of the Jerusalem above with a quotation from Isaiah 54:1. This prophecy is a prediction that the children of the heavenly city will be more numerous than those of the earthly city (v. 27). How can this be? The children of Sarah (the children of promise) include all those who come to God by faith (both Jew and Gentile) – which is far more than the children of Hagar who abide under the law. The multiplication of the children of Sarah and the heavenly Jerusalem was a tangible reality for the apostle Paul as he witnessed the faith of Gentiles and their reception of the Spirit. As Paul saw this ancient promise of God partially being fulfilled in his day, he must have felt the joy of breaking forth with a loud shout!

4. Personal Consequences (4:28-30) – Paul now draws out the personal consequences for the Galatian believers – brethren, like Isaac, you are children of promise (v. 28). Just as Isaac was born as the result of a promise, so the Gentile believers were born as a result of the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham (3:8), and his promise through the prophet Isaiah (4:27). So the link between the Galatians and Isaac is established. That link is confirmed by their experience of persecution. The Jewish Christian teachers have been harassing them with their requirements and demands. That is exactly what happened in the story of Ishmael and Isaac – at that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the Spirit, so it is now also (v. 29). Genesis 21:9 says that Ishmael mocked Isaac. Interpreting this text in the light of his own experience, Paul saw Ishmael's treatment of Isaac as derisive and abusive. Paul experienced fierce opposition from "false brothers" who tried to destroy him and his work – as it was at that time . . . so it is now also (v. 29). This story has been repeated many times throughout the history of the church. We saw it illustrated in the time of the Protestant Reformation, when the powers of the Church of Rome ruthlessly persecuted the Reformers.

Now Paul is ready to apply the law directly to the Galatian crisis – But what does the Scripture say? Paul asks – “Cast out the slave woman and her son” (v. 30). Get rid of the law teachers! Excommunicate them! The command for expulsion also carries with it an exclusion from inheritance – for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance
with the free woman's son (v. 30). Paul applies this to those who have been teaching another gospel (1:6-9), to those who have been bewitching his converts with their demand for law observance (3:1), to those who are zealous to win the Galatians to themselves and to alienate them from Paul (4:17). It is these people who are forfeiting their inheritance by depending on the law rather than on the promise fulfilled in Christ (3:18). The clear implication of this exclusion of the law teachers from the inheritance is that those who depend on the promises of God fulfilled in Christ will receive the inheritance – they are the true children of Abraham and Sarah – they are the Isaacs. The negative consequence of being an Isaac is persecution; the positive consequence is inheritance. The pain of rejection by "false brothers" is more than offset by the joy of acceptance as children and heirs of promises made and kept by God.

Conclusion (4:31) – The conclusion of the entire Hagar-Sarah allegory emphasizes once again the identification of believers in Christ – we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman. The freedom-slavery and Spirit-flesh antitheses which Paul has constructed in his allegory serve as the framework for his ethical instructions in the rest of the letter. The children of the free woman are born of the Spirit (v. 29), and must learn to express their freedom by walking in the Spirit, rather than submitting to slavery under the law or gratifying the desires of the flesh. Identity is the basis of behavior – a clear understanding of who we are in Christ guides our conduct in the Spirit.

Authoritative Appeal (5:1-12) – In our day we highly esteem the value of religious tolerance. As such, our religious tolerance may cause us to be offended by the sharp arguments Paul draws between true and false religion in this section. If we listen carefully to what he is saying, however, we will find that he is defending the freedom of his readers from the coercive tactics of those who were forcing them to conform to a particular religious tradition. What we really find here is the basis for preserving genuine spiritual freedom. In this section Paul calls his readers to protect their freedom (5:1-6); then he exposes the false teachers who are robbing them of their freedom (5:7-12).

Protecting Freedom (5:1-6) – Paul writes, “It was for freedom that Christ sets us free!” This declaration of our freedom is both a statement of an accomplished fact and a goal to be pursued. Freedom is ours because Christ has set us free! We don’t have to fight to be free – we are free! Our freedom is not the result of liberating ourselves by our own efforts – we are not able to do that! Our freedom has been given to us by Christ, and that freedom is both our goal and our responsibility. Imagine a prisoner who is suddenly surprised to find out that he has been pardoned and set free. He did nothing to accomplish this. He was not even aware that it had happened. But there he stands outside the prison walls, a free man. Now it is his responsibility to live as a free man. Charles Wesley captures the Christian experience of this liberation in his great hymn “And Can It Be?” –

Long my imprisoned spirit lay. . . fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray. . . I woke, the dungeon flamed with light.  
My chains fell off, my heart was free. . . I rose, went forth, and followed Thee!

Our imprisonment has been a major theme in Paul's letter to the Galatians: "The Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin" (3:22). "We were held captive by the law, locked up" (3:23). "We were in slavery under the basic principles of the world" (4:3). So there is no doubt about the nature of our slavery. We were condemned prisoners under the judgment of the law of God, doomed to live under the severe restrictions of the law, with no hope of earning our
freedom by our obedience to the law, since all the law could do was to point out our transgres-
sions (3:19). This imprisonment under the law separated Jews from Gentiles (2:14; 3:23); the law
isolated its prisoners in different cell blocks according to their ethnic origins. Our release from
prison and our release from slavery run as parallel themes in the letter – Jesus Christ "gave
himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age" (1:4). "Christ redeemed us from the
curse of the law" (3:13). "God sent his Son to redeem those under law" (4:4-5). "Therefore, brothers,
we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman" (4:31). So the nature of our
freedom is clear. We have been delivered from the judgment of the law of God, and we no longer
live under its disciplinary regulations. We are not children of the slave woman, who stands for
the Mosaic commandments; we are children of the free woman, who stands for the promise. We
are not captive to the dreadful terror of breaking the commandments – "You shall not!" Our
lives are lived in the joyful freedom of knowing that in Christ God has fulfilled His promises to
us – "I will bless you!" This freedom from imprisonment under the law has led to a new
community in which the divisions between race and class and gender are removed (3:28). The
liberating, redemptive act of Christ that sets us free from slavery and imprisonment under the law
has also been a major theme of this letter. It was by His death on the cross when He took the
curse of the law for us (3:13) that Christ set us free. When we believe the message of Christ
crucified, we receive the Spirit (3:1-2) and participate in the benefits of the cross ourselves; we
then view ourselves as having been crucified with Christ, set free from the curses and demands
of the law, but now able by the indwelling life of Christ to live for God (2:19-20). Now that we are
set free from living like slaves under the law, we can all live together in one family as beloved
children of God who by the indwelling Spirit call God "Abba, Father" (4:4-7).

Set Free for Freedom (5:1) – All these major themes of slavery, freedom and the liberating
work of Christ are now summed up in the ringing affirmation – it was for freedom that Christ
sets us free. That indicative reality is followed by the imperative – stand firm then! What we
must do (the imperative) is always based upon what God has already done (the indicative) – to
put it another way, what God has done gives us the opportunity and power to do what we must
do. This indicative-imperative structure is seen here in verse 1 and also in verses 13 and 25. So
it provides the structure for the whole chapter – God's gift of freedom must be defended (v. 1);
God's gift of freedom must not be abused but must be used to serve (v. 13); God's gift of life by the
Spirit must be expressed through the Spirit (v. 25). In Paul's letters he often exhorts his readers to
stand firm – "stand firm in the faith" (1 Cor 16:13); "stand firm in one spirit" (Phil 1:27); "stand firm in
the Lord" (Phil 4:1). Here he appeals to them to stand firm in the freedom Christ has given to them.
False teachers have now infiltrated the ranks of the Galatian churches and have been putting the
Galatian converts under intense social pressure to become Jews by being circumcised. Writes
Paul – Stand firm! Do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery! (v.1).

In Paul's day one could often see oxen harnessed by a “yoke” to a heavily ladened cart,
straining to pull their burden uphill. Paul uses the word yoke to refer to the yoke of the law.
We can see from his statement in verse 3 that the crushing weight of this yoke is the obliga-
tion to obey the whole law. The yoke of the law is a yoke of slavery, because it places us
under the burden of commandments we cannot keep and under curses that we deserve for our
disobedience. But God sent his Son to lift this heavy yoke from our shoulders and to take it
upon Himself – He was "born under law" (4:4) and kept all its demands for us; and He died
under the curse of the law for us (3:13). Since He has set us free from this yoke of slavery, we
must not take it upon ourselves again. In contrast to the yoke of slavery under the law – His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Mt 11:30). So, why the complaining? In order to strengthen his readers' resolve to defend their freedom in Christ and resist the false teachers' efforts to put them under the yoke of slavery to the law, Paul sets forth the terrible negative consequences of submitting to this yoke of slavery in verses 2-4. Then in contrast to this negative picture, he sets out a positive description of maintaining our freedom in Christ in verses 5-6.

