

New Testament Studies

Galatians

(RVS Notes)

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Galatians—Justification by Faith in Christ

Introduction—Galatians has been described as the Magna Carta of Christian liberty. The book played such a key role in the Reformation that it is called “the cornerstone of the Protestant Reformation.” The letter is Paul’s manifesto of justification by faith alone refuting the legalism that ensnared the Galatian churches. This essential truth was challenged by the insistence from certain quarters that believers in Christ must keep the law if they expected to be complete before God. Paul uses personal, theological, and moral arguments to demonstrate the superiority of grace over law and a life of liberty over that of legalism or license. Galatians is “deliberative rhetoric”, the kind of argument ancient writers used to persuade people to change their behavior.

Author and occasion—Galatians is universally accepted as a genuine letter of Paul. He is mentioned as the author in 1:1 and 5:2. Very early in church history, Galatians was included in the canon as a letter from Paul.

There are two major views concerning the background of the writing of Galatians:

- **South Galatia theory**—Paul wrote this letter to the churches in south Galatia (Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch) that he founded during his first missionary journey (Acts 13-14). He wrote from Antioch in Syria before the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) in the late 40s. The visit to Jerusalem described in Galatians 2 is the famine relief visit discussed in Acts 11:27-30.
- **North Galatia theory**—Paul wrote to the churches he founded in north-central Galatia during his second missionary journey (Acts 16:6-8) before he came to Troas and received the Macedonian vision (Acts 16:9-10). A second visit to these churches is described in Acts 18:23. According to this view, Paul wrote Galatians after the Jerusalem Council in the mid-50s from either Ephesus or Macedonia. The visit Paul describes in Galatians 2 is the Jerusalem Council itself.

This matter is further complicated by confusion in terminology. The term “Galatia” was used in both a geographical and a political sense. Initially, Galatia referred to the north-central area in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey) where the Gauls had settled after migrating from Europe in the 3rd century B.C. In this geographical sense of the term, the principal cities of the area were Ancyra, Pessinus, and Tavium. In 25 B.C., the Emperor Augustus converted this territory into a Roman province and added to this province an area in the south, which included the cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. So Galatia, in the political sense of the term, encompassed an area through which Paul traveled in his first missionary journey.

The problem boils down to this. Was Galatia written to the churches in the southern part of the province (Galatia in the political sense) which Paul and Barnabus evangelized on their first missionary journey, or was it written to a group of churches in Galatia proper (Galatia in the geographical sense), which may have been founded during the second and third missionary journeys?

Date—Some date Galatians as one of Paul’s earliest letters, because he does not appeal to the decisions of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) which would seem to be decisive with the problems the Galatians were having. Others see Galatians 2:1 as referring to taking Titus to the Jerusalem Council after his first missionary journey and therefore date the letter later. The difference is a letter written in the late forties versus one written in the early or mid-fifties.

The south Galatian theory allows for an earlier dating for the book, one as early as 48 or 49. However, Galatians 4:3 seems to imply a second visit to the Galatian churches prior to the writing of the letter, perhaps what is described at the beginning of the second missionary journey in Acts 16. If so, the letter was penned in the early 50s perhaps from Corinth or Macedonia.

Purpose— Some Judean Christians were arguing that, in essence, one must become a cultural Jew and obey the law to become fully Christian. They argued that the Bible itself made this a requirement for anyone who wished to belong to God's people (Gen. 17:10-14—circumcision emerges as the key concern). This letter is a protest of the corruption of the gospel of grace and defends that gospel from the respective errors of legalism and license.

Guiding Concepts:

Defense of Paul's apostolic ministry—Like 2 Corinthians, Galatians defends Paul's apostolic call and ministry and contains in summary form what the apostle taught. Acts 1:21-26 indicates that the major prerequisites for being an apostle was having been an eyewitness of Christ's earthly ministry and having been chosen for the office by the risen Lord. The legalists undoubtedly claimed that Paul never met the Lord Jesus and was not an eyewitness of the Lord's ministry. Likewise, they would deny his commission from the Lord. Paul's claim to having fulfilled these requirements stemmed from his Damascus road experience and its aftermath.

Law and grace—Galatians vigorously defends justification by grace alone and exposes the fallacy of a law-based righteousness. Galatians is called "a short Romans" since both books teach the doctrine of justification by faith. The superiority of grace over law is a central concern of the book.

