



Escape from
BONDAGE



ROGER E. DICKSON

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A Narrative Commentary Of Galatians

Roger E. Dickson

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INTRODUCTION

God created man with a desire to seek after Him. He “*made of one man all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, so that they should seek the Lord*” (At 17:26,27). We are spiritual beings, seeking God who is above our mortal creation. In our seeking, and without revelation, we will create a god after our own imagination. We will thus bring themselves into the bondage of our own created religiosity. No civilization has been found throughout the world that did not have some practice of religion, and some belief in either spirits or gods. But without revelation from the one true and living God, men will bring themselves into the bondage of their own religiosity.

Even when God does reveal His will to man, we are traditional beings we will almost always add to the word of God our countless traditions. We will blend God’s word with our traditions and come up with a bondage of religiosity by which we divide ourselves from one another. In writing to religious Gentiles who became Christians, and yet were looking back to those ordinances of men from which they had been delivered by their obedience to the gospel, Paul asked, “*Therefore, if you died with Christ from the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourselves to ordinances?*” (Cl 2:20). So why do we submit ourselves to our man-made religious ordinances? Such “*things have indeed a show of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and neglect of the body, but not in any value in restraining the indulgence of the flesh*” (Cl 2:23).

The letter to the Galatians was possibly the first inspired document to be written to the early Christians. It was sternly written as a letter of rebuke to those who had been delivered from the bondage of the religiosity of men. Nevertheless, they were seeking to return to a legal system of justifying themselves before God by performance of commandments and meritorious works. After their initial conversion, the Galatian Christians were being influenced to return to a practice of religiosity that demanded perfect keeping of law. It was a religiosity that focused on man’s performance of law, and thus, they were minimizing the grace of God. This is Paul’s defence of the sufficiency of God’s grace. It is his urgent appeal that the Galatians not become entangled again in a religiosity that focused on the perfect performance of man in order to justify oneself before God, for law was never given as a system of salvation. It was not simply because no man can keep law perfectly. All have sinned. And no man can do good works to atone for one sin. Salvation is thus by our faith in God’s grace to bring us into eternity regardless of our inability to keep law perfectly.

EXCAPE FROM BONDAGE

Chapter 1

GREETINGS FROM PAUL

Paul reminded the Galatians that he was a Christ-sent apostle. He was not sent out by men, nor did his apostleship exist because of his desire to remain in fellowship with those who recruited disciples for their own selfish reasons. He was called directly by Jesus Christ on a Damascus road and by God the Father. His calling was thus mandated by God who raised Jesus from the dead.¹ The letter he writes was also coming from all those brethren who were with him at the time of writing. It was addressed to all the assemblies of the disciples throughout the region of Galatia.²

The letter came with his wishes that God's eternal favor be with them, which favor would result in their peace of mind because God's grace had been poured out on them for their spiritual well-being.³ God's grace was manifested through Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross. It was Jesus who gave Himself for our sins, for no sacrifice of animals could ever atone for the sins of man. Therefore, Jesus became our atoning sacrifice in order to deliver us from the evil of this present world. Jesus' death was not an accident because the Jews had rejected Him. The atoning sacrifice of the cross was according to the eternal plan of God to bring believers into a covenant relationship with Him. The Jews had sought an earthly king, but Jesus came as a saving King who would reign from heaven.⁴ Because God took the initiative to save us from our eternal doom because of our sins, all glory must go to Him, not only in this time, but throughout eternity. When all Christians finally come into an eternal dwelling with Jesus, then they will fully understand the blessing of salvation that came through Jesus.⁵

Chapter 1

Greetings

1 ¶ Paul, an apostle—not from men nor by man, but^a by Jesus Christ and God the Father, ^bwho raised Him from the dead—

2 and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia.

3 ¶ Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ,

4 ^cwho gave Himself for our sins so that He might deliver us ^dfrom this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,

5 to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

Chapter 1: At 9:6 b At 2:24
c Mt 20:28 d Hb 2:5

THE OTHER GOSPEL

As one would be amazed at the occurrence of a miracle, so Paul was amazed that the Galatian disciples were so quickly turning away from the freedom that they received when they obeyed the gospel. Their initial joy for freedom from the bondage of the legalistic religions of men was fading as they were being tempted to return to a system of meritorious righteousness.⁶ They continued to believe the gospel of the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope. However, the grace that was revealed through the cross and resurrection was being subsidized by other requirements for salvation, specifically, works of the Old Testament law as circumcision. Some were binding on them things that were not bound by God, and thus making requirements for salvation that God had not made. This constituted another gospel that was being preached among the Galatians. Since they had formerly found confidence and joy in the gospel of freedom that Paul had initially preached to them, those who were adding further requirements for salvation were troubling the Galatians. Those who trouble the disciples are those who add requirements for salvation that God never required. What these teachers were actually doing was twisting, or perverting the simple gospel that Paul had preached. Their preaching of other requirements for salvation other than obedience to the gospel was a perversion of the gospel.⁷ At the time the Galatians had heard the gospel, Paul said that there were no more requirements for salvation than their simple obedience to the gospel and faithfulness to their commitment to serve God. Therefore, even if an angel came after him and preached other requirements for salvation, that angel must be rejected. Paul says that that angel who would preach another requirement for salvation is accursed, or destroyed from the presence of God.⁸ Paul is emphatic in these statements. He goes

The Other Gospel

6 ¶ I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away ^efrom Him who called you into the grace of Christ to another gospel,

7 ^fwhich is not another, but there are some ^gwho are disturbing you and want to ^hpervert the gospel of Christ.

8 But even if ⁱwe or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

e Gl 1:15; 5:8 f 2 Co 11:4 g Gl 5:10,12 h 2 Co 2:17

beyond angels to anyone who might come and preach another gospel other than the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope. Obedience to this gospel was by immersion into the death, burial and resurrection of the gospel. If anyone would preach less of this truth of the gospel, then he is not preaching the gospel. If anyone would preach more, then he is preaching another gospel. If one would do such, then he is under the condemnation of God. Paul had known that there would be others who would come after him and preach other gospels. His admonition was thus based on warnings that he had proclaimed to them while he was yet in the regions of Galatia.⁹ The accusation had been made against Paul that he was preaching in order to remain in favor with men. They accused him of such, assuming that he did so in order to remain in favor with men. Since all men have the desire to be accepted by others, instead of being persecuted, some among the Galatian disciples assumed that Paul was no different. But if he were still pleasing men as in his former days before he crucified himself with Christ, then he would not be preaching the gospel that brought hardship in his life. Those who would be bondservants of Christ, therefore, must not allow their desire to be accepted by others to turn them from preaching the truth of the gospel to preaching twisted versions of the gospel.¹⁰

DIRECT REVELATION FROM GOD

Paul preached the good news of the revelation of God's grace that was revealed through the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope. He preached this message throughout the regions of Galatia. However, he wanted the Galatians to understand that the message he preached was not the invention of men.¹¹ It came to him by direct revelation from God. Therefore, the gospel was not

9 As we said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

10 For ^kdo I now ^lpersuade men or God? Or ^mdo I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be the bondservant of Christ.

Revelation from God

11 ¶ But ⁿI want you to know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man.

i 1 Co 16:22 j Dt 4:2 k 1 Th 2:4 l 1 Sm 24:7 m 1 Th 2:4 n 1 Co 15:1

passed on to him as a teaching that came from his Jewish heritage. He did not go to a Bible school to learn it.¹² It came to him directly from God. It came by revelation, and was preached and written by inspiration. We are reassured, therefore, that we can believe the message to be true because it did not originate from men.

In his former days of persecuting the church, the antagonism of Paul against the church was well known throughout the world of Judaism. His former religion was the Jews' religion, for it was the Old Testament law that was combined with countless Jewish religious traditions. As a former Jewish religious leader, he, as well as his fellow religious leaders, had developed their own religiosity. Though this religiosity was based on the traditions of the Jews, with the added beliefs of Jewish tradition, Paul wanted his readers to understand that his former religion (Judaism) was not from God. Judaism, therefore, was the Jew's religion, not a faith that came from God. The vast majority of the Jews failed to see the fulfillment of the prophecies in the coming of Jesus as the Messiah. For this reason, Paul and the Jewish religious leaders initially poured out great persecution against the disciples in Judea, for they thought that Christianity was a breakaway sect of Judaism. In his efforts to promote the Jew's religion, Paul zealously took every opportunity to destroy the church.¹³ Paul's legal approach to the Jews' religion (Judaism) was carried out in his zeal to work against anyone who worked contrary to what he believed. He had studied the oral and written traditions of Judaism, advancing above his fellow students of the religion. His zeal was in protecting his religious heritage, the traditional religion of the Jews. Because of his great respect for his religious heritage, he was zealous to persecute anyone who worked against his Jewish heritage. He was thus blinded by his heritage because he

12 For ^oI neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but *I received it* ^pthrough the revelation of Jesus Christ.