**Negative Consequences of submitting to the law (5:2-4)** – Paul's list of the negative results of getting circumcised and trying to be justified by law is prefaced by strong reminders that he is speaking with authority. Paul writes – *Mark my words! I testify to every man!* (vv. 2-3). There must be no doubt about his warnings. They come from Paul, "an apostle, not sent from men, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father" (1:1). His warnings are given to those who are getting circumcised - the present tense indicates that the process has already begun. Since the surgical procedure of circumcision has no theological significance to us today, it is difficult to understand why Paul is so upset about it. In Paul's day circumcision was the mark of belonging to the Jewish nation. For a Gentile to get circumcised in the Greco-Roman world, where circumcision was repugnant, indicated that inclusion within the Jewish nation had become a very high priority item for him. Paul understood their motive as trying to be justified by law – doing something to please God. These individuals thought they could gain more of God's approval by belonging to the Jewish nation; ultimately, this meant they did not consider faith in Christ to be sufficient enough for God's approval. They were being convinced that faith in Christ had to be supplemented with identification with the Jewish people through circumcision and law observance. Paul lists four inevitable, negative consequences of adding such a supplement to faith in Christ.

1. **Christ will be of no value to you at all** (v. 2) – If you start to trust in circumcision to gain God's blessing, then you have stopped trusting in Christ. When you put your trust in your own position or performance for God's blessing, even to the smallest degree, you are indicating that who you are and what you have done has more value that who Christ is and what He has done. In essence, you have turned your back on Christ.

2. **You are obligated to obey the whole law** (v. 3) – Paul informs them that the law is a vast, interdependent network of legal codes. Getting circumcised indicates that you are relying on keeping the law for God to bless you. If you are relying on the law, then you are obligated to keep the whole law – you cannot be selective. If that is your choice, you have embarked on an impossible mission. Once you have decided to base your relationship with God on your performance, you will not be graded on a curve. You must get it right 100 percent of the time. If you've already failed, you're already out! You're already a lawbreaker! Game over!

3. **You have been alienated from Christ** (v. 4) – No doubt the rival teachers had assured them that keeping the law was not abandoning their faith in Christ; it was the way to "attain your goal" (3:3) – perfection – in the Christian life. But Paul says that those who regulate their lives by the law are removed from the reign of Christ over their lives.

4. **You have fallen away from grace** (v. 4) – If you trust in your own efforts to keep the law, then you are no longer trusting in God's grace. Circumcision or Christ – law or grace – these are exclusive alternatives. You cannot have it both ways. You must choose one or the other. The danger of apostasy and falling from grace must have been very real, or Paul would not
have used such strong language. To experience the grace of sanctification, we must humble ourselves under the authority of God’s Word. Grace and Law are antithetical.

**Positive Description of maintaining freedom in Christ (5:5-6)** – Having painted a negative picture of what will happen if freedom in Christ is given up for the yoke of slavery, Paul describes in these two verses how freedom in Christ is maintained. Both verses focus on **faith**. Faith in Christ is the only way to protect our freedom in Christ. Paul spells out in very concise terms what this life of faith is like. He is basically echoing what he has already taught at some length in the preceding chapters –

1. **The life of faith is life by the Spirit** – *through the Spirit by faith we wait* (v. 5). By faith in the gospel we received the Spirit (3:2). We now "live by the Spirit" (5:16); are “led by the Spirit” (5:18); and are to "walk by the Spirit" (5:25). The presence of the Spirit marks us the children of God (4:6), and the power of the Spirit produces in us the character of God (5:22-23). Furthermore, the control of the Spirit in our lives makes the yoke of the law unnecessary (18).

2. **The life of faith is a life of confident expectation of righteousness** – *through the Spirit by faith we wait for the hope of righteousness* (v. 5). Paul's focus here is the future righteousness which is ours when God completes His work in us by His Spirit. By depending on the Spirit, we can expect to reap the harvest of eternal life in the future (see 6:8). In the past, when we put our faith in Christ at the beginning of our Christian life, God credited righteousness to us (3:6-9). In the present, by the power of the Spirit, God produces righteousness in us (5:13-25); that is, our righteousness – credited to us by justification, produced in us by sanctification, and perfected in us by glorification – is always a gift of grace received from God by faith.

3. **In this life of faith what matters is union with Christ**, not union with the Jews or Gentiles or any other racial or social group – *for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything* (v. 6). The world's divisions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female have been obliterated in our union with one another in Christ (3:28).

4. **Our life of faith is a life of loving one another** – *The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love* (v. 6). Freedom from the law does not leave our life without moral direction – faith in Christ gives us not only moral direction but also the moral dynamic to fulfill the true intent of all the law by serving one another (vv. 13-14). The evidence of true faith will be genuine love, for true faith in Christ is inevitably expressed through love (v. 6). These four concise descriptions of the life of faith enable us to see how faith in Christ is the only way to maintain our freedom in Christ. In his ethical appeal (5:13-6:10), Paul fills in the implications and applications of these brief statements. But first he exposes the false teachers for who they really are in order to rid the church of their destructive influence.

**Exposing the False Teachers (5:7-12)** – In his exposure of these false teachers, Paul gives us six identifying marks that can guide us to discern the presence of "wolves in sheep's clothing" in our midst today –

1. **False teachers distract Christians from obeying the truth of the gospel** (v. 7) – Paul compliments the Galatian believers for *running a good race* – this image portrays how well they were *obeying the truth*. The gospel set the course for their life, and they were running well in that course… but then they were distracted and hindered from running this race. Paul
asks them – *Who hindered you from obeying the truth?* By asking the question this way he exposes the false teachers' negative effect on the life of the believers. The picture is of a runner who distracts another runner, blocks his way, cuts in on him and trips him up. Everyone would have been furious with a runner who did such a thing in the Greek games – he would have been immediately disqualified and excluded. The false teachers were hindering the Christians from obeying the truth of the gospel with all their talk about becoming Jewish and keeping the law.

2. **False teachers replace the call of God with their own deceptive persuasiveness (v. 8).**

Paul tells them – *that kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you.* When Paul preached the gospel, they heard the voice of God calling them through by His Spirit (1:6); but when the false teachers taught, all they heard was flattery, boastfulness & empty rhetoric. They were skillful orators, and supported their positions with a perverted use of Scripture. Their message was all about the works of the law, not about God's work of grace in Christ. So obviously their persuasion did not come from God, who always calls us by His grace.

3. **False teachers gain control over the whole church (v. 9)** – Just as a little leaven works through the whole batch of dough, so the negative influence of a few false teachers can penetrate the whole church and control the direction of the church. False teachers seek to dominate every situation in the life of the church.

4. **False teachers cause confusion and discouragement (v. 10)** – When the Galatians were converted, they related to God with the joyful confidence of children, calling him "*Abba, Father*" through the Spirit. But their confidence in God's grace was badly shaken by the false teachers, who threatened them with the judgment of God if they did not keep the law of God. They were confused and discouraged. So Paul reassures the Galatians of his confidence in the Lord regarding them – *I am confident in the Lord that you will adopt no other view.* He then turns the tables on the false teachers by putting them under the judgment of God – *the one who is disturbing and confusing you will bear God's judgment, whoever he may be.*

5. **False teachers spread false reports about spiritual leaders (v. 11)** – We may infer from verse 11 that these teachers had given a false report about Paul. Since the immediate context focuses on the corrupting influence of the false teachers, it seems reasonable to suppose that they claimed Paul's support for their campaign to circumcise the Gentile believers – maybe they incorrectly pointed to Paul's own willingness to continue his Jewish way of life even after his conversion (see 1 Cor 9:20). Whatever their basis may have been, they gave a false report about Paul to strengthen their own position and give them credibility. Paul proves that the report that he is still preaching circumcision is false by pointing to the fact that he is being persecuted (5:11). Both non-Christian Jews and many Christian Jews fiercely opposed him precisely because he did not require circumcision. If Paul had preached circumcision, then he would not have been persecuted by the Jews. By preaching circumcision, he would have been communicating that it was necessary to belong to the Jewish nation because the salvation of God was available only to those within that nation. Paul says by preaching circumcision, *the offense of the cross has been abolished* (v.11), because the message that salvation is only through the cross of Christ would have been denied. The message of Christ crucified is offensive not only to Jews, but also to the pride of all who want to claim some personal merit as the basis of God's approval.

6. **False teachers emphasize sensational rituals** – Verse 12 sounds terribly harsh and crude, but it needs to be interpreted in its historical and cultural context. Paul sarcastically says, if
these false teachers really want to put on a sensational show – \textit{I wish they would mutilate themselves!} He is probably referring here to a “barbaric castration ritual” that actually took place in that day in the pagan temples of Galatia. The false teachers were leading the Galatians to think that the ritual of circumcision was a sacred act that would bring them into fellowship with God. Paul has already said that “in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything” (6). Now he puts the ritual of circumcision in the same category as the ritual castration of Galatian pagans – it had no more significance to the Gentile Christians than any of the other barbaric, bloody rituals practiced in the ancient world. Paul felt the false teachers only "want to make a good impression outwardly" (6:12); they want to boast in their sensational ceremony (see 6:13). Since their motive is to put on an impressive ritual show, they might as well learn a few lessons from the pagan priests, who really know how to put on a good show when it comes to using a knife on the human body!