Liberty and license—Galatians 5-6 shows that Christian liberty does not mean license. God intends His children to live in the power of the Holy Spirit to manifest the fruit of the Spirit (5:22-23) rather than the works of the flesh (5:19-21).

***Detailed Outline:* Galatians—Justification by Faith in Christ**

- I. Introduction: Turning to another gospel (1:1-10)
 - A. Salutation (1:1-5)
 - B. Turning to a different Gospel: Astonishment and denunciation (1:6-10)
- II. Defense of Apostolic Authority (1:11-2:21)
 - A. Paul's message received directly from God (1:11-24)
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 - a. Service and attitudes within the family of faith (6:1-5)
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 - C. Conclusion: Not circumcision but new creation (6:11-18)

Galatians—Justification by Faith in Christ

I. Introduction: Turning to Another Gospel (1:1-10)—Jewish legalists were spreading a false gospel, mixing law and grace, and Paul was not going to stand by and do nothing. He takes definite steps to engage on this issue by expressing his anxiety for the Galatians (1:6-7) and exposing the adversary (1:8-10).

A. Salutation (1:1-5)—These Notes adopt the south Galatian theory addressed above. Galatians is addressed to the churches located in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch founded during Paul's first missionary journey.

B. Turning to a different gospel: Astonishment and denunciation (1:6-10)—Paul's usual thanksgiving for his readers is omitted and he plunges abruptly into his immediate concern: their desertion of the Lord by turning from the true gospel. Paul is ticked! The lack of a thanksgiving for the readers is an expression of his anger.

Legalistic Judaizers had come to the Galatians after Paul and corrupted the message of God's grace and undermined Paul's ministry (1:6-7). His opponents had corrupted the gospel message by cluttering it with the necessity of obeying the law; that grace wasn't enough. He insists that such legalism is not the same gospel as the gospel of God's grace. Rather, it is a perversion of it. This additional requirement of law-keeping meant a subservient position of the Gentiles in the church of Christ. They had to be Jews before they could be real Christians. Ethnic rivalry and even hostility would be alive and well in such a situation. Paul will have none of this. He expresses the desire that those preaching a false gospel be eternally condemned (2:8-9). This stern expression is in the genre of Deuteronomy 27-28 where Moses speaks of curses coming on people for disobedience.

1:6—Turning away (*metatithes*) was a military term describing the desertion of a soldier.

1:7—The false teachers were perverting the gospel and troubling the church. The two necessarily go together.

1:10—The opponents seem to be asserting that Paul tailored the gospel to please people. He knew law-keeping would be unpopular to Gentiles, so he conveniently left it out. If Paul was a people-pleaser, would he have opened this letter with such a stern rebuke?

II. Defense of Paul's Apostolic Authority (1:11-2:21)—Paul replies in detail to the challenge by the Jewish legalists to his apostolic authority. They were arguing that Paul claimed to be an apostle but did not stand in the apostolic tradition. Paul asserts that the gospel he preached did not come from his Jewish training, nor from the apostles in Jerusalem, but by direct revelation from God (1:11-12). He was not a self-appointed imposter. He was an apostle before he met the other apostles (1:13-17). When he did meet the original apostles, he was welcomed (1:18-24) and his apostolic function and message was affirmed (2:1-10). In addition, he even found it necessary to rebuke Peter, the reputed leader of the Twelve, and that rebuke was received as appropriate (2:11-21).

A. Gospel received by revelation directly from God independent of the other apostles (1:11-24)

1. Circumstances of Paul's revelation (1:11-17)—The old Puritans used to say that God breaks

hearts in repentance, but not all in the same way. Paul is telling the Galatians and people through the ages his conversion story and his call to preach. Paul is demonstrating the integrity of his message. He did not receive it from other people nor was it self-originating. It was direct revelation from God himself.

1:13-17—Paul reaches back into his own past to remind the Galatian Christians of how God had dealt with him. He begins by reviewing his own conduct as a persecuting Jewish rabbi (1:13-14). His reputation as a persecutor was known far and wide. Then something happened that changed Saul the persecuting rabbi into the Paul the apostle and preacher of the gospel he formerly persecuted. This amazing change was of God, an experience that is related in three different places in the book Acts (Acts 9; 22; and 26). His conversion was entirely of God, by grace, through Christ, for a purposeful ministry to the Gentiles, for the glory of God.

He was advancing in Judaism. He was a persecutor of the church of God (he ravaged it like a wild boar in a cultivated vineyard) and was very zealous for the traditions that the opponents were promoting. He was stopped in his tracks on the way to Damascus and then went to Arabia to radically reassess his life and his ministry. Note what Paul says God did for him:

- He sent him apart from birth (see Jer. 1:5);
- He called him by his grace;
- He revealed his Son to him that he might preach to the Gentiles.