13 ¶ For you have heard of my behavior in the past in Judaism, how beyond measure ^qI persecuted the church of God and *'tried to destroy it.*

14 And I advanced in Judaism above many of my contemporaries in my own nation, ^rbeing more extremely zealous ^sfor my ancestral traditions.

^o 1 Co 15:1 ^p Ep 3:3-5 ^q At 9:1 ^r At 8:3; 22:4,5 ^s At 26:9
^t Jr 9:14

could not see in Jesus the fulfillment of prophecy concerning the Messiah.¹⁴

God allowed Paul to persecute the church. It was a time in the history of the church when the early believers needed to have a faith that was tested by fire. Persecution thus grew the faith of the early disciples. But God knew what He would eventually do with Paul, even before Paul was born.¹⁵ Paul was being used by God to strengthen the faith of the disciples through his persecution of the church. At the time Paul persecuted the church, he reasoned that he was working against an apostasy from his Jewish heritage, a heritage he assumed was from God. Though he was working against God's work through the church, he was actually working for God to strengthen the church. But when the time came for God to use Paul for the defense of Christianity, Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus road. His call, therefore, was by grace, not because he had earned the calling. His argument to the Galatians was that he was not called by man, but by God. He was so far away from God's work through His church that only God could call him to his destiny. His calling, therefore, was by grace because of the behavior of his life in persecuting the church of God. Thus Jesus personally revealed Himself to Paul for a special purpose, that is, that Paul be a special witness to preach the gospel of grace to the Gentiles. However, when he was called on the Damascus road, Paul did not seek the instruction of men concerning the gospel that was revealed to him.¹⁶ He did not go to Jerusalem where the gospel was first preached. Instead, he went to the deserts of Arabia. Because he was so entrenched in his convictions for Judaism, he needed time alone in order to mentally reconcile the revelation of the gospel with his Jewish religiosity that had twisted the prophecies concerning the Messiah. Arabia was thus a time for reflection. He possibly

15 ¶ But when it pleased God, ^uwho separated me from my mother's womb and called *me* through His grace,
16 ^vto reveal His Son in me so that ^wI might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with ^xflesh and blood,
17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me. But I went to Arabia and returned again to Damascus.

^u Is 49:1,5 ^v 2 Co 4:5-7 ^w At 9:15 ^x Mt 16:17

spent a long period of time in Arabia before he returned again to Damascus where he had first obeyed the gospel.¹⁷

When Paul returned to Damascus, he went to work preaching the gospel. However, it was not long before the Jews rose up in persecution against him. Though he was formerly their champion in persecuting those who believed in Jesus, he was now their enemy because he preached Jesus. After escaping the Jews by being let down in a basket over the wall of the city of Damascus, Paul returned to Jerusalem. We can only imagine the surprise of Peter when Paul knocked on his door. It would have been great to have sat in on their conversation for the fifteen days that Paul remained in Jerusalem.¹⁸

As Paul continued his historical argument to the Galatians, he wanted them to remember that he preached the gospel first in Damascus even before he stayed with Peter for fifteen days. His stay with Peter, therefore, was not for the purpose of being instructed in the gospel, but to let Peter know that they were both on the same page concerning the grace of God. When in Jerusalem, Paul did not see any of the other church-sent apostles. He saw only James, the brother of Jesus. At this time in history, James was a prominent leader of the church in Jerusalem, and was known as such throughout the world.¹⁹ That which caused him persecution in Damascus, the preaching of the gospel, was known by Paul before he saw either Peter or James. The brothers in Damascus could confirm this truth, and thus, Paul reassured his readers that he was not fabricating a lie.²⁰

After his visit to Jerusalem, Paul went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. He thus went back home to Tarsus of Cilicia, possibly to teach his family what had been revealed to him.²¹ Before Barnabas brought him to Antioch of Syria, he was possibly in the regions of Syria and Cilicia

18 ¶ Then after three years ¶ I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and stayed with him fifteen days.

19 But ¶ I saw none of the other apostles except ^aJames, the Lord's brother.

20 (Now the things that I write to you, I affirm before God that I do not lie.)

21 ^bAfterward, I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

y At 9:26 z 1 Co 9:5 a Mt 13:55 b At 9:30

for five years, during which time he made no trips to Judea in order to be known by the brothers of Judea. After his obedience to the gospel, therefore, he spent only fifteen days in Jerusalem, and then went on to Syria and Cilicia. He was thus not schooled in the faith by anyone in Jerusalem. He was not sent out by the churches of Judea, for they did not know him.²² The only thing they knew about him was that he had been converted. Since they did not know him personally, he could not have been sent out by them to preach in the regions of Galatia. What the Galatians heard from him, therefore, was the result of God's direct revelation. The faith of the Galatians was based on God's revelation to Paul.²³ Though the Judean brethren had not personally met Paul after his conversion, they glorified God because of his obedience to the gospel.²⁴ They did not glorify Paul, but God who through His grace revealed the power of the gospel to man through Jesus. The converting power of the gospel was so great that even one who zealously persecuted the church could be convinced that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God.

Chapter 2

VISIT TO JERUSALEM

In stating that it was fourteen years from the time of his first visit to Jerusalem to see Peter and James until he visited Jerusalem again, Paul continued his argument to the Galatians by stating that he had no other opportunity to go to Jerusalem.¹ It was only when God revealed to him that he should go to Jerusalem that he eventually went. He thus did not seek to consult with others in Jerusalem concerning the message that he preached, for he was confident in the revelation of the gospel that he had received from Jesus. After fifteen years, however, he went to a meeting in Jerusalem to participate in discussions that are recorded in Acts 15. He

22 I was *still* unknown by face to the churches of Judea that ^cwere in Christ;
23 but they ^donly kept hearing that he who ^epersecuted us in the past now preaches the faith that he once *tried* to destroy.

24 And they ^fglorified God in me.

Chapter 2

Visit to Jerusalem

1 ¶ Then after fourteen years ^aI went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus also with *me*.

2 And I went up by revelation and communicated to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles, but ^bprivately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means ^cI run, or had run in vain.

c Rm 16:7 d At 9:20,21 e At 8:3 f At 11:18 Chapter 2: a At 15:2 b At 15:1-4 c Ph 2:16

took with him Barnabas, his companion in his first missionary journey, and Titus a Gentile evangelist. When he arrived in Jerusalem, Paul revealed the gospel of grace that he was preaching among the Gentiles. He had discussions with some of the key leaders of the area. He met with them in private in order to make it clear that he preached the gospel that was revealed directly to him by God. He met with these brethren concerning the message in order to verify that all of them were preaching the same thing in reference to the preaching of the gospel of grace. And because they were preaching the same revelation of the gospel, there was no need that he work under some supposed authority by the Jerusalem leaders.²

While in Jerusalem some legalistic teachers had come in among the brethren and were teaching that unless one was circumcised, he could not be saved. A heated discussion ensued between Paul and these Jewish teachers. At the time, they were seeking to force Titus, a Gentile, to be circumcised. But on this occasion, Paul stood for the truth that one is saved by grace, and not with the added work of circumcision.³ Circumcision was not a requirement for salvation. Those who were teaching the gospel plus the necessity of circumcision, or legal works of law, were actually false brethren. They were false because of their legalistic view of salvation, and thus, their efforts to recruit followers by compelling the saved to be circumcised. They believed, as Paul would later explain, that one earns his salvation by meritorious works of law.⁴

We are not told the origin of these false brethren. They could possibly have been brought into the fellowship of the church by those who were opposing Paul in the matter of legal salvation by works of law. Paul had been preaching among the Gentiles. He was not asking the Gentiles to be circumcised. With some of the Jewish brethren in Jerusa-

3 But not even Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.

4 But *this happened* because of ^dfalse brethren secretly brought in, who sneaked in to spy out our ^eliberty that we have in Christ Jesus, ^fthat they might bring us into bondage.