**Ethical Appeal (5:13–6:10)** – Paul begins his ethical appeal with a second declaration of freedom – you were called to freedom (v. 13). This declaration focuses on the initiative of God – Christ's action set us free! God's call set us free! When the whole human race was hopelessly locked up under law, and imprisoned by sin, "God sent His Son" into human history to set us free. When we were enslaved, "God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts" to set us free. Our freedom is not the result of our decisions or our actions. God acted in history on the cross and through the resurrection to set us free. God acted in our hearts by His Spirit to set us free. The gracious initiative of God is underscored by Paul's repetition. As Christians we have been set free from the law and the obligation to obey it – therefore we are called to freedom from slavery under the law. Though we have been set free from the law, Paul commands us not turn our freedom into an opportunity for the flesh – rather we are to serve one another in love. Thus we are first told not to lose our freedom by turning back again to slavery.

**Paul uses the term “flesh” eight times in this section (5:13–6:10)** to refer to that aspect of our being that is opposed to the Spirit of God (5:16-17) and that produces all that is evil and destructive in our human experience (5:19-20). The NIV translation of flesh as sinful nature is a helpful, interpretive translation. Human nature apart from God's intervening grace is both a captive of sin and the source of "passions and desires" (5:24) that lead to sin. No doubt one reason the Galatian Christians were attracted to the law is that they viewed the law as the only way to restrain and control the passions and desires of the flesh. They saw the law as a needed disciplinarian to keep them from being destroyed by their own sinful desires.

**The false teachers who were trying to bring the Gentile Christians under the law**, no doubt told the Galatian Christians that “the law was given to guard, protect and keep you from evil; therefore live under it as your master and guide." In contrast to this message of the false teachers, Paul says that he has "died to the law" (2:19), that "we are no longer under the supervision of the law" (3:25) and that we should not let ourselves "be burdened again by a yoke of slavery," by which he means the law (5:1). Paul then says, "Does this mean that we are free to follow the desires of our sinful nature?" Paul was always sensitive to the questions in the minds of his readers – as such, he counters their misunderstanding with a strong prohibition – \textit{Do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh} (v. 13). The Galatian Christians were hoping to be able to overcome their moral problems by concentrating on keeping the law. Paul sought to convince them that the law has no power to restrain the flesh. On the contrary, those who try to overcome the sinful nature (the flesh) by observing the law, actually become more deeply enslaved to the sinful nature (the flesh). Obviously, Christian freedom from the law does not mean giving into the sinful nature. It means serving one another in love, and this is only possible by walking in the Spirit. That is the essence of Paul’s ethical appeal.
Freedom to Love (5:13-15) – The Christian’s freedom is *the freedom to serve one another in love* (v. 13). The slavery of love is contrasted to two other kinds of slavery. First, the immediate context puts this command to *serve in love* in direct contrast to indulging the sinful nature. Our sinful nature causes us to be *slaves to our own selfish desires* – love expresses itself in service to the needs of others. Second, the command to serve in love is contrasted to slavery under the law. Christians are not to be *under the law or enslaved to it; they are commanded to be under others as slaves to them*. Christian obligation is not *subjection to the law* (v. 3) but *subjection to one another in love*. Slavery to the law and to our own flesh always robs us of our freedom to serve others in love. If we are enslaved to the law, we are more interested in keeping the commandments to establish our own merit than in loving others. Even if we serve others out of obligation to observe the law, we do it for ourselves rather than for them. If we are *enslaved to our own sinful nature*, we are absorbed in our own selfish interests rather than the needs of others. Even if we serve others, we do it to fulfill our own desires. Therefore slavery to the law and the flesh cause us to use people to meet our goals rather than to serve them in love. Only when we are free from slavery to the law and slavery to the flesh will we be free to serve one another in love.

*We have learned two things about the meaning of love in this letter* – first, love was expressed by Christ's giving of Himself for us (2:20); second, love is the expression of true faith (5:6). Now we learn that love is expressed by serving one another (5:13). When the object of our faith is Christ, who loved us, we are motivated and empowered to express His kind of love to others. When such love is expressed, the whole law is fulfilled – *the entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself"* (v. 14). Paul here describes the result of Christian faith expressed in loving service to others. The result of the believer’s loving service to others is that all the prescriptions and prohibitions of the law are fulfilled, since they can all be summed up in one command – *Love your neighbor as yourself* – which, incidentally, James refers to as the *royal law* (Jam 2:8). Paul quotes the law to show that love, motivated and empowered by faith and the Spirit (vv. 6, 22), fulfills the demands of the law.

The moral standards of the law are not discarded or violated by Christians who are free from the law. Paul tells us that "the law is holy, righteous & good" (Rom 7:12). Freedom from the law is not license to break the law and pursue every selfish desire. No, freedom from bondage to the law is experienced by those who believe in Christ and are led by His Spirit. They use their freedom to serve one another in love – and in that loving service the high moral standards of the law are fully realized in their lives. Though the law is holy and good, since it is God's revelation of His moral standards for our lives, the law provides no power to obey it or overcome sin. Only the power of the Spirit at work in us can enable us to overcome sin and fulfill God's moral design for our lives through loving service to others.

The Galatians wanted to be under the law as a way of attaining “spiritual perfection” (cf. 4:21 and 3:3); but their preoccupation with keeping the law did not lead them to spiritual perfection. On the contrary, their bondage to the law produced a competitive, angry, judgmental spirit. Paul warns them of the results of their bondage to the law – *if you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out lest you be consumed by one another* (v. 15). Paul knew from his own experience that zealous devotion to keep the law can accompany and even intensify destructive attitudes toward the church. When he saw the Galatian believers biting each other in their criticism and chewing each other up in their negative reports, he was reminded of his own attacks on the
church during the time in his life when he was most zealous to keep the law. When a church defines its purpose in terms of law observance, it needs to watch out or it will be destroyed by a critical, competitive, judgmental spirit. The tragic irony of the Galatians' situation was that the more they came under bondage to keep the law, the more they violated the basic moral standard of the law – *love your neighbor as yourself.* Paradoxical as it may seem, that standard is only fulfilled in the lives of those who resist slavery under the law (v. 1) and serve as slaves in love to others (v. 13). Note the contrast between a “law-focus” and a “love-focus.” Freedom in Christ is freedom to love. Legalists can’t love – because genuine love is a fruit of the Spirit.

**Freedom by the Spirit (5:16-18)** – The attempt of the Galatians to attain spiritual perfection by keeping the law had ended in failure. Their churches were torn apart by conflict – they were "biting and devouring each other" (v. 15). Obviously their devotion to the law had not enabled them to be devoted to each other in love – and since they did not love each other, they were breaking the law. Where could they find the motivation and power to resolve their conflicts and renew their love for each other? Many Christians ask the same question today. They are members of Bible-teaching churches torn apart by conflict. What went wrong? How can they be so devoted and yet so divided? How can they be empowered to really love each other? Paul's answer – *walking by the Spirit* (v. 16). This command is the central concept in Paul's ethical appeal. Since the Christian life begins with the Spirit (3:3; 4:6, 29), the only way to continue the Christian life is by the power of the Spirit. The Spirit is not only the source of Christian life but also the only power to sustain Christian life. The command to walk in a certain way speaks of choosing a way of life – a "lifestyle" in which all aspects of life are directed and transformed by the Spirit.

**The Galatian believers began their Christian life by receiving the Spirit** (3:2-3), but they soon turned to the law to direct their lives. They probably felt that observance of the law was the way of life that would establish their identity and guide their behavior as the people of God. However, by turning to observance of law as their way of life, they were denying the Spirit's sufficiency to identify them as the people of God and to direct their conduct. Paul's references to the Spirit in this section (5:13–6:10) expresses his confidence that the Spirit is more than adequate to direct their moral behavior. The Spirit is the only sure guide for Christian behavior; the only source of power to love in a way that fulfills the whole law. Therefore Paul asserts – *walking by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh* (v. 16). *Walking by the Spirit* demands active determination to follow the direction of the Spirit in the power of the Spirit. Those who follow the Spirit's direction in the Spirit's power will not carry out the evil intentions of their sinful nature. Walking by the Spirit excludes the destructive influence of the sinful nature. Walking by the Spirit can transform people who are "devouring each other" into people who are serving each other in love.