1:17—Arabia probably refers to Nabataea, the area around Damascus in Syria. Damascus and this Arabian area may have been controlled by Aretas IV at the time.

2. First Jerusalem meeting with Peter and James (1:18-24)—Paul's opponents were implying that he was a junior member of the apostolic team. And he was not even reliable at that. Paul continues his testimony and begins his defense of his apostleship. He starts with a description of his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion. The whole point of this is that Paul's conversion, message, and ministry was independent of the apostles in Jerusalem. He then went to Syria and Cilicia (Tarsus, Paul's hometown was in Cilicia) and was preaching the faith. The church in Judea heard of this and praised God for his about face (persecutor turned preacher) with respect to the faith.

Paul's theology was not received from other people nor significantly molded by them. Paul minimizes the influence of the chief leaders of the Jerusalem church to underline that his apostolic office and teaching came directly from God. The function of the travelogue in this section is to establish that point.

B. Right hand of fellowship: Recognition by the apostles of Paul's ministry among the Gentiles (2:1-10)—While Paul received his commission and message directly from God independent of the original apostles, there was apostolic affirmation of Paul's ministry and unity between Paul and the original apostles. The first part of Galatians 2 differs from Galatians 1. The narrative moves:

- from the source of the gospel Paul preached to its nature, especially as pertaining to circumcision;
- from independence from the Twelve to harmony and cooperation with them;
- from his conversion and early activities to real traction on the Gentile mission;
- from an uneasy uncertainty about the substance of the legalists' argument to agreement on the nature of the gospel and on a division of labor.

1. Second Jerusalem meeting: Judaizing controversy places Gentile mission in issue (2:1-5)—

Paul continues by describing another visit to Jerusalem fourteen years after his meeting with Peter and the other apostles. Paul didn't go to Jerusalem to be instructed in the gospel. He goes to Jerusalem in response to revelation (2:2) and to posit the gospel he preached to the established apostles. He was going there to maintain unity and to address any false charges that would undermine that unity.

That meeting revolved around circumcision as an identity marker for the people of God, the same issue that confronted the Galatians via the false teachers. The focus on circumcision for the legalists was understandable. If you're insisting on Law-keeping in addition to grace then how do you know that other people are keeping the law? Were they always eating kosher food? Were they always keeping the Sabbath? There were long-running disputes in those areas. But circumcision was definite. A guy was either circumcised or he wasn't. A clear-cut identity marker.

2:1—The book of Acts records five visits by Paul to Jerusalem:

- the visit after he left Damascus after being converted (Acts 9:26-30; Gal. 1:18-20);
- the famine relief visit (Acts 11:27-30);
- the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-35);
- a short visit at the end of the second missionary journey (Acts 18:22); and
- the visit that resulted in his imprisonment (Acts 21:15-23:35).

The visit mentioned in this verse is either the famine relief visit or that of the Jerusalem Council. The case for identifying the Jerusalem visit of Galatians 2:1-10 with the Jerusalem Council recorded in Acts 15 seems strongest. For both accounts, the communication is between the Jerusalem and Antioch churches. For both, Barnabas and Paul go to Jerusalem and the participants at the meeting being the same—the legalists, Barnabas and Paul, and the Jerusalem apostles. The subject of the dispute is the same (necessity of being circumcised) as are the results. However, there are differences. Galatians only mentions a private meeting and omits the public discussion. Galatians speaks of Titus going with Paul and Barnabas as a test case, whereas Acts 15 fails to mention that. Galatians says that Paul and Barnabas “went up in response to revelation”, whereas Acts 15 indicates that Paul and Barnabas were delegated by the Antioch church. These differences are not compelling when one reflects on the reality that Paul's main goal in Galatians was not giving a full account of his activities or lining up his version with what Luke would write later. His point was to reply to the criticisms of the legalists.

The main bugaboo with seeing the Galatians 2 visit as the same as that of Acts 15 is to ask why Paul doesn't use the Jerusalem Council's verdict in his argument against the legalists in Galatians? Perhaps because the Council, while freeing the Gentiles from the necessity of adherence to the law, also added certain restrictions for Jewish conscience sake. Or perhaps by referring to the Council's decrees, Paul would be conceding the very thing the legalists were contending, that the authority of the Jerusalem apostles was greater than his own direct commission from the Lord; that he was indeed a second-stringer.