5 To whom we did not yield in subjection even for an hour, so that ^gthe truth of the gospel might continue with you.

^d At 15:1,24 ^e Gl 3:25; 5:1,13
^f Gl 4:3,9 ^g Gl 1:6; 2:14; 3:1

lem, this was a threat to their legal system of salvation with which they interpreted their conduct as Christians. These brethren evidently recruited others to align with their side in the controversy, and thus, they brought in support by Jews who were actually not baptized believers. They came in secretly as spies. They sought to spy out the freedom that we have in Christ. Legalistic brethren behave as spies. They seek to spy out where someone might not be in obedience to what they consider to be legal requirements of law. In this case, they were seeking to spy out the freedom of the Gentiles who were not to be circumcised in order to be saved. The Gentiles were free, and thus no legalistic spy could bring them under law in order that they be saved by circumcision. When one gives up his freedom in order to be obedient to the religious traditions of men, he has brought himself into bondage. If one turns the law of Christ into a legal system of justification by works, then he has brought himself into bondage.⁴ If Paul had succumbed to the pressure of the Judaizing teachers, and thus encouraged Titus to be circumcised, then he would not have continued in the truth of the gospel of freedom in Christ. The truth of the gospel is that we are saved by grace, not through meritorious works of law or good works. If we would continue in the truth of the gospel, therefore, we will not submit ourselves to the bondage of legal obedience to those things that God does not bind on us. Neither will we submit ourselves to focus on our own performance of law and good works.⁵

Some had assumed that the leaders among the Judean disciples walked with authority in reference to what they said. It was the people who considered them important, and thus, they assumed that their proclamations were authoritative in reference to what the church should do. But in reference to what is required for the church to do, Paul did not consider

6 ¶ But from those ^hwho seemed to be important—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; ⁱGod shows no partiality to man—for those who seemed *to be important* ^jcontributed nothing to me.

^h Gl 2:9; 6:3 ⁱ At 10:34 ^j 2 Co 11:5; 12:11

the pronouncements of key figures in the church to be important. What was binding on the church, was spoken clearly by God, not man. Since the gospel was all-inclusive concerning what was necessary for salvation, then no man had any right to include any other requirements. When it comes to understanding what is the law of God, only that which God says is important, for God shows no partiality between those who would be leaders of the church and all the church members. In this case, therefore, those who were considered to be important by the disciples could not by their proclamations reveal any further truth to Paul than what he already knew concerning the truth of the gospel.⁶ However, those who seemed to be important did see something wonderful in Paul. They saw that God had destined him to be a special apostle to the Gentiles. As Peter had a special mission to preach to the Jews, so Paul was given a special mission by God to preach to the Gentiles.⁷ What they understood was that it was God who was effectively working in the life of Peter to reach the Jews. As Peter was effective with the Jews, so Paul was effective in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles.⁸ When the key leaders in the church in Judea, James, Peter and John, realized that God had commissioned Paul to the Gentiles, then they gave their full agreement and consent to what Paul and Barnabas were doing in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. Therefore, they did not require the Gentiles to be circumcised. They agreed that Paul and Barnabas should continue to reach out to the Gentiles, while they, James, Peter and John, should continue to reach out to the Jews. In coming to this conclusion, they realized that each person has cultural skills by which he can better reach different cultural groups of people.⁹ Regardless of the people groups to whom they went, as they had done in Judea, so they encouraged Paul and Barnabas to remember the poor. Paul reminded

7 But on the contrary, ^kwhen they saw that the gospel of ^lthe uncircumcision ^mwas committed to me as *the gospel* of the circumcision was to Peter

8 —for He who effectively worked in Peter for the apostleship to the ⁿcircumcision, the same ^oeffectively worked ^palso in me toward the Gentiles—

9 and when James, Cephas and John, who seemed to be ^qpillars, perceived ^rthe grace that was given to me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship ^sso that we *should go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcision.

10 *They only desired that we remember the poor,* ^twhich *thing* indeed I was eager to do.

k At 9:15; 13:46; 22:21 | l 1 Th 2:4 m 1 Pt 1:1 n Gl 3:5 o At 9:15 p Mt 16:18 q Rm 1:5 r At 13:3 s At 11:30

them that in his preaching of the gospel, that to the best of his ability he was eager to help those who were truly suffering from the unfortunate times of economic depression. Because he was a self-employed tentmaker by profession, Paul was always eager to help the poor.¹⁰

IMPOSSIBILITY OF JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS

At one time Peter came from Jerusalem to the Gentile church of Antioch of Syria. We do not know if he had been designated an elder of the church in Jerusalem by this time, though it was about fifteen years after the establishment of the church. He was a Christ-sent apostle, but on this occasion he behaved contrary to the gospel of grace that both he and Paul had preached. His behavior was so contrary to the gospel of freedom that he stood condemned in reference to his salvation.¹¹ When Peter first came to Antioch, he openly and willingly fellowshiped with the Gentile disciples of the church. But certain Jewish brethren came from Jerusalem, whose coming possibly threatened his Jewish heritage, and thus, his fellowship with his Jewish brethren. He was intimidated by these brethren who came. Though he was previously eating with the Gentiles, which was contrary to Jewish custom, the coming of fellow Jews intimidated him, and thus, he discontinued his relationship with the Gentile brethren. As a result, he openly separated himself from the Gentiles in the presence of both the Gentile and Jewish disciples. He was afraid of the intimidating cloud of authority that came with those who came from Jerusalem.¹² His example also spread to the other Jewish brethren in Antioch. They too joined with what was considered hypocrisy, for they preached fellowship in Christ, but they practiced separation when intimidated by those of their own culture. Barnabas was also carried away with this behavior which contravened the gos-

Not Justified by Works of Law

11 ¶ But 'when Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to *his* face because he stood condemned.

12 For before certain *men* came from James, "he ate with the Gentiles. But when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.

13 And the other Jews likewise joined in his hypocrisy, to the point that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

t At 15:35 u At 10:28; 11:2,3

pel of freedom and unity in Christ.¹³

The truth of the gospel was the fact that Jesus died for all men, both Jews and Gentiles. When one obeyed the gospel, he came into a fellowship of disciples where neither race nor nationality can separate one disciple from another. What Peter, Barnabas and the other resident Jews of Antioch did was to behave contrary to the spirit of fellowship that all people have in Christ. Their behavior was so contrary to the nature of the gospel that Paul dealt with the matter in a public confrontation with Peter before the entire church. Before the legalistic Jewish brethren came from Jerusalem, Peter was living as the Gentiles. But when the Jewish brethren arrived from Jerusalem, his behavior taught that they should live as the Jews, and thus maintain their separation from the Gentiles.¹⁴ Peter stumbled for a moment in thinking that his Jewish heritage was more important than living by the faith of Jesus that resulted in His death on the cross. Therefore, if one died with Christ, then he died to any cultural heritage that would keep him away from fellowshiping all those who had obeyed the gospel.¹⁵ One is not justified by perfect keeping of law, nor does he atone for sins by doing good works, or keeping his cultural heritage. When Peter and Paul initially recognized that Jesus was the grace of God who appeared on the cross, they and all Jews by faith fled for deliverance from the necessity of perfect law-keeping in order to obey the gospel. They did so because they realized that they could not keep law perfectly in order to save themselves. And since they could not keep law perfectly, then they had to walk by faith in the grace of God. They had no choice because they were honest enough to realize that one cannot perform the works of the law perfectly, and thus, demand salvation on the basis of works.¹⁶

If one seeks to be justified by works of law, while at

14 ¶ But when I saw that they were not straightforward about ^vthe truth of the gospel, I said to Peter ^wbefore *them* all, ^x“If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles, and not as the Jews, why do you compel the Gentiles to live as the Jews?”

15 ^y“We *who are* Jews by nature and not ^zsinners among the Gentiles,

16 ^a“knowing that a man is not justified by works of law, but ^bby the faith of Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus so that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not ^cby works of law; for by works of law no flesh will be justified.

v Gl 1:6; 2:5 w 1 Tm 5:20 x At 10:28 y At 15:10 z Mt 9:11 a At 13:38,39 b Rm 1:17 c Ps 143:2

the same time he seeks to be justified by Christ, then he is a sinner, for no one can keep law perfectly in order to save himself. Christians, therefore, cannot make the law of Christ a legal system of justification. They cannot because all men sin, and sin condemns. Jesus did not bring us into the bondage of having to keep law perfectly in order to be saved. He delivered us from the curse of the law by our faith in Him.¹⁷ Christians must be careful about reverting to their former life of seeking to be legally justified by the rites of former religiosity. If one makes the law of Christ a legal system by which to justify himself before God, then he has made himself a transgressor who has no hope. He has made himself a transgressor of law because no man can keep law perfectly in order to earn his salvation.¹⁸ Law kills because no one can keep it perfectly. When one realizes that he cannot keep law in order to save himself, then he will, as Paul and Peter, flee to Christ for justification by faith. Law kills, but faith brings eternal life.¹⁹ It is for this reason that we crucify our efforts to seek justification by perfect keeping of law. The Christian has been crucified with Christ in that he has denied his own efforts to save himself in order to trust in the grace of God that was revealed on the cross. The result of one's crucifixion with Jesus is that he no longer lives for himself, but for Christ who lives in him. Our living, therefore, is not an effort to justify ourselves, and thus boast in our performance of law. The Christian lives because he has been justified by faith in the Son of God, who because of love, died on the cross to set us free. The Christian life, therefore, is a life of thanksgiving in response to the grace of God.²⁰ The point to the argument is that if we could justify ourselves before God with perfect keeping of law, or atoning good works, then there would have been no need for Jesus to die on the cross. Therefore, through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, we do

17 ¶ "But if while seeking to be justified by Christ, we ourselves are also found to *be*^d sinners, is Christ therefore the minister of sin? Certainly not!