**In verse 17 Paul explains the basis of his confidence in the Spirit.** He describes the war between the flesh and the Spirit and the result of that war. The *Spirit* and the *flesh* are two hostile forces opposed to each other – *the flesh sets its desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; they are in opposition to each other.* Therefore, by definition, *walking by the Spirit* means fighting in a war between the Spirit and the flesh – *inner spiritual warfare is the nature of the Christian life* – it is the experience of all who *walk by the Spirit.* The conflict described by Paul is the conflict of a thoroughly committed Christian who is choosing each day to "walk by the Spirit." Every day we walk by the Spirit we are engaged in a fierce battle between the Spirit and the flesh. It is important to stress this point, because many Christians feel ashamed to admit
that they are experiencing such a conflict. They feel that mature Christians should somehow be above this kind of struggle. They imagine that the great saints were surely too spiritual to feel the desires of the flesh. But Paul flatly contradicts such images of *superspirituality*. His perspective is expressed by the words of an old hymn –

*And none, O Lord, have perfect rest... for none are wholly free from sin;*

*And they who fain would serve Thee best... are conscious most of wrong within.*

While Paul honestly portrays the reality of “incessant moral warfare” in the life of a Spirit-led Christian, he is not painting a picture of defeat. If you have sworn your allegiance to the Spirit in this war between the Spirit and your flesh, “you will not use your freedom to indulge the flesh” (v. 13), you will not *gratify the desires of the flesh* (v. 16). Therefore you will not do what *you desire* (v. 17), but what the *Holy Spirit desires*. In this passage Paul is presenting a reason for confidence in the Spirit's power to guide our behavior. His confidence is based on the fact that Christians who walk by the Spirit are involved in a war that determines the direction of every choice and every action. Their Christian freedom does not mean that they are left without moral direction to do whatever they want – they do not do what they want – they march under the Spirit's orders, to fulfill the directions of the Spirit. Those who are living by the guiding power of the Spirit in their lives and are fighting each day against the influence of the flesh do not need to be supervised and restrained by the law. Paul says, *if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law* (v. 18).

**In verse 16 Paul described walking by the Spirit in the active voice** – walking demands active determination to get up off the couch and keep going at a steady pace. But here in verse 18 Paul speaks of life in the Spirit as passive submission – *if you are led by the Spirit*. The verb implies pressure and control – soldiers arrested Jesus and led him away (Lk 22:54); soldiers arrested Paul and led him away (Acts 21:34; 23:10). Paul described the control of the law in similar terms – "we were held captive by the law, locked up" (3:24); "the law was put in charge to lead us" (3:24); "subject to guardians and trustees" (4:2). But while the law exercised control, it could not give life or transform character (3:21). The law controlled by locking us all up under sin (3:22). **Paul depicts an alternative kind of control – the control of the Spirit.** Life begins with the Spirit (3:3); children of promise are born by the power of the Spirit (4:29). The Spirit produces a transformation of character (5:22-23). The one who submits to the control of the Spirit is not under the control of the law. Life by the Spirit involves active obedience to the direction of the Spirit (v. 16), constant warfare against the desires of the flesh by the power of the Spirit (v. 17), and complete submission to the control of the Spirit (v. 18). Such a life will be an experience of freedom from the control of the flesh and the law.

**Freedom from Evil (5:19-21)** – So far Paul has talked in general terms about life in the Spirit. He has assured his readers that the Spirit will enable them to resist the desires of their sinful nature. What the law cannot do for them, God will do by the work of His Spirit in them. Paul realizes that the Galatians are attracted to the law because it gives them specific moral guidelines that they can apply to their practical problems – the Jewish law teachers were renowned for their ability to develop applications of the law for every conceivable situation. There seems to be a sense of moral security in such well-defined codes of conduct. By comparison, Paul's command to "walk by the Spirit" seems to leave everything up in the air. How can they know they are not gratifying the desires
Walking in the Spirit / Living by the Spirit
Galatians 5:16-25

To walk in the Spirit is to allow Him to have His way (v.16). It is to remain in communion with Him… to make decisions in the light of His holiness… to be occupied with Christ, because the Spirit’s ministry is to engage the believer with the Lord Jesus. We cannot be occupied at the same time with Christ and with sin. When we walk by the Spirit, the flesh or self-life is treated as dead. The “key problem” is that the flesh is still present with the Christian – thus, the idea of the eradication of the (flesh) is refuted.

The Spirit and the flesh are in constant conflict – Obviously, God could have removed the sinful nature from us at the time of conversion, but He did not choose to do so. Why? Because He wanted to keep us continually reminded of our own weakness and our need of Him – to keep us continually dependent on Christ, and to cause us to praise unceasingly the One who saved worms such as us. Therefore, instead of removing the old nature, God gave us His own Holy Spirit to indwell us. God’s Spirit and our flesh are perpetually at war (v.17), and will continue to be at war until we are taken home to heaven. It is this very problem/struggle that Paul discusses in his letter to the Romans (Rom 7:15, 19). The solution is not to pit our will against the flesh, but to surrender our will to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit writes God’s Law upon our hearts (Heb 10:14-17; 2 Cor 3) so that we desire to obey Him in love (cf. Ps 40:8). Our part is to “yield to the Spirit.”

All Christians are led by the Spirit – No Christians are under the law; they don’t depend on “self-effort” (v.18). The Holy Spirit resists the motions of evil within us – not us, because our flesh naturally desires to sin. To be led by the Spirit means to be lifted above the flesh and to be occupied with Christ. When we are so occupied, we don’t think of the law or the flesh. The Spirit of God does not lead us to look to the law as a means of justification (becoming righteous); rather, He points us to the risen Christ as the only ground of acceptance before God.

The Law appeals to the energy of the flesh – What kind of works does fallen human nature produce? Paul identifies some “fifteen sinful behaviors” (vv.19-21). Paul warns his readers that those who “practice such things” will not inherit the kingdom of God. The passage does not teach that one who “commits an evil act” cannot be saved, but it does say that those who lives are “characterized by such fleshly works” are not saved. The reason Paul mentions this is that not all who “profess Christ” are true children of God.

The Spirit produces “fruit” in the believer’s life – A branch produces fruit when it abides in the vine (Jn 15:5). Notice the difference between the flesh and the Spirit – works vs. fruit. Also note that fruit is singular, not plural. The Holy Spirit produces one kind of fruit: Christ-likeness. All “nine virtues” listed in this passage (5:22-23) describe the life of the child of God. It should also be noted that every one of these virtues is foreign to the soil of the human heart… and all of these virtues are produced by the Holy Spirit as we live in communion with the Lord. Furthermore, all of these virtues are pleasing to God, beneficial to others, and good for ourselves. As we gaze upon the Savior in loving devotion, and obey Him in daily life, the Holy Spirit works a wonderful miracle. He transforms us into the likeness of Christ. We become like Christ by beholding Him (2 Cor 3:18). Just as the branch derives all its life and nourishment from the vine, so the believer in Christ derives his strength from the True Vine, and is thus able to live a fruitful life for God.

Those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh – The verb tense indicates this action happened decisively at some point in the past – at conversion (v. 24). When we repented, there was a sense in which we nailed the old, evil, corrupt nature to the cross with all its affections and lusts. We determined that we would no longer live to cater to our fallen sinful nature – this decision has to be renewed every day in our lives; we must constantly keep the flesh in the place of death. Since we have eternal life by the work of the Holy Spirit in us, let us live out the new life by the power of the same Spirit (25).
of their sinful nature if the behavior of the flesh is not defined? How can they know what life in the
Spirit is like if it is not defined? There seems to be a common tendency among believers to develop
a “computer manual approach” to the Christian life – people want a specific list of steps to follow.
"Let's be practical," they say, "tell me exactly what to do and what not to do, and then I will feel safe;
I'll know how to act." But this approach to the Christian life is in danger of repeating the Galatian
error – it is an attempt to live under law rather than under the direction of the Spirit.

Is there any objective basis for evaluating when we are following the direction of the Spirit?
and when we are simply gratifying the desires of the flesh? Having described in general terms
the Spirit's victory over the sinful nature, Paul goes on to define the deeds of the flesh (vv. 19-21),
and the fruit of the Spirit (vv. 22-23). These lists of fifteen vices and nine virtues are not offered as
a new set of specific codes to replace the law codes; rather, they provide an objective basis for
evaluation, so we can determine whether we are living to gratify the desires of the flesh or
walking by the Spirit.

Paul says, the deeds of the flesh are obvious (v. 19) – While the "desires" of the flesh (vv.16-17)
may be hidden, the “acts” produced by those desires are visible for everyone to see. So an
evaluation of our behavior makes it easy to see if we are gratifying the hidden desires of the
flesh. Since some of the acts listed also refer to inward attitudes of the heart (for example, envy,
hatred, and selfish ambition), the word evident emphasizes the fact that the Galatians did not
need the Mosaic law to define the nature of evil – Paul does not describe the acts of the flesh
as transgressions of law. His list of vices is similar to many lists in the ethical teaching of the
Greeks and Romans of his day. Pagan philosophers often published lists of vices and virtues.
So when Paul says that the acts of the flesh are obvious, he means that all of us know what is
evil when we see it. Therefore, his list is typical of those things that were widely viewed to
be contrary to high moral standards. Paul's fifteen deeds of the flesh can be divided into four
categories: (1) illicit sex, (2) religious heresy, (3) social conflict and (4) drunkenness.