“Fourteen years” refers to Paul's previous visit to Jerusalem about three years after his conversion (Gal. 1:18). If this visit was around the time of the Jerusalem Council, that would place Paul's conversion in the early 30s, rather soon after the Lord Jesus' resurrection.

2:3-5—Paul brought Titus to Jerusalem as a test case. Would the original apostles require a Gentile believer to be circumcised? The answer was no. To impose circumcision on Titus would be to deny that salvation is by faith alone and to require obedience to the law in addition to faith for acceptance before

God. Those undermining the unity of the church are described as false brothers, kin to the teachers who were troubling the Galatians.

Although some Jews believed that Gentiles could be saved, no one believed that they would be adopted into the covenant on equal terms with Jews and certainly not without being circumcised. The decision diverged significantly from the cultural norms of Judaism.

Was Paul inconsistent in refusing to circumcise Titus (2:3) when he later circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3). Paul was not submitting Timothy to Jewish Law to win him to Christ. Timothy was part Jew and part Gentile, and his lack of circumcision might have hindered his ministry among the Jewish people. Titus was fully Gentile and to require circumcision in his case would imply that there was something lacking in his Christian conversion and experience.

2. Recognition of the Gentile mission by the apostolic pillars (2:6-10)—The right hand of fellowship showed that the original apostles not only affirmed Paul's message of justification by faith, but that he was divinely commissioned to take that message to the Gentiles. They recognized spheres of ministry. Apart from his visit to the household of Cornelius (Acts 10) and to the Samaritans to confirm Philip's ministry (Acts 8), Peter centered his ministry primarily on the Jews and Paul on the Gentiles.

Paul walks a tightrope here. His ministry was from God, not an assignment from the Jerusalem apostles. He wants the Galatians to know that because the false teachers were probably making him out to be a second-stringer and themselves as getting things right from the first team. No, Paul didn't receive an assignment from the "first team". Rather they recognized his divine call and ministry to preach to the Gentiles as they were to preach to the Jews. He wanted to make clear his independent ministry from the Lord without undermining the unity with the original apostles. The original apostles (the pillars) added nothing to his divinely received message, they were happy to agree to the Jew-Gentile division of labor.

C. Peter confronted in Antioch: Justification by faith in Christ, not by legal observance (2:11-21)—Paul relates how he confronted Peter because Peter was behaving in a way inconsistent with the truth that we are all justified by faith and not by the works of the law. After his vision at the house of Simon the tanner (Acts 10:9-16), Peter felt free to eat with Gentiles and seems to have done so regularly. However, this demonstration of the unity between Jew and Gentile in Christ halted when some emissaries from Jerusalem arrived. Peter might have been intimidated by the circumcision party and drew back from eating freely with Gentiles. Peter's poor example was being imitated by Jewish believers and Paul felt the need to confront him on the issue. Anything that implies that a person in Christ is something less than acceptable is not being straightforward about the Gospel.

1. Eating with Gentiles and Jewish customs (2:11-13)— Why report this? Why would Paul publicly rebuke Peter in this situation? Peter may have justified his action to step back from table fellowship with Gentiles the way Paul saw his own actions at times, recorded in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22, that he would restrict his freedom in order not to give offense. However, Paul saw it differently. Stepping back from table fellowship with Gentiles relegated them to second-class citizenship in the Kingdom. Peter may have seen himself as accommodating the Jews on minor points to keep the peace, whereas Paul saw any degree of racial or ethnic segregation as affront to the heart of the gospel. Paul saw the issue as serious and urgent and therefore public rebuke, rather than private aside, was in order.

It is difficult for moderns to understand how serious table fellowship was in the early church. Just as circumcision was a symbol of family identity, so was table fellowship. Paul is telling this story to them for the same reason he publicly rebuked Peter. This isn't a squabble about two different ways of

interpreting an insignificant point. The heart of the gospel was at stake. God was forging a united family and Peter was backing away from that truth to accommodate Jewish exclusivism.

2:13—Note that he says that Peter, Barnabas, and the other Jews were hypocrites (2:13). The hypocrite was the actor in a Greek play that wore masks to indicate which of the multiple roles he was playing in any given scene. The word came to mean someone deceitfully playing a part, pretending to be someone they weren't. Peter was play-acting and leading others to do the same. That play-acting was an essential denial of the new community that Jesus was calling into being. Peter was holding the mask of Jewish respectability in front of his real face, separating himself from his Gentile brothers and sisters. Peter's action undermined the unity of the church (2:14), cast a shadow on the doctrine of justification by faith (2:15-16), was inconsistent with Peter's own testimony at the Jerusalem Council relating to the believer's freedom from the law (2:17-18), undermined the gospel itself (2:19-20), and the grace of God in the atonement of the Lord Jesus (2:21).