18 "For if I build again the things that I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

19 "For I ^ethrough law ^fdied to law, so that I might ^glive to God.

20 "I have been ^hcrucified with Christ. And it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the *life* that I now live in the flesh ⁱlive by faith in the Son of God, ^jwho loved me and gave Himself for me.

21 "I do not nullify the grace of God, for ^kif righteousness comes through law, then Christ died in vain."

d 1 Jn 3:8 e Rm 8:2 f Rm 6:2,14; 7:4 g Rm 6:11 h Rm 6:6 i 2 Co 5:15 j Is 53:12; Ep 5:2 k Hb 7:11

not nullify the grace of God. Christ did not die uselessly because we assert ourselves righteous before God because of our legal performance of law and good works.

Galatians 3

LAW AND THE CURSE

There were social dynamics being played out in the Galatian Christians' move back to a legal system of religiosity. Behind the scenes, there was a debate raging between the influence of those we would refer to as Judaizing teachers and what the Galatians were taught by Paul when they obeyed the gospel. Because of the freedom that came from the bondage of legal religiosity, Paul proclaimed that they were foolish to consider going back into the legal bondage of law. He had clearly manifested before the Galatians the freedom that they had received when they became Christians. Therefore, there was some intimidation by those who cast a spell of deception over them that they should return to the "Jew's religion" from which they had been set free.¹ Therefore, Paul asked them some very penetrating questions, questions for which they knew the answers. He wanted them to identify who was bewitching them to leave the freedom of grace in order to go into bondage again in legal religiosity. They had been endowed with the spiritual gifts that came through the laying on of Paul's hands. They did not receive the Holy Spirit because they earned His blessings through perfect obedience of law. The receiving of the gifts was a blessing of the Spirit that came with their obedience to the gospel. It was a result of their faith, not their works.² Now that they had begun a new life in Christ, they were foolish to believe that they could go on to perfection by efforts to justify themselves through perfect keeping of law. Their works in the flesh could not perfect what was started by the Spirit.³

Chapter 3

Law and the Curse

1 ¶ O foolish Galatians. Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ has been publicly portrayed as having been crucified?

2 This only I want to learn from you. Did you receive the Spirit by works of law ^aor by hearing of faith?

3 Are you so foolish? ^bHaving begun in the Spirit, are you now being perfected by ^cthe flesh?

Chapter 3: a Rm 10:16,17 b Gl 4:9 c Hb 7:16

If they believed that they could through the flesh justify themselves before God, then their persecution that they endured when they first became Christians was useless.⁴

Jesus provided the Spirit to them through the laying on of Paul's hands. And it was Jesus through the Spirit who worked powerful miraculous wonders among them. In other words, the coming of the gospel to them through Paul was not in work only, but with the confirming miraculous works of the Spirit. Paul worked miracles among them, but he did not do such because of law, but because of faith.⁵ Abraham acted on his faith in God. And because he was obedient because of his trust in God, he was justified before God.⁶ Those who are obedient in response to their faith in God, therefore, are the true sons of Abraham.⁷ Through promises made in the Old Testament, God revealed that He would justify all men through faith, not by keeping of any law, including the Old Testament law. Since no man can be justified by perfect keeping of law, then all men must come to God through faith in Jesus in order to be considered righteous before God. This good news was first revealed to Abraham when God called him from among the nations. His promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 was that from the seed of Abraham, all nations would be blessed when the Messiah came.⁸ Those who are of faith, are blessed by the coming of Jesus because they believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. In response to their belief, they obeyed the gospel. Because Abraham believed the promise of God, the blessing of the gospel came from his seed, and thus, all men of obedient faith have been blessed because Abraham walked by faith.⁹

If one would seek to be justified by perfect keeping of law, he is under the curse of the law. The curse of the law is that one sin condemns one as a lawbreaker. Since no one can keep law perfectly, then all men are under condemna-

4 "Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?"

5 ¶ Therefore, He who provides to you the Spirit and works powerful deeds among you, *does He do it by works of law or by hearing of faith?*

6 Even so Abraham ^ebelieved God, and it was credited to him for righteousness.

7 Therefore, know *indeed* that ^fthose who are of faith, the same are the sons of Abraham.

8 And ^gthe Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached beforehand the gospel to Abraham, *saying,* ^h"In you will all nations be blessed."

9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

10 ¶ For as many as are of the works of law are under the curse, for it is written, ⁱ"Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things written in the book of the law, to do them."

d Hb 10:35 e Gn 15:6 f Jn 8:39 g Rm 9:17 h Gn 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14 i Dt 27:26

tion, for all have sinned. The curse of law, therefore, is that no one can keep law perfectly in order to justify himself before God. Now if one resorts to law-keeping in order to be justified, then he would have to keep the law perfectly.¹⁰ But the fact is that no one is justified by keeping law, for no man can keep law perfectly. All honest people confess their weakness in keeping law. They realize that law was never given by God as a means to acquire salvation, for all men sin by breaking law. Therefore, the righteous seek to live by faith by trusting in the grace of God.¹¹ It is for this reason that legal law-keeping is not a walk of faith. Law-keeping is walking by faith in oneself to keep law perfectly.¹²

Through His atoning death on the cross, Jesus delivered us from the necessity of having to keep law perfectly in order to be justified before God. Those who walk by faith, therefore, have been delivered from the curse of having to keep law perfectly.¹³ Those who walk by faith, therefore, have been purchased by the blood of Jesus in order that the blessing to all nations that would come through Abraham might be poured out on all nations. This blessing was poured out in order that all the obedient by faith might receive the promise of the Holy Spirit by faith, not by perfect keeping of law. Through law, we could not receive the Spirit, for we could not keep law perfectly in order to put God in debt to award us with the Spirit.¹⁴

THE PROMISE VERSUS THE LAW

When two men make a covenant with one another, once the covenant is ratified by the agreement of the two parties, the conditions of the covenant cannot be changed, neither can the covenant be annulled.¹⁵ Now God made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants. The covenant that God made with Abraham was that through his seedline

11 But that no one is justified by law in the sight of God is evident, for ¹"the just will live by faith."

12 And ^kthe law is not of faith, but ^l"the man who does them will live in them."

13 ¶ ^mChrist redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us, for it is written, ⁿ"Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree."

14 ^oHe redeemed us in order that the blessing of Abraham might come on the ^pGentiles through Christ Jesus, so that we might receive ^qthe promise of the Spirit through faith.

Law and the Promise

15 ¶ Brethren, I speak in the manner of men. Even though *it is* but a man's covenant, yet *when it is ratified*, no one annuls or adds *conditions* to it.

j Hk 2:4 k Rm 4:4,5 l Lv 18:5
m Rm 8:3 n Dt 21:23 o Gn
12:3; 22:18; Rm 4:1-5,9,16 p
Is 49:6; Rm 3:29,30 q Is 32:15
r Hb 9:17

the Blessing (Christ) would come into the world for all nations. The promise was made that the Blessing would not come through seedlines other than Abraham's seedline. From the seedline of Abraham, the Christ would come into the world, bringing the blessing of salvation by grace.¹⁶ Now the promise was made to Abraham before the giving of the Old Testament law, which law came with the covenant that God made with the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai. The making of the covenant with Abraham, therefore, did not depend on Abraham's keeping of the Old Testament law, which law was given only to Israel. The law came 430 years after the making of the promise to Abraham. And when the law came, it did not annul the covenant that God had made with Abraham concerning the promise. The covenant had already been ratified with Abraham before the coming of the Old Testament law.¹⁷ The inheritance of the promise, therefore, did not depend on one's keeping of the Old Testament law, which law was given only to Israel. The promise and its fulfillment did not depend on the ability of men to keep the Old Testament law. If the fulfillment of the promise depended on the keeping of law, then the promise could never have been fulfilled, for no man can keep law perfectly. The Blessing that would come through the seed of Abraham, therefore, had to be by promise, not law-keeping.¹⁸

But why did God give to Israel the Old Testament law? It was given because it is not in man to direct his own paths. If Israel did not have the tutorialship of the Old Testament law, then she would have gone in the way of all those who were destroyed by the flood of Noah's day. Guidelines of obedience (law), therefore, were necessary in order to preserve a portion of humanity (the seed of Abraham, Israel). The promise came through the seedline of Abraham, and thus, the seedline had to be preserved by the guidelines of law.