1. **Illicit sex.** Paul mentions three kinds of illicit sex: sexual immorality, impurity and
debauchery. The first is a general term that encompasses all kinds of immoral sexual
relationships. The next two terms refer to sexual perversions. The art and literature of Paul's
day provide ample evidence for the widespread practice of sexual immorality; we only need
to observe the chaos in our own world to understand the conditions in Paul's day. A good
case could be made that in the two millennia since the Roman Empire, our generation comes
closer than any previous one to the blatant prevalence of sexual perversions that was charac-
teristic then. And a study of the fall of the Roman Empire suggests that any civilization or
society that tolerates the unchecked promotion of such perversions will inevitably collapse
from moral degradation.

2. **Religious heresy.** From Paul's teaching on idolatry in his other letters we learn that idolatry
is not merely worshiping the image of a god but also participating in the temple feasts (1 Cor
10:7, 14), and being greedy for possessions (Col 3:5). Sorcery is a translation of a Greek word
from which our English word pharmacy is derived. The Greek word could have the positive
meaning of dispensing drugs, but its more common meaning was the use of drugs in sorcery
and witchcraft and to poison people. False religion is the worship of other gods and
dependence on other powers (drugs or occult practices).
3. **Social conflict.** Paul's major emphasis in this list is on those acts of the flesh which cause social conflict. He lists eight such acts – enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions and envy. It seems that Paul added more terms under this category of social conflict because this was the area of greatest need among the Galatians. The attitudes and actions that destroy personal relationships were the most prominent manifestations of the flesh in those churches. We can see reflections of this problem of social conflicts in other verses as well – Christians were "biting and devouring each other" and "provoking and envying each other" (cf. vv. 15, 26). The Galatian churches were divided into bitterly antagonistic factions. The rest of the letter indicates that these conflicts were caused by the false teachers' campaign to enforce the observance of the law in the churches. The curse on "all who rely upon observing the law" (3:10) was already being experienced in the tragic breakdown of relationships between Christians. While they concentrated on adhering to "works of the law," their lives were characterized by the "works of the flesh," especially in the area of social conflict.

4. **Drunkenness.** Paul concludes his list with two terms that refer to the wild drinking parties held in honor of pagan gods, particularly the god Bacchus. Drunkenness and carousing and orgies were part of pagan culture; they still are. The church itself has never been immune to the deeds of the flesh, because the flesh is oriented toward such behavior. Paul begins and ends his list with the most obvious expressions of the sinful nature.

**Paul gives them a very severe warning** – *I warn you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God* (v. 21). It may come as a shock that Paul is announcing judgment on the basis of works, but that no doubt is exactly what he is doing. Those who “practice” the works of the flesh are denied entrance to the kingdom of God. How can Paul now turn around and declare that judgment will be on the basis of works? when he so vehemently defends justification by faith in Christ, not by works of the law (2:16)? A careful reflection on the flow of Paul's argument will show the consistency of his thought. The evidence that the Galatian believers had really been justified by faith was the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. They had received the Spirit simply by believing the gospel, not by observing the law (cf. 3:1-6). Those who receive the Spirit experience a moral transformation by the directive power of the Spirit (5:16-18). If there was no evidence of moral transformation, then there was no basis for claiming the presence of the Spirit, and hence there was no basis for claiming justification by faith. And if they had not experienced justification by faith, then they would not inherit the kingdom of God.

**To put it in theological language, sanctification is not the basis of justification… but the inevitable result of justification.** Those whom God declares righteous on the basis of their faith in Christ's work for them, God also makes righteous by the work of His Spirit within them. Those whose lives are characterized only by the expressions of the flesh demonstrate that they have not been born of the Spirit – and those who live like that will not inherit the kingdom of God (5:21). It is clear that Paul does not consider freedom in Christ to be freedom from moral obligation. On the contrary, "Christ has set us free — to walk by the Spirit." All who walk (or live) by the Spirit, and are led by the Spirit, reap a great harvest of moral transformation – the fruit of the Spirit.

**Freedom for Moral Transformation (5:22-26)** – *The fruit of the Spirit is the moral character developed by the power of the Spirit in the believer’s life.* The nine character qualities are a unity
of Christ-like character. Paul has expressed his desire to see Christ formed in the Galatians (4:19). Now he describes what they will be like when that formation is complete. These character qualities are not a new list of laws to be kept; they are the result of living and being led by the Spirit. Jesus also taught that the genuineness of His followers would be demonstrated by good fruit from their lives (Mt 7:16-20; Lk 13:6-9), and He promised that the presence of the Spirit and communion with Him would produce the fruit of love and obedience (Jn 14–16). Paul's list of virtues produced by the Spirit provides assurance that those who "walk by the Spirit" will actually fulfill God's requirements for His people – the Spirit will produce the virtues and moral qualities that God requires.

**Love** is first on the list – as such it is given the greatest emphasis. Love is the focus of the entire ethical appeal: "serve one another in love" (v. 13); love fulfills the law (v. 14); love is the expression of faith (v. 6). Love is demonstrated in a tangible way in the sacrificial love of Christ (2:20) and the service of Christians (5:13). All the other virtues on the list define and flow from love.

**Joy** is the result of healthy relationships. When relationships fall apart because of broken commitments, there is a loss of joy (see 4:15). When there is conflict and bitterness, as there was among the Galatians, there is no joy. The first result of true love in relationships is joy.

**Peace** is also the result of relationships built by loving service. Instead of "hatred, strife, jealousy, dissensions, factions" there is harmony and order in relationships. The Greek word for peace literally means "joining together that which has been separated."

**Patience** is the opposite of "outbursts of anger" or a short temper. It is the quality of hanging in there with people even when they constantly wrong us and we are irritated by them.

**Kindness** and **Goodness** are joined with **patience** to teach that a sweet disposition and doing good to people (see v. 10) is the way to hang in there with them in love.

**Faithfulness** is the quality of keeping commitments in relationships. The Galatians had proved to be fickle in their attitude toward Paul (4:13-16). Only the Spirit can produce the quality of loyalty no matter the cost.

**Gentleness** is the opposite of **disputes**. Gentle people are not "conceited, provoking and envying each other" (v. 26). Gentleness is an expression of humility, considering the needs and hurts of others before one's personal goals.

**Self-control** is the opposite of self-indulgence. Those who are Spirit-led will not indulge the flesh (v. 13). They are not characterized by "sexual immorality, impurity, strife, drunkenness, etc." They do not use other people to gratify their own appetites. They have the strength to say no to themselves, and the desires of their sinful flesh.

**"Against such things there is no law" – Gal 5:23**

This list of qualities paints a picture of relationships that are built and nourished by the presence of the Spirit. No wonder Paul says, **against such things there is no law** – here we see Paul again directing his comments to people who want to be under the supervision of law. Paul
assures them that if they are led by the Spirit, they are not under law (v.18), because the Spirit produces all the qualities that fulfill the requirements of the law (vv. 14, 23). There is no rule in all the Law which can be cited against such character qualities. The Spirit-led life is not a life lived against the law; it is a life that fulfills the law. Paul concludes his lists of the deeds of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit with a summary statement about putting to death the flesh (v. 24) and walking by the Spirit (v. 25). The death of the flesh opens the way for the life of the Spirit. The remarkable feature of Paul's statement about the crucifixion of the flesh is the use of the active voice — **those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires** (v.24). Galatians 2:19 and 6:14 say that Christians have been crucified with Christ, but 5:24 says that they themselves have acted to put to death their own flesh (sinful nature). Believers are responsible to crucify their own sinful nature. Since Roman crucifixion was a merciless, painful means of execution, Paul's statement describes an absolute and irreversible renunciation of evil. The past tense points to the time of conversion.

**If this repentance and renunciation of evil is as decisive as crucifixion**, it means that believers have said an absolute, unconditional “no” to all of their sinful desires and passions. Renunciation of evil is a practical everyday discipline. When my flesh (sinful nature) subtly suggests a sinful thought, I shout a defiant “no” to my flesh. When I hear a juicy bit of gossip and start to repeat it, I shut my mouth and say “no” to my flesh. When another Christian criticizes me unfairly and my flesh screams for revenge, I say “no” to my sinful passions. The fact of “warfare against the flesh,” (v. 17), indicates that the flesh (sinful nature) is never fully eradicated in this life; therefore this “no” must be continually renewed. On the other hand, the fact that the execution of the flesh described in verse 24 shows that goal of the war against the flesh is not a negotiated settlement but an unequivocal execution.

**Both the continuous “war against the flesh” and the absolute “execution of the flesh” must be kept in mind if we are to have the full picture.** The **perfectionists** who talk as if the flesh has been or can be totally conquered in this life have lost sight of the need to fight the war every day. The **pessimists** who are halfhearted in battling the flesh because they never expect victory have lost sight of the victory that is ours through active identification with Christ on the cross. The active execution of the **flesh** is followed by an active expression of new life in the **Spirit** — since we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit(v. 25). Paul's combination of an indicative (we live) with an imperative (let us walk) is parallel to the same combination of indicative and imperative in verses 1 and 13. The indicative describes God's gift to us — freedom in Christ and life in the Spirit. The imperative expresses our responsibility — to protect our freedom from slavery under the law, to use our freedom to serve one another in love and to walk by the Spirit. The word walk or keep in step is a military command to make a straight line or to march in ordered rows. The Spirit sets the line and the pace for us to follow. Keeping in step with the Spirit takes active concentration and discipline of the whole person. We constantly see many other paths to follow; we reject them to follow the Spirit; we **constantly** hear other drummers who want to quicken or slow down our pace — we **instantly** tune them out to listen to the Spirit. The believer can’t “entertain or consider” the various alternatives/options – if he does, he’ll fail.
Walking by the Spirit vs. Walking by the Flesh
This is a Sink or Swim Proposition
Galatians 5:16-25

Walking by the Spirit vs. Walking by the Flesh is a “SINK or SWIM” proposition – Either you walk by the Spirit and overcome, or you walk by the flesh and sink in a sea of misery (the emphasis here is on “misery;” failing spiritually is no joyful experience – it is a miserable experience). So walking by the Spirit is a “sink or swim” proposition; contrary to popular opinion, there is “no middle ground,” and “no middle option.” Believers who walk according to the flesh will live miserably. Period. No peace. No joy. No love. No self-control – because these virtues are only produced in us by the Holy Spirit when we walk in obedience to His leading.

The Spirit won’t let you rest in sin and mediocrity – David knew the “heavy hand” of the Lord on his life when he tried to live without dealing with sin issues in his life. He writes in Psalm 32:3-4, “When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; and my vitality was drained away as with the fever-heat of summer.”

Know the experience? It’s a miserable one. God then goes on to tell David in Psalm 32:8-9, “I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you. Do not be like the horse or the mule which has no understanding – God is giving understanding to you right now! Are you listening? – whose trappings include a bit and a bridle to keep them in check.” God doesn’t just leave us “alone” when we live in darkness – He chastens us to bring us to our senses – if we stubbornly resist, He puts a bit and a bridle on us to move us in the direction He wants us to go. By the way, if you’re living in sin and you’re not being disciplined by the Lord, you’re not God’s child (Heb 12:8).

God chastens us because He loves us – He doesn’t chasten us to punish us. God’s motivation is to bring correction to our lives, not to get even for wrongs done. The author of Heb 12:6 writes, “Those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.” His discipline amounts to training in righteousness. “All His training seems sorrowful, not joyful – yet to those who are trained by it, it ultimately yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (Heb 12:11). Either we can choose to cooperate with God throughout the process of being transformed into the likeness of His Son, or we can become belligerent like a mule which has no sense. The apostle Paul wrote in Phil 2:12-13, “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; but work with the realization that God is also at work in you, to will and to work for His good pleasure.” In the first chapter Paul wrote, “I am confident of this very thing that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:6). Let there be no mistake about it – God is at work in you, and He isn’t going to abandon you or give up on you no matter how obstinate and stubborn you might become. God isn’t going to let you ruin your life! That’s “good news!” He’s going to see it all through to the end – one way or the other! Either we learn the “easiest way” (admittedly, it is not a cakewalk), or we learn the “hardest way” (this is a tough road).

Read these passages: Ps 100:3; 103:3, 10-14; 119:75; 136:1; 138:8; Prv 3:12; Mt 16:24-26; Heb 13:5.

What does this mean in practice? Paul gives a general but practical application to the Galatian churches – let us not become boastful, challenging and envying one another (v. 26). This verse and verse 15 clearly indicate that the community life of the Galatian churches had been torn apart by pride, which caused them to challenge and envy each other. In their concentration on keeping the law, they had become very competitive in their spiritual life, attempting to outdo each other. Some were so sure of their spiritual superiority that they wanted to prove it in a contest, so they would challenge each other. Others felt spiritually inferior and resented those who made them feel that way. Both attitudes were caused by pride that could not tolerate rivals. C. S. Lewis says that the devil laughs when he sees us overcome by pride – “He is perfectly content to see you
becoming chaste and brave and self-controlled provided, all the time, he is setting up in you the Dictatorship of Pride – just as he would be quite content to see your problems cured if he was allowed, in return, to give you spiritual cancer. Pride is spiritual cancer – it eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or even common sense" (Lewis 1943:45). The only treatment for the cancer of pride is radical surgery – we must crucify the pride of our sinful nature (flesh) and be led by the Spirit, who alone has the power to overthrow the dictatorship of pride.

**Freedom to Full Responsibilities (6:1-10)** – So where do we go from here? What practical steps can we take to resolve this crisis? Paul at this point spells out specific responsibilities for those who are led by the Spirit so that they can rebuild their broken relationships. The responsibilities of *those who are spiritual* (v. 1) are directly related to the problem of division in the Galatian churches. We have already noted that when Paul describes the problem in the churches, he speaks of "biting and devouring each other" (5:15) and "provoking and envying each other" (5:26). The false teachers' campaign to force all the Gentile believers to become Jews would have divided the churches into hostile groups – the Jewish Christians who zealously campaigned for the necessity of circumcision and observance of the Mosaic law, the Gentile believers who zealously pursued the goal of living like Jews, and the Gentile believers who were not willing or able to live by the Mosaic law. Paul's list of responsibilities in this section shows how those who are truly led by the Spirit can bring healing and unity in their divided churches. The responsibilities include the believers' corporate responsibilities to one another and the individual believer's personal accountability before God. Our public care for one another must be matched by integrity in our private walk before God. Note how corporate responsibilities and individual accountability are woven together in this section:

1. **Corporate:** restore him gently (v.1)
2. **Individual:** look at yourself (v.1)
3. **Corporate:** bear one other's burdens (v.2)
4. **Individual:** examine your own actions . . . bear your own load (v.4)
5. **Corporate:** share all good things with your teachers (v.6)
6. **Individual:** do not be deceived . . . a man reaps what he sows (v.7)
7. **Corporate:** do good to all people, especially those who are believers (v.10)

**Restoring Sinners, Examining Yourself (6:1)** – The first responsibility of those who are spiritual is the restoration of one who has sinned. Paul's conditional clause, *if someone is caught in a sin*, is framed in such a way as to point to the high probability that members of the church will sin. Sin in the church is not a hypothetical possibility, it is a reality. Paul and his readers both knew of believers in the church who had been trapped by sin. The kind of sin in view here is not specified by Paul. It could be any one of the "acts of the sinful nature" (5:19-21). Paul is more concerned about the manner in which sinners in the church are treated than in the sin itself. Moral failure in the church should not be a surprise, nor should it be considered fatal to the life of the church. What is important is the church's response when such failure occurs. If the church may responds with harsh condemnation under the law, that kind of response will crush the sinner and divide the church. That seems to have been what was happening in the churches in Galatia. The zealots for the law were merciless to sinners. Paul wants to show that the occasion of sin is the opportunity for Spirit-led people to display the fruit of the Spirit in order to bring healing to the sinner and unity in the church.
**In order to bring healing to the sinner, we must have a compassionate view of the sinner.**

Paul views the sinner as one who is caught in a sin. When a person sins, other people are victims of that sin as well. Nevertheless, we must remember that sinners themselves are also in a sense victims of sin. Paul is not excusing the sinner of personal responsibility, but he is recognizing the terrible captivating force of sin. Just as Jesus said, "Everyone who sins is a slave to sin" (Jn 8:34), so now Paul says that the one who sins is trapped by sin. When we view moral offenders as those who are enslaved and entrapped, we have a compassionate attitude toward them. We will want to help them break the bondage of sin over their life. Paul appeals to those who are spiritual to help the one who is caught in a sin. The spiritual are not some elite leadership group of spiritual giants. All of those whom Paul addresses in 6:1 as brothers are spiritual, so Paul is calling on all who have believed the true gospel and received the Spirit to be actively engaged in the ministry of restoration. One way to "walk by the Spirit" (5:25) is to restore one who has been trapped in sin.

**Paul's directive to the spiritual is to “restore” the sinner.** The verb restore could be used in physical or material contexts to signify resetting a broken bone or mending a torn net (see Mt 4:21; Mk 1:19). In spiritual contexts it meant perfecting in spiritual maturity and equipping for service (2 Cor 13:11; Eph 4:12; 1 Thess 3:10; Heb 13:21). In 1 Corinthians 1:10 Paul uses the same verb to express his desire that the divided church in Corinth "be perfectly united" – the church had been broken and torn by divisions; it needed to be reset as a physician would reset broken bones and mended as a fisherman would repair torn nets. Here in Galatians 6:1 the verb restore calls for spiritual therapy so that a broken member of the body can once again work properly and perform its vital functions for the benefit of the whole body. As long as any member of the body is broken, the whole body suffers. If the broken member of the body is amputated, the whole body suffers the loss. What is needed is restoration. The goal is the recovery of Christian brothers and sisters who have sinned so that the whole body will be healthy and productive again.