16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of ^sone, ^t"And to your seed," who is ^uChrist.

17 And this I say, *that* law ^vwhich came four hundred and thirty years later cannot annul a covenant previously ratified by God, ^wthat it should make the promise of no effect.

18 For if ^xthe inheritance depends on law, ^yit no longer *depends on* promise. But God gave *it* to Abraham by promise.

19 ¶ Therefore, why *then* the law? ^zIt was added because of transgressions until the ^aSeed should come to whom the promise was made. *And it was* ^bordained through angels by the hand ^cof a mediator.

s Gn 22:18 t Gn 12:3,7; 13:15; 24:7 u 1 Co 12:12 v Ex 12:40 w Rm 4:13 x Rm 8:17 y Rm 4:14 z Jn 15:22 a Gl 4:4 b At 7:53 c Ex 20:19

The law preserved the seedline in order that the promise be fulfilled. It was for this reason that the Old Testament law was given through angels to Moses who mediated on behalf of the nation of Israel.¹⁹ But Moses' mediatorship was not for Israel alone. He mediated on behalf of Israel in order that through Israel the Blessing might come for all nations, for God is the God of all mankind. For this reason, Moses mediated for all men in that through Him the law was given in order to preserve the seedline of Abraham, the nation of Israel.²⁰

So one might ask if the Old Testament law was against God's power to fulfill the promise of the Blessing. The fulfillment of the promise did not depend on keeping of the law, for if such were true, then the promise could never have been fulfilled. Now if there could have been a law given that would guarantee the fulfillment of the promise because of the performance of man in keeping law, then certainly such could have been accomplished through the giving of the Old Testament law. The law was given by God. It was holy, just and good. It was the best law that could have been given if justification were through law-keeping. The problem was not with the law, but with men who cannot keep law perfectly in order to justify themselves before God. So if a law could have been given in order to give men eternal life, then certainly such a law could have been given to man by God.²¹ The fact is that the Old Testament law themselves condemned men to sin. And since all are confined to sin because of law, then the promise had to be given to those who responded to Jesus by faith. The giving of the promise to Abraham was based on the faith of Abraham. The acceptance of the blessing of the promise is based on the faith of the recipients.²² Before all this was revealed through Jesus, those who were of the faith of Abraham were in bondage. They were in the

20 Now a mediator is not a *mediator* of *only* one, ^dbut God is one.

21 ¶ So is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given that could have given life, certainly righteousness would have been by law.

22 But the Scripture has confined ^eall under sin so ^fthat the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

^d Rm 3:29 ^e Rm 11:32 ^f Rm 4:11

bondage of their own sin which was the result of man's inability to keep law perfectly. They were guarded in bondage by the law, for those who were of the faith of Abraham knew that they could not keep the law perfectly in order to justify themselves before God.²³ In this way, the Old Testament law was a school headmaster who controlled those who were of the faith of Abraham until they were handed over to Christ through their obedience to the gospel in order that they be justified by faith.²⁴ Now that those who are of the faith of Abraham have been handed over to Christ, the headmaster, the Old Testament law, was released from its duty. Christians, therefore, are no longer under the guard of the Old Testament law.²⁵

SONS THROUGH BAPTISM

The Gentile Christians were sons of God because of their obedient faith, not because of their perfect obedience to law. Law was established in their lives by faith. Faith was not established by law-keeping.²⁶ When they were immersed into Christ, they put on Christ. They were thus dressed in the garments of salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ. And having put on Christ, they stood justified before God. It was at the point of their immersion in obedience to the gospel when they were brought into a saving relationship with Christ. It was not by perfect keeping of law, or meritorious good works.²⁷ And when they came into Christ, their nationality or race no longer separated them from one another. Peter, Barnabas, and the rest of the resident Jews in Antioch, had withdrawn from the Gentiles on the occasion when Jewish brethren came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Such an action contravened the nature of the Christians' oneness in Christ that resulted from their baptism into Christ. Their behavior of separation manifested an effort to return to the law of the past, which law had ful-

23 But before faith came, we were kept under guard by law, being shut up to the faith that would afterward be revealed.

24 Therefore, ^gthe law was our headmaster *to bring us to Christ* ^hso that we might be justified by faith.

25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a headmaster.

Sons through Baptism

26 ¶ For you ⁱare all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

27 For ^jas many of you as were baptized into Christ ^khave put on Christ.

28 ^lThere is neither Jew nor Greek, ^mthere is neither bondservant nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all ⁿone in Christ Jesus.

^g Rm 10:4 ^h At 13:39 ⁱ Jn 1:12 ^j Rm 6:3 ^k Rm 10:12; 13:14 ^l Cl 3:11 ^m 1 Co 12:13 ⁿ Ep 2:15,16

filled its purpose in bringing us to Christ.²⁸ So now that we belong to Christ because of our obedience to the gospel, we continue the spiritual seed of Abraham by faith, not by keeping any ordinance of the Old Testament law. We thus inherit the promise that was made to Abraham, the Blessing that blessed all nations. We have inherited the salvation that Jesus, the Blessing, brought into the world.²⁹

Chapter 4

In order to illustrate our inheritance of the Blessing that was promised to Abraham, consider the fact that when a son is an heir of his father, while the father is still alive he is no different in reference to the possessions of the inheritance than one of the father's bondservants. Though he will eventually inherit all that the father owns, he is still subject to the father, just as the bondservant.¹ He is under the guardians and stewards until the time that the father has appointed when he should receive the inheritance.² Therefore, the Jews were under the bondage of the Old Testament law until the time appointed by the heavenly Father when they should inherit the Blessing.³ But when the time set by the Father was completed for the fulfillment of the promise, the Father sent for His Son in order to deliver all those who lived under the bondage of the law. The promise was made to Abraham. The Old Testament law was given to Israel only for a determined period of time. When this period of time was fulfilled, the promise was given, and thus, the law was taken away. It had fulfilled its purpose of bringing the heirs to the fulfillment of the promise in Jesus.⁴ When Jesus came, therefore, He delivered us from that which we could not deliver ourselves. He set us free from the bondage of the law in order that we might be the adopted sons of the Father.⁵

Now that they had become sons of God by their obe-

29 And ^oif you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's ^pseed and ^qheirs according to the promise.

Chapter 4

1 ¶ Now I say *that* the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ from a bond servant, though he is lord of all.

2 But he is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.

3 So we also, when we were children we ^awere in bondage under the elements of the world.

4 But ^bwhen the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, ^cborn ^dof a woman, ^eborn under law,

5 *in order* ^fto redeem those who were under law, ^gso that we might receive the adoption as sons.

o Gn 21:10; Hb 11:18 p Rm 4:11; Gl 3:7 q Gn 12:3; 18:18; Rm 8:17 **Chapter 4:** a Cl 2:8,20 b Gn 49:10 c Jn 1:14 d Gn 3:15; Is 7:14; Mt 1:25 e Mt 5:17; Lk 2:21,27 f Mt 20:28 g Jn 1:12

dience to the gospel, God has given to them the Spirit, which Spirit moves the adopted sons to look to the Father as the source of their salvation. Their thanksgiving is to the Father for their salvation, not to their own abilities to walk meritoriously by law in order to justify themselves.⁶ Because we have responded by faith to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, we are no longer bondservants without an inheritance. We have been adopted by the Father, and thus, we are sons of God.⁷

As the Gentiles, and thus bondservants of our own imagination, we were idolatrous in our behavior and beliefs. Because we had created gods after our own imagination, we did not know the one true and living God. We believed only in that which was imagined, and thus, the gods in which we believed were not gods at all.⁸ Now here is the problem facing those who would seek to justify themselves through law and works. God adopted those who have obeyed the gospel, and thus, the obedient are known by God to be His sons. But if His sons turn back to those things that were useless in reference to salvation, then the gospel will benefit one nothing in reference to salvation. If one returns to the bondage of his vain religion which he had created after the imagination of his own thinking, then his obedience to the gospel will be nullified.⁹ In the case of many of the Galatians, they were legally observing certain days, months and festivities that related to their idolatrous religions of the past.¹⁰ If they returned to these legal systems of religiosity, then Paul would have labored in vain to preach the gospel to them. His labors would have been useless because they would have fallen from the grace of God.¹¹

Paul thus pleaded with them to remain as he in the grace of God. Paul had previously in his life lived in the legal system of law, being obedient to the Judaism that he

6 ¶ And because you are sons, God has sent forth ^hthe Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, "Abba, Father."