**Paul specifies the manner of restoration – restore him gently.** "Gentleness" is one aspect of the fruit of the Spirit (5:23). Gentleness is not weakness; it is great strength under control—the emotions of the gentle person are under control, and the will of the gentle person is devoted to loving the sinner all the way to total recovery. Only the Holy Spirit can empower a person to respond in such a way. Gentleness not only considers the needs of other, but also humbly recognizes one's own needs before God. So Paul moves from his command for restoration in the plural form, addressed to the corporate body, to a command for self-examination in the singular form (to the individual) – look at yourself. Close observation of the inner life is necessary because everyone is vulnerable to temptation – you too may be tempted. Awareness of my own vulnerability to moral failure not only puts me on guard against temptation, but also enables me to respond with a spirit of gentleness to someone trapped in sin. Those who are led by the Spirit are aware that they are "only sinners saved by grace." All their responses to other sinners are guided by the personal insight of their own weakness and their total dependence on the redemptive love of God.

**Carrying Burdens (6:2)** – Paul turns again to the corporate responsibility of all Spirit-led believers: Bear one another's burdens. To "serve one another in love" (5:13) means to bear each other's burdens. After all, bearing burdens is the work of servants. The term burdens can refer to all kinds of issues—physical, emotional, mental, moral, spiritual, financial, cancer, illness, or the results of divorce. The list of burdens crushing fellow Christians goes on ad infinitum. No doubt the command to carry each
other's burdens covers every conceivable kind of burden and calls for us to be sensitive enough to perceive even the unseen burdens that our brothers and sisters try to hide. Without condoning the sin, we need to walk with them through their emotional turmoil and constantly reassure them that we do not reject them and that God does not reject them. We can demonstrate a loving acceptance not only through a warm, affectionate attitude toward them, but by getting involved in their lives. When we bear another's burden in this way, we thus fulfill the law of Christ (v. 2).

**Paul's reference to the “law of Christ”** here establishes a striking contrast between fulfilling the law of Christ – the royal law of love (Jam 2:8) – and keeping the law of Moses. Preoccupation with keeping the Mosaic law will only result in breaking the central commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself." Serving sinners in the church, not separating sinners from the church, is the way to fulfill the law of Christ. The law of Christ is the love commandment – "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12). Jesus loved sinners and gave himself for them (Gal 2:20); He bore the terrible burden of the law's curse against them (3:13). Hence all who are united with Christ and are led by the Spirit will also fulfill the high standard of love established by the life, death and resurrection of Christ – like Jesus, they will love sinners and carry their burdens; and thus fulfill the law of Christ.

**Evaluating Your Work (6:3-5)** – Paul turns back again to the need for personal evaluation; self-evaluation is necessary since there is always the danger of self-deception (v. 3). Personal evaluation must be made on the basis of a careful examination of one's own work, not on the basis of comparison with others (v. 4). Personal evaluation should clarify one's God-given mission in life (v. 5). The warning against self-deception (v. 3) enlarges upon the warning against conceit (5:26) and temptation (6:1). The most serious spiritual danger of all is the self-delusion of pride – someone who thinks he is something when he is nothing. In the immediate context, Paul's rebuke must be aimed at those who thought so highly of their own status that they were unwilling to take the role of servants to carry the burdens of others. The Jewish Christian law teachers were so impressed with the importance of their mission of imposing the Mosaic law on Gentile believers that they had no time or interest to bear the sin-burdens of "Gentile sinners" who had come to Christ. The Gentile Christians were so intent on coming under the yoke of the law to establish their status as full members of the favored Jewish people that they did not lift a finger to help carry the burdens of their fellow Christians. Such is the result of trying to live by the law – it is a cruel taskmaster.

**These zealots' pride in the law kept them from serving one another in love** – thinking that they were something, they were in fact nothing. Remember Paul's words to the Corinthians – "if I have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor 13:2). Instead of loving one another, these zealots for the law were challenging and provoking one another (5:26). Their arrogance caused them to react in angry condemnation toward those who sinned, rather than to help restore sinners by carrying their burdens. No wonder then that Paul interweaves this warning against the self-delusion of pride with his call to service. Only those who are freed from delusions of their own importance will be able to serve others in love. The only way to prevent self-deception is to examine the value of one's own work (v. 4). As the jeweler examines a precious stone under a magnifying glass in very bright light to determine its worth, so each Christian should scrutinize his or her actions to determine their true worth before God. The standard used for this evaluation is the law of Christ – the love of Christ expressed in His life and death and produced by His Spirit. Paul has already said, "the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (5:6). Therefore, to
examine one's work is to evaluate whether one's faith in Christ is expressing itself in Christ-like actions of love – "then he will have a reason for boasting in himself and not by comparison with someone else" (v.4). Paul here is contrasting two kinds of boasting – law advocates boast about their flesh. Paul says, “May I boast in nothing except the cross of Christ” (vv.13-14). Paul boasted in the cross because the cross was the ultimate display of the love of God for sinners. When we are united with Christ in His death and resurrection, the love of God for sinners can be expressed through us by the power of the Spirit. And that is the reason for Christians to boast! When the self-sacrificing love of Christ is seen in the actions of Christians, there is reason for boasting.

When we engage in this kind of self-evaluation, we are renewed in our commitment to our own God-given mission – each of us should bear our own load (v. 5). We’ve all been called by God to carry our own load. There is no contradiction here with verse 2 – Paul uses two different Greek words to make a clear distinction between the burden (baros) and the load (phortion). Though these two words are basically synonymous in other contexts, the change of nouns in this context indicates a change of reference. Verse 2 refers to the need to come to the aid of others who cannot carry the crushing burden of the consequences of their sin. Verse 5 refers to work given to us by our Master, before whom we will have to give an account of how we used the opportunities and talents He gave us to serve Him. It is because we desire to fulfill our God-given mission in life that we learn how to carry the burdens of others. In other words, as Christians examine their actions to see if they reflect the love of Christ, they are at the same time led by that self-evaluation to consider how to serve others in love.

Supporting Teachers of the Word (6:6) – Paul’s challenge to fulfill one’s God-given mission in life (carry one’s own load) is now balanced by a recognition that some who are fulfilling their God-given mission in the church by teaching the Word need special support from the whole church – anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with him who teaches (v. 6). Here we see an extremely practical application of the fruit of the Spirit. The love empowered by the Spirit is expressed in sharing good things with our teachers. Christian growth is dependent on sound biblical teaching. Paul’s guideline to support teachers indicates that Christian teaching was a full-time occupation that precluded the opportunity to earn money in some other profession. He thought that teachers in the church should work hard at their job of teaching and be well paid for it (1 Cor 9:14; 1 Tim 5:17). Paul obviously placed great importance and value on the work of teaching God’s Word. It is the basis for strong churches and healthy Christians. The command must share is a translation of the Greek word koinonia – which is frequently translated "fellowship" or "partnership." Undoubtedly Paul was encouraging this kind of partnership in the Word. If the churches were to be united and strong again, there had to be a full-time teaching ministry in the church. Gifted teachers needed to devote themselves to an accurate interpretation and application of the "truth of the gospel." In order for them to do that, they needed to receive enthusiastic, generous support for their work of teaching. The same is true today.

Reaping What You Sow (6:7-8) – The responsibilities listed so far present two opposite ways of life – the way of the Spirit and the way of the flesh. Now comes the hour of decision – his readers must consider very carefully the consequences of choosing one way or the other. They cannot drift; they cannot remain neutral; they must decide whether they are going to walk by the Spirit or gratify the desires of their flesh. Since each individual must decide for himself or herself which way to live, Paul puts his challenge in a singular form. Paul introduces his call for decision with a solemn warning based on an agricultural principle – Do not be deceived; God is not mocked; for whatever a man
When people think and act as if they will not reap what they have sown, or as if they will reap something different from what they have sown, they are deceiving themselves and mocking God. Since the inexorable law of reaping what is sown has always been proved true, the proverbial statement of warning God is not mocked is also true – no one can mock God and get away with it. Those who think otherwise will one day reap the work of their folly.

The prophet Jeremiah said, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure" (cf. Jer 17:9). Our capacity for self-deception is frightening. It is amazing how blind otherwise brilliant people can be to their own spiritual direction in life. In fact, the more brilliant people are, the more skilled they are at developing rationalizations to deceive themselves and to hide from God. The story of Adam and Eve's hiding from God behind their skimpy clothes and even skimpier excuses is our common human experience. Paul's warning needs to be heard, and to be heard often, to warn us against our most brilliant self-delusions. Paul writes – The one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life (v. 8). Here we are faced with a decision that determines our destiny. We are not victims of fate, bad luck, or even predestination. Our destiny is determined by the choice we make – shall we sow to the flesh or to the Spirit? Pay heed to the old proverb – "Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny."