7 Therefore, you are no longer a bondservant, but a son; ⁱand if a son, then an heir through God.

*Concern for the
Galatians*

8 ¶ Previously, ^jwhen you did not know God ^kyou served as bondservants those *things* that by nature are not gods.

9 But now ^lafter you have known God, or rather are known by God, ^mhow can you turn back again to ⁿthe weak and worthless elements to which you desire again to be in bondage?

10 ^oYou observe days and months and times and years.

11 I fear for you, ^plest I have labored over you in vain.

h Rm 5:5; 8:9,15,16 i Rm 8:16,17 j Ep 2:12 k Rm 1:25 l 1 Co 8:3 m Cl 2:20 n Hb 7:18 o Rm 14:5 p 1 Th 3:5

had received from his Jewish fathers. However, when Jesus called him, he remained faithful to the calling. If the Galatian Christians fell away from the grace of God, they would not endanger his salvation, for he had fulfilled his responsibility of preaching the gospel to them. They would endanger their own salvation, for each person is held accountable for his own behavior.¹² It was not easy for Paul to carry out his mission to preach the gospel to the Galatians. They knew that he had to endure great physical weakness in order to stand before them and preach the grace of God.¹³ They knew that he was suffering physically while carrying out his mission to preach the gospel. Whatever his physical infirmity, we are not told. But when he initially came into Galatia, the Galatians looked past his physical infirmity in order to hear what he had to say concerning the gospel of Jesus. They were so interested in his message, that they received him as the messenger of God, even as they would have personally received Jesus.¹⁴ It may have been that Paul was suffering from some eye ailment. We are not told. But the Galatians' compassion for him while he was with them was sincere. It was sincere because they understood the blessing of salvation that they received as a result of his labors for them.¹⁵ But now, it seems that he had become their enemy because he was chastising them with the truth by telling them that they were ungratefully turning away from the message he had preached, as well as turning away from him as the messenger of God.¹⁶

Now what was happening among the Galatian disciples was the recruiting by those Judaizing teachers who were seeking a following among men. With great zeal, these teachers were turning the people away from Paul, and thus, away from the message that Paul preached. But such was not for the good of the Galatian disciples. It was not good be-

12 ¶ Brethren, I urge you to be as I *am*, for I *am* as you *are*.^q You did me no wrong.

13 You know how 'through physical weakness I preached the gospel to you at the first.

14 And my trial that was in my flesh you did not despise nor reject, but you received me ^sas a messenger of God, ^teven as Christ Jesus.

15 Where then is the blessing you *enjoyed*? For I bear you witness that if *it were* possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.

16 Therefore, have I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?

17 ¶ They ^uzealously recruit you, *but* not for good. Yes, they want to exclude you so that you might be zealous for them.

q 2 Co 2:5 r 1 Co 2:3 s MI
2:7 t Lk 10:16 u Rm 10:2

cause if they did return to a system of law-keeping, they would be cut off from the grace of God. They would also be cut off from the fellowship of the worldwide body of Christ. These political Judaizers, therefore, were playing church politics. They were seeking the favoritism of the people in order that the people listen to them.¹⁷ Now it is always good to be zealous. But if one uses his zeal in order to recruit others to follow him, then his zeal is being wasted on matters of selfish ambition. The Galatians were zealous to receive Paul when he was with them. But they must continue to be zealous for him in his absence, lest they stop believing the message that he preached to them.¹⁸ Paul was as a father to them in that he fathered them in Christ by the preaching of the gospel. He personally labored in their presence as a loving father. Now he was again laboring as a woman in birth pains in order to keep them faithful to the grace of God.¹⁹ He was writing with sternness in his words, for he was laboring for their salvation. If he were present with them, then he could nurture his words with love in order to encourage them to be true to their confession.²⁰

HAGAR AND SARAH

The Galatians needed an illustration from the Old Testament in order to understand that the Old Testament law had been cast out. In order to better understand that the Old Testament law was cast out in order to make room for the new covenant, Paul gave them an allegory that was based on the historical incident of a confrontation between Hagar and Sarah.²¹ Abraham had two sons. Isaac was born to Abraham through Sarah. Ishmael was born to Abraham through Hagar, Sarah's handmaid. Hagar was a bondwoman, but Sarah was the wife of Abraham.²² Ishmael was born as a result of Abraham and Sarah making a plan that Abraham have an heir

18 But *it is* always good to be zealous in a good *thing*, and not only when I am present with you.

19 'My little children for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you,

20 I desire to be present with you now and to change my voice, for I am perplexed about you.

Hagar and Sarah

21 ¶ Tell me, you who desire to be under law, do you not hear the law?

22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, "the one by a bondwoman *and* the other by a freewoman.

v 1 Co 4:15 w Gn 16:15 x
Gn 21:2

through whom the promise of God would continue. Through works, therefore, they sought to work out the promise of God. He and Sarah were old in age, but had no son. Therefore, they formed a plan that Hagar go in to Abraham, and from this union, an heir would be born to continue the promise of God through the seed of Abraham. But this was a work of Abraham and Sarah. In order that they might know that it was God working in the matter to fulfill His promise to Abraham, Isaac was born to Sarah in her old age. She was the freewoman who would give birth to the One who would eventually come into the world and deliver to freedom all those who were confined to the bondage of law. Thus Isaac was born according to the work of God to bring about His promise. Ishmael was born according to the works of Abraham and Sarah.²³ The two sons, therefore, illustrate two covenants. The first was God's covenant with Israel that was given to Israel at Mount Sinai. However, this covenant, with its law, the Old Testament law, was a covenant of bondage, for by works of the Old Testament law no one could be justified before God. Instead of bringing life, therefore, the law of the old covenant brought death. The law was thus a curse in reference to salvation. No one could keep it perfectly in order to justify himself before God.²⁴ All those who would seek to be justified by keeping of the Old Testament law, therefore, are still under the bondage of the law.²⁵ In contrast to the Old Testament law that brought sin and death, the new brought freedom from the curse of sin and death. It brought freedom from the necessity of having to keep law perfectly in order to be justified before God. Sarah is thus the mother of the free.²⁶ Sarah broke forth with joy when she became pregnant with Isaac. She became the mother of many nations. She brought forth the one who would continue the heritage of Abraham, and thus the fulfillment of the promise

23 But he *who was* of the bondwoman ^ywas born according to the flesh. But ^zhe *who was* of the freewoman *was born* through the promise.

24 These things are an allegory. For these are two covenants, the one from Mount ^aSinai, bringing forth *children* to bondage, which is Hagar.

25 For this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to Jerusalem that now is, and is in bondage with her children.

26 But the ^bJerusalem that is above is free, which is the mother of us all.

27 For it is written, ^c"*Rejoice barren woman who does not bear. Break forth and cry you who do not labor. For the desolate has many more children than she who has a husband.*"

^y Rm 9:7,8 ^z Hb 11:11 ^a Dt 33:2 ^b Is 2:2 ^c Is 54:1

that would come about two thousand years later on a cross outside Jerusalem.²⁷

Because Isaac was the result of God's work to carry out His plan of fulfilling His promise to Abraham, we become children of the promise. We are not children because of the Old Testament law, but children by the grace of God that was poured out on Sarah in her old age to bring forth Isaac.²⁸ When Isaac was but a small child, he was persecuted by Ishmael because Ishmael was jealous of him. Ishmael had been born to Abraham because of the works of the flesh, the plan that he and Sarah had devised that Hagar go in to Abraham in order that Abraham have an heir. Isaac, however, was born according to the Spirit of God who worked in the womb of Sarah that she give birth. But as Ishmael persecuted Isaac, so the legalistic Jews who continued to cling to the Old Testament law, persecuted those who believed in Jesus and had obeyed the gospel.²⁹ God told Abraham to cast out Hagar and Ishmael in order to bring peace to his family. He was to cast them out because the fulfillment of the promise would not come through Ishmael. It would come through Isaac.³⁰ We must keep in mind, therefore, that we are not sons of God through Ishmael. We received the fulfillment of the promise that was promised to Abraham that came through the working of God. We are heirs of the promise that continued, not by the flesh of Abraham and Sarah working to fulfill the promise, but by God working through Abraham and Sarah in their old age to continue the fulfillment of His promise to them through the birth of Isaac.³¹

28 ¶ Now ^dwe, brethren, as Isaac, are the ^echildren of promise.

29 But as ^fhe who was born according to the flesh persecuted him *who was born* according to the Spirit, ^geven so *it is* now.

30 Nevertheless, what does ^hthe Scripture say? ⁱ"Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for ^jthe son of the bondwoman will not be heir with the son of the freewoman."

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

Chapter 5

SET FREE, STAY FREE

d Gl 3:29 e At 3:25 f Gn 21:9 g Gl 5:11 h Gl 3:8,22 i Gn 21:10,12

In view of the fact that we must remain in our freedom that came through our obedience to the gospel, Paul reveals a fundamental principle of the Christian life. It is the principle that in Christ we must remain free from believing that we must keep law perfectly in order to be saved. It is imperative, therefore, that we stand fast in our freedom in Christ in view of the sacrifice that Jesus paid in order to make our salvation possible. Christians must make every effort not to become entangled in the web of religious doctrines and practices that are a burden to all those who seek to retain such in their lives. They must not view the law of Christ as a system by which they would justify themselves before God.¹ If one would seek to be circumcised as an indication that he was returning to a legal system of religiosity in order to justify himself, then the atoning sacrifice of Christ would not profit him in reference to his salvation.² If one would seek to return to efforts of perfect keeping of law in order to justify himself, then he must keep perfectly the law he chooses to obey.³ But the fact is that no man can keep any law perfectly, even the law of Christ. It is for this reason that no man can be justified before God through the keeping of law. Law, therefore, was never given to save man, or as a means of salvation, for by works of law no person can justify himself before God. If one would seek to justify himself through law-keeping, then he is actually fallen from the grace of God by which he was once saved. He is fallen from grace because his faith is not in the all-sufficiency of the grace of God that was revealed through the gospel.⁴ But those who walk by the Spirit, have hope of eternal life because of their faith in the grace of God.⁵ One can eagerly wait with anticipation for the coming of Jesus if he puts his trust in the grace of God and not in himself. If he puts his faith in his own works, then he will always be in doubt concerning his salvation, and thus, will

Chapter 5

Set Free, Stay Free

1 ¶ ^aStand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a ^byoke of bondage.

2 Behold I, Paul, say to you that ^cif you are circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.

3 For I testify again to every man who is circumcised, ^dthat he is a debtor to keep the whole law.

4 ^eYou have been severed from Christ, you who *seek* to be justified by law. ^fYou have fallen from grace.

5 For we through the Spirit eagerly ^gwait for the hope of righteousness by faith.

6 For ^hin Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails anything nor uncircumcision, but ⁱfaith working through love.

j Jn 8:35 **Chapter 5:** a Ph 4:1 b At 15:10 c At 15:1 d Rm 2:25 e Rm 9:31 f Hb 12:15 g Rm 8:24 h Gl 6:15

always be apprehensive concerning the coming of Jesus.⁶

Some Christians, as the Galatian disciples, start off their Christian life well. They begin with their trust in Jesus, but then begin to establish religious codes by which they bring themselves into their own bondage. If there are those who would bind on Christians those things that God has not bound through His word, then they are hindering the salvation of Christians. Those who would teach the traditions of men to be binding on men are thus hindrances to the salvation of those they teach.⁷ We must keep in mind that law-keeping as a means to salvation was not brought into the world by Jesus. He came to set us free from the bondage that is of our own making. It is men who bring people into bondage, not Jesus.⁸ Christians must keep in mind, therefore, that a few teachers can bring into bondage the whole church. If bondage teaching is not stopped, it can affect the church as a whole. It is for this reason that Christians must be diligent not to bind traditions on the church that are not bound in the word of God. They must not turn the law of Christ into a legal system by which they would seek to justify themselves.⁹ Paul had confidence in the sincere obedience of the Galatians. He knew that once they remembered their faith with which they started their Christian life, they would not be moved away from that faith. But the teacher who was troubling them with the binding of religious codes that God did not bind would suffer judgment for what he was doing in reference to disturbing the household of God. Those who would trouble the church by teaching their religious traditions, or teachings that are found nowhere in the word of God, will give account for leading the church into bondage. The same is true of those who would use the law of Christ as a legal system of justification.¹⁰

The fact that Paul was not teaching a legal system of

7 ¶ You ⁱwere running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?

8 This persuasion did not *come* from the One who calls you.

9 ^kA little leaven leavens the whole lump.

10 I have confidence in you in the Lord, that you will be of no other mind. But the one troubling you will bear his judgment, whoever he is.

i 1 Th 1:3 j 1 Co 9:24 k 1 Co 5:6

religiosity was proved by the fact that he was suffering persecution from those who were teaching such a system. Legalistic brethren, therefore, always persecute those who preach freedom in Christ. The free are persecuted with slander, and sometimes as in the case of Paul, with stoning as he suffered while in Galatia. Therefore, one's persecution is often the result of his defense of the freedom that we have in Christ.¹¹ Since the fundamental principle of freedom in Christ is a foundation upon which our salvation depends, then Paul wished that the legalistic brethren would disfellowship themselves from the free. If division in the church must result in order to maintain our freedom from those who would bind where God has not bound, then division must occur. The freedom of the church must never be sacrificed in order to remain in fellowship with those who would bring the church into the bondage of legalistic religiosity.¹²

Christians have been called by the gospel into the liberty that they have in Christ. They are free from the necessity of having to keep law perfectly in order to be saved, for they understand that law was never given as a means to salvation. It was given to direct our lives, not as a standard by which we would be saved. However, though we are set free from the necessity of keeping law perfectly in order to be saved, then we must not feel that we have the freedom to sin against the law of God. Love is the identity of the family of God. Christians serve one another because of love, not law. And thus, instead of using our freedom to ignore one another, or cause another to sin after the flesh, Christians should respond to the needs of one another because of love.¹³ Christians keep the law of God because of their love. They do not love because of law. If one serves his neighbor, therefore, it is out of love, not law.¹⁴ If there is no love among brethren, the brethren will be involved in quarrels by which

11 ¶ And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then ^mthe offense of the cross has ceased.

12 ¶ I could wish that those ^owho are troubling you would cut themselves off *from you*.

13 ¶ For you, brethren, have been called to liberty, only ^pdo not *use your liberty* as an ^oopportunity for the flesh. But ^tthrough love, serve one another.

14 For ^sall the law is fulfilled in one word, *even in this, "You will love your neighbor as yourself."*

I 1 Co 15:30 m 1 Co 1:23 n
Ja 7:25 o At 15:1,2 p 1 Co
8:9 q 1 Pt 2:16 r 1 Co 9:19 s
Mt 7:12; 22:40 t Lv 19:18

they will destroy their fellowship with one another. A church of people who have lost their love for one another will eventually cease being a church of Christ.¹⁵

THE FLESH AND THE SPIRIT

If one walks according to the law of love, he will not seek to please his own selfish desires. Walking after the Spirit, therefore, is a walk of focusing on others. It is a walk that is not directed by law, but by love. If one walks according to the Spirit, he is not seeking to live for himself.¹⁶ If one thinks that life is about himself, then he is working against the Spirit who would direct us to live for others. Living according to our own will, therefore, is against what the Spirit would have us do as Christians. If one would walk according to the desires of the flesh, then he cannot accomplish the work of the Spirit.¹⁷ When Christians are led by love, they are walking after the desires of the Spirit. When one is walking according to love, he needs no law to direct him to do good to his neighbor.¹⁸

Now one who would seek to live according to his own desires will not live in order to serve the needs of others. He will commit those sins that violate relationships between people. He will commit sexual immorality wherein people are hurt. He will live an impure life of filthiness. He will become involved in lewd dancing, sensuality, debauchery, immoral dress and conduct.¹⁹ He will create a god after his own imagination by which he will convince himself that his god is pleased with his immoral behavior. Some will become involved in drugs and senseless behavior by binding on themselves fictitious beliefs of imagined spirits and ghosts. Others will harbor enmity toward others, manifesting a behavior of contention and jealousy. They will not be able to control themselves in their relationships with others for they

15 But if you bite and devour one another, take heed that you not be consumed by one another.

The Flesh and the Spirit

16 ¶ I say then, ^uwalk in *the* Spirit and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

17 For ^vthe flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. And these are contrary to one another, ^wso that you cannot do the things that you desire.