Sowing to please the “flesh” will always result in a harvest of destruction, a destruction of relationships with others and with God. Sowing to please the Spirit means "serving one another in love" (5:13), restoring one who has been caught in sin (6:1), bearing the burdens of others (6:2), giving generously to those who teach in the church (6:6), and doing good to others (6:9). Sowing to the Spirit cannot be done in isolation or separation from others. Bearing the burdens of others requires in-depth participation in their pain and sorrow. If sowing to the flesh means selfish indulgence, sowing to the Spirit means selfless service. Those who continue to grow in these relationships by the power of the Spirit will ultimately experience the fullness of eternal life – perfect harmony in relationship with God and others.

Doing Good (6:9-10) – Growth in relationships does not happen automatically; growth takes effort. Furthermore, hard work is required if broken relationships are to be rebuilt. In these two verses Paul simply encourages Christians to keep on working at building their relationships – do not lose heart in doing good (v. 9). Although Paul warned against relying on the works of the law as the basis of blessing (3:10-14), he clearly taught that true faith expresses itself through love (5:6), in the hard work of serving one another (5:13), and in bearing one another’s burdens (6:2). One of the greatest obstacles to rebuilding broken relationships is simply fatigue. We can easily lose heart and run out of strength when we come up against the same problems over and over again as we deal with others. Even Paul sounds discouraged when he talks about his efforts to rebuild his relationship with the Galatian believers – "I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored in vain over you" (4:11). Obviously, fatigue and discouragement might cause Christians to throw in the servant's towel and quit, so he presents two incentives to keep us from giving up when we grow weary of serving others in love.

First, he assures us of a reward for doing good – for in due time we shall reap if we do not give up (v. 9). Sometimes the harvest is experienced in this life; sometimes it is not. We must remember that reaping a harvest almost never happens on the same day as sowing the seed. We may not even see a harvest in this life from what we have sown. Nevertheless, we must never
give up, because we know that in due time our Master will return and reward those who have been faithful servants. Second, he motivates us to persevere in serving one another by reminding us that we are part of one family – so while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially to those who belong to the household of faith (v. 10). Although there are no limits placed on our service to all people, our priority is certainly to serve the family of believers. Since we belong to Christ, we are all brothers and sisters and belong to His family.

Summary and Benedictions (6:11-18) – Careful studies of thousands of letters written in Paul's day have led to the discovery that most of the letters exhibit two styles of handwriting – it was common practice that the main body of a letter was written by dictation to secretaries, and then the author would personally write only a few lines at the conclusion of the letter. Usually these concluding lines in the author's own hand summarized the cardinal points of the letter. Evidently the author's summary of the main points served not only to verify that he had actually made those points in his dictation to his secretary, but also to underline the points he wanted his readers to remember. For this reason the conclusion of a letter often provided important interpretive clues to the entire letter.

We see this common practice of letter writing in Paul's letter to the Galatians. At verse 11 he indicates that he has taken up the pen to conclude the letter – see what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand! Some have suggested that he wrote with large letters because he had poor eyesight – such a conjecture has little evidence to support it. Perhaps Paul wrote his conclusion in large letters because he wanted to emphasize to his readers the importance of the main points of the letter in his concluding summary. In our day we might draw attention through boldface type or double underlining of the main points. The main points to which Paul draws attention in his conclusion are points of contrast between himself and the false teachers who have misled the Galatian churches. To clarify these points of contrast, Paul first summarizes the position of the false teachers, the way of the world (vv. 12-13), his own position, and the way of the cross (vv. 14-15). He concludes with a peace benediction (v.16), a final statement of his authority (v.17), and a grace benediction (v.18).

The Position of the False Teachers – the Way of the World (6:12-13) – Paul's character sketch of the false teachers in these two verses is the clearest picture we have of them in the entire letter. Paul outlines three motives behind their mission to the Galatian churches – First, they are motivated by an obsession with outward uniformity – those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh (i.e., make a good impression outwardly) try to compel you to be circumcised (v. 12). Their emphasis on circumcision proved that their number one concern was to make everyone look the same outwardly (literally "in the flesh"). Although many Gentiles in Paul's day viewed circumcision as a barbarous custom, for the Jews it was the mark of belonging to the covenant people of God. Some teachers in our churches have also been so totally preoccupied by the "circumcision" (cutting away) of certain external practices (like smoking, drinking, dancing), that they almost seem unconcerned with inward change; focusing on good outward behaviors often conceals proud, unrepentant hearts.

The second motive Paul sees in the false teachers is a concern for their own personal safety: The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ (v. 12). If Jewish Christians associated with Gentile Christians simply on the basis of their common belief that the cross of Christ is the only way of salvation, then they would be condemned by zealous Jews for negating the central Jewish teaching that only faithful, law-abiding Jews were included in the covenant of salvation. But if the Jewish Christians required the Gentile Christians to live as faithful Jews live, by getting circumcised and observing sabbath regulations and dietary laws,
then their zealous Jewish friends would compliment rather than condemn them for their association with Gentiles. For then it would be obvious that what really mattered to them was not their belief in a crucified Messiah, but identification with the Jewish people.

**The third motive behind their circumcision campaign was pride in their national identity:** Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh (v. 13). They were not really interested in the moral or spiritual transformation of the Galatian believers, because their own inconsistency in following the law demonstrated that devotion to the law was not their basic motivation. What they were really interested in was being able to boast to fellow Jews that they were good Jews – "Look at all the Gentiles we have circumcised and brought into the Jewish nation," they boasted. They sought to earn credit with the Jews by proselytizing the Gentile Christians and forcing them to live like Jews. So what was most important to them was not encouraging the spiritual growth of others, but maintaining their own national identity as zealous Jews. Furthermore, because they were driven by their nationalistic pride, they were breaking the central command of the law – "Love your neighbor as yourself."

**The Position of Paul – the Way of the Cross (6:14-15)** – In contrast to the prideful boasting of the false teachers, Paul reaffirms his own commitment to the cross of Christ (v. 14) and the new creation in Christ (v. 15). All prideful boasting is excluded by the cross of Christ, because identification with Christ in His death on the cross results in the death of all reasons for such boasting – *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world* (6:14). The world is characterized by prideful boasting about national identity, social status and religious practices. When we live in the world, our lives will inevitably be characterized by such shallow boasting. But when we die to the flesh, the way of the world will no longer govern our lives. Our belief in the cross of Christ includes not only the realization that He died for us to rescue us from judgment under the law of God, but also the constant awareness that we must reckon ourselves to have died with Him (cf. Rom 6:2-11; Gal 2:20). Our participation in Christ's death means we no longer have any reason for boasting in ourselves, since the old self which is characterized by the values of the world is dead. This absolute renunciation of all prideful boasting because of total identification with the crucified Messiah is the aspiration of every true believer.

**Belief in Christ leads not only to death but also to life:** *Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything – what counts is a new creation.* The reality of life in this new creation has been a major theme of the entire letter. We have a new relationship with God – we are no longer slaves; we are His children, and are free to address Him by the Spirit as *Abba Father* (4:6). We have a new relationship with one another – we are no longer imprisoned and divided by racial, social or gender barriers; we are now free and one in Christ (3:28). The gospel was the rule for Paul's life; it determined both the spiritual and the social dimensions of his life. No longer did he relate to God or to others on the basis of his Jewish identity, but on the basis of his union with Christ in His death and resurrection.

**The Benediction of Peace (6:16)** – Paul closes his letter with a benediction – *Peace and mercy be upon all of you who walk by this rule* (v. 16). Throughout the entire letter Paul has appealed to the gospel as the rule to follow in our relationship with God and with one another. *All who follow this rule* of the gospel will certainly experience peace and mercy in their relationship with God and in
their relationships with others. And all who have experienced the gospel work of peace will express the same compassion to others that they have received from God through Christ (cf. Rom 5:5; 2 Cor 1:4; 1 Jn 4:7, 11, 19). Paul's reference to the Israel of God appears to be a title for the Galatian believers. By giving this title to the Galatian Christians, he is able to summarize his major arguments that they are indeed the true children of Abraham (3:6-29), the children of the free woman, just as Isaac was (4:21-31). The false teachers were claiming that only those who followed the law belonged to Israel. Now Paul proclaims that all those who follow the gospel are the true Israel of God.

**The Authority of Paul (6:17)** – After the benediction on all believers, Paul adds a warning directed against those who have been causing trouble in the churches. Paul takes their attack on the churches personally and gives the basis of his authority for stopping their attack – *from now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus* (v. 17). The marks on Paul's body were the scars caused by his sufferings as an apostle of Christ. These marks demonstrated his unswerving loyalty to the gospel of Christ. While the false teachers were preoccupied with the mark left by the ritual of circumcision, Paul drew attention to the marks left by the reality of serving Christ. Such a proof of devotion to Christ should silence all critics.

**The Benediction of Grace (6:18)** – Paul’s final benediction sums up the message of the letter – *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren.* The unmerited favor and grace of Jesus Christ experienced in the spirit makes all believers true brothers and sisters in the family of God.