18 But ^xif you are led by *the* Spirit, you are not under law.

19 ¶ Now ^ythe works of the flesh are manifest, which are: fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, **20** idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,

u Rm 6:12 v Rm 7:18,22,23;
8:5 w Rm 7:15 x Rm 6:14;
7:4; 8:14 y Ep 5:3,11

think only of themselves. And because they think only of themselves, they have a contentious spirit, speaking those things that are contrary to the truth. They will have a sectarian spirit that promotes division rather than unity.²⁰ Their relationship with others will always be strained because they thirst for the possessions or positions of others. And because of their low self-esteem and baseless life, they will seek to escape reality through intoxicating liquor, the result of which will be a life of excessive drunken parties. Such behavior manifests a walk according to the lusts of the flesh. In such behavior, one cannot have a correct relationship with his fellow man. One can have no hope of dwelling in eternity with others who live according to behavior that destroys relationships.²¹

Contrary to the walk after the lusts of the flesh, the walk after the Spirit is based on love. Those who seek joy, will seek peace with their fellow man. And in order to have peace, one must be patient with the faults of others. Patience depends on showing kindness to others. And when one is kind he seeks to do good to others. In order for two people to maintain a relationship with one another, both people must remain faithful and committed to one another.²² When two people remain faithful to one another, they manifest a spirit of gentleness in order to maintain their relationship. They thus control their behavior and speech in order not to endanger their relationship.²³ Christians, therefore, have given themselves to others. For this reason, they do not walk according to their own desires. They put their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ first, and thus maintain their relationship with the family of God.²⁴ Therefore, those who would live in the Spirit, must walk according to the instructions of the Spirit. Upon the foundation of love, the Spirit directs through the word of God.²⁵ In order to maintain our relationships with

21 envyings, drunkenness, revelries, and such like, of which I tell you beforehand as I have also told *you* in the past, that ^athose who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 ¶ But ^athe fruit of the Spirit is ^blove, joy, peace, patience, kindness, ^cgoodness, ^dfaithfulness,

23 gentleness, and self-control. ^eAgainst such there is no law.

24 Now those who are Christ's ^fhave crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

25 ¶ If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

z 1 Co 6:9,10 a Jn 15:2 b Cl 3:12-15 c Rm 15:14 d 1 Co 13:7 e 1 Tm 1:9 f Rm 6:6 g Rm 8:4,5

one another in Christ, we must desire the good of others, not seeking glory for ourselves. We must be patient with one another, kind and gentle in spirit lest we provoke others to lose their gentleness toward us. Those who are disciples in Christ, exalt and encourage others to do their best. Christians are not in competition with one another as to who is the greatest. The family of God is a community of servants who seek to serve one another's needs.²⁶

Chapter 6 OBEDIENT FAITH

In reference to the disciples' relationship with one another, it is a principle of fellowship that those who are more mature in the faith have a responsibility to those who are new in the faith. Therefore, if one who is new in the faith is overtaken in a sinful behavior that is according to the works of the flesh, he must be encouraged to remain faithful to his commitment. It is the responsibility of those who are strong in the faith to seek to restore the fallen. They must do this with a spirit of gentleness, knowing that every disciple can be overcome with sin, and thus, fall from the grace of God.¹ It is thus our responsibility to carry one another's spiritual burden of faithfulness. We are responsible for one another. By being responsible for one another, we fulfill the law of Christ, that we love one another as Christ also loved us.² But if someone thinks that he is too good to help others, then he has deceived himself. If one thinks that he is better than others, and thus not able to be tempted to fall, then he has deceived himself.³ There is no room for boasting among disciples. If one would prove his work, then he must look to God for approval. One must never become involved in comparing his works with the works of others. Since every disciple has been given different abilities or gifts, then no dis-

26 ^hLet us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another or envying one another.

Chapter 6

Obedient Faith

1 ¶ Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of ^agentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

2 ^bBear one another's burdens, and so fulfill ^cthe law of Christ.

3 For ^dif anyone thinks himself to be something when ^ehe is nothing, he deceives himself.

4 But ^flet each one prove his own work, and then he will have *reason* for boasting in himself alone and ^gnot in another.

h Ph 2:3 Chapter 6: a Ep 4:2 b Rm 15:1 c Js 2:8 d Rm 12:3 e 2 Co 3:5 f 1 Co 11:28 g Lk 18:11

ciple can ever compare his works with another disciple.⁴ So because each person has been given different abilities or gifts, then each person is responsible for his own works. He is not responsible for the abilities or gifts of another, neither can he compare the benefit of his gifts with the benefits of the gifts of another disciple.⁵

It is a principle of brotherhood, the furtherance of the gospel, and continued teaching of the word of God, that the students of the word should financially support the teachers of the word. If one teaches the good things of the word of God, then he deserves to be supported by those whom he teaches. Those who neglect their responsibility to support the teachers of the word have not understood the principle by which God intends that the word of God be taught.⁶

One must not think that he can live a life after the flesh and not at the same time reap the consequences of such behavior. God has stated that we will reap the consequences of sinful behavior.⁷ If one lives according to the sins of the flesh, he will reap the consequences of such by suffering in this life, both physically and in his relationships with others. But if one lives according to the directions of the Spirit, then he will reap eternal heaven.⁸ For this reason, we must not become tired of doing that which is good to others. When we do good to others, then they will do good to us in life. We will also reap eternal life as a result of our good life.⁹ Since we will reap eternal life as a result of living after the Spirit, then we must take every opportunity to do good. Christians must do good not only to fellow Christians, but to every person who is in need. In fact, one cannot be sincere in his goodness if it is poured out only on those who are Christians. Christians do good works toward those who are disciples of Jesus, but such goodness also spills over to everyone with whom one comes into contact.¹⁰

5 For ^heach one will bear his own load.

6 ¶ ⁱLet him who is taught the word share in all good things with the one who teaches.

7 ¶ Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for ^jwhatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption. But he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap ^keternal life.

9 And ^llet us not become weary in doing good, for in due time we will reap ^mif we do not give up.

10 ⁿTherefore, as we have opportunity, ^olet us do good to all *men*, ^pespecially to those who are of the household of the household of the faith.

^h Rm 2:6 ⁱ 1 Co 9:11,14 ^j Rm 2:6 ^k Rm 6:8 | 1 Co 15:58
^m Js 5:7,8 ⁿ Pv 3:27 ^o Ti 3:8 ^p Rm 12:13

Paul's message to the Galatians, and all Christians, was critical. It was critical because the Galatian Christians were in the process of being influenced by those teachers who were teaching a legal system of justification. If the Galatians succumbed to the influence and teaching of the Judaizing teachers, then they would fall from the grace of God. Therefore, with his own hand he wrote this urgent letter to the Galatians.¹¹ It seems that some Judaizing teachers had succumbed to the intimidation of their fellow Jews. They thus taught what they were compelled to teach because they did not want to suffer persecution for preaching the gospel of freedom from law-keeping.¹² The irony of the situation was that those who were forcing the Galatians to be circumcised in order to manifest their keeping of the Old Testament law, were themselves not able to keep the law perfectly. The real reason they were compelling the Galatians to be circumcised was that they wanted to boast to the Jews that they had circumcised so many people, manifesting that they had converted the saved.¹³ Paul's boasting was only in the sufferings of Jesus for the salvation of all men. And because he was willing to suffer for preaching the gospel to the world, the things of the world meant nothing to him. It was Christ who was living in him, and thus, the things of the world did not detour him from his destiny of preaching the gospel to the world.¹⁴ Works as circumcision cannot accomplish salvation. If one remains uncircumcised, it still does not accomplish anything toward salvation. What does count is if one has been immersed into Christ in order to become a new creation in Christ. Obedience to the gospel, therefore, is what is important in reference to our salvation, for obedience to the gospel is not a work of merit, but a response to the cross and resurrection of Jesus.¹⁵

All those who walk in response to their obedience to

The New Creation

11 ¶ You see with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand.

12 As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, they compel you to be circumcised, ^oonly that they might not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.

13 For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh.

14 But God forbid that I should boast, except in the ^rcross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me and ^sto the world.

15 For ^tneither circumcision accomplishes anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

^q Gl 5:11 ^r 1 Co 1:18 ^s Cl 2:20 ^t 1 Co 7:19

the gospel will have peace of mind and peace with God. God's mercy will be upon them. Peace and mercy will be individually upon all Christians, as well as upon the spiritual Israel, the church.¹⁶ Paul wanted no further debate on this matter. If there were those who wanted to return to law-keeping as a means of salvation, then they must cut themselves off from the church of God. Paul had sought to be faithful to his calling to preach the gospel. As a result, he suffered the persecution that came from his fellow Jews.¹⁷ If one would walk according to Paul's life, therefore, then the grace that was manifested through Jesus would continue with him.¹⁸

16 ¶ And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

17 ¶ From now on let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

18 ¶ Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with your spirit. Amen.