2. Gospel truth: Justification by faith in Christ apart from law (2:14-21)—Are Paul's direct remarks to Peter limited to verse 14, or do they go through to the end of the chapter, or do they stop somewhere in between whereupon Paul continues to elaborate on the inconsistency of Peter's behavior and the doctrine of justification by faith. Whether Paul's response to Peter continues through verse 21 is uncertain. However, what is certain is that this section goes to the heart of what the letter to the Galatians is about. Both Jews and Gentiles are justified by faith (2:15-16). They are on the same terms regarding salvation. Righteousness by faith does not lead to sinful living (2:17-18). Indeed, the law properly understood leads us to our need for the grace of God in the Lord Jesus (2:19-20). If the law could bring righteousness, then it would set aside the need for grace and Christ would have died needlessly (2:21).

Our new identity arises from the reality that we are in Christ. This public rebuke of Peter was a matter of Christian identity. It was part and parcel of Paul's passionate argument to the Galatians about the reality of their Christian identity in Christ. In Christ, we are new creatures. Those who belong to the Lord Jesus are in Him, so that what is true of the Lord Jesus is true of them. All those who are in the Lord Jesus are the true people of God, regardless of race, or ethnicity, or gender, or any other humanly devised divider or marker. This identity is framed by God's promise to Abraham, fulfilled in the Lord Jesus, of a single world-wide family. The marker of membership in that family was not circumcision or other humanly devised markers, but faith in Christ.

Illustration—A story about Margaret Thatcher, while she was Prime Minister of Great Britain, visiting an assisted living facility for senior citizens. She went from room to room greeting the senior citizens. She came upon one senior citizen who showed no sign of recognizing who Thatcher was while shaking her hand. Thatcher asked the woman: “Do you know who I am?” The woman replied: “No, I don't. But I'd ask the hall nurse if I were you, she probably would know. She usually does.”

2:16—This is a key verse in the book and marks the first appearance of the term “justified” (*dikaioutai*) in Galatians. This is a legal term and means “to declared righteous”. How can sinful people stand before a holy God? Only by the gracious declaration by God based on faith in Christ and his justifying work that wrought a new creation.

There is a threefold repetition of the doctrine of justification by faith in this one verse: “a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Christ”; “So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith”; and “because by observing the law no one will be justified”.

2:20—Ultimately, the implications of our union with Christ (Rom. 6:1-6; 1Cor. 12:13) is the answer to

the accusations that justification by faith alone leads to lawless living (see 2:17). That is the standard antinomian objection to justification by faith, that is by eliminating the law one encourages godless living. But that objection misunderstands the nature of justification.

For the legalists, justification by faith is nothing more than a legal fiction, declaring that people are right when they are not. While it is true that people are accepted by God as righteous when they are not, this is only the case because God joins us to Christ and this implies a true transformation. What does it mean to be in Christ? It means to be so united to Christ that all the experiences of Christ become the Christian's experiences. His death for sin, was the Christian's death; His resurrection was the believer's resurrection (in one sense); His ascension and exultation, the believer's exultation (in the sense of Ephesians 2:6 and being seated with Christ in the heavenlies). What is true of Christ is true of the believer.

2:21—The implication of requiring law-keeping in addition to justification by faith for acceptance before God is that the Cross is not enough. Human effort is needed to plug divine gaps. However, if righteousness is gained or sealed by human effort, then Christ died needlessly.

III. Defense of Paul's Message of Justification by Faith in Christ (3:1-4:31)—In this section Paul defends justification by faith. He appeals to the Galatians' original reception of the gospel of grace (3:1-5). He then returns to the Old Testament to show that Abraham and the prophets understood salvation by grace through faith (3:6-14). He proceeds to explain why the law was originally given (3:15-4:7), expresses his consternation over the Galatians current confusion (4:8-20), and then uses an allegorical interpretation of the story of Sarah and Hagar to illustrate the relationship between law and grace (4:19-31).

The Galatians were being urged to add law-keeping to the faith as a condition for acceptance before God. However, to supplement the work of Christ is to supplant it; we are saved by faith in Christ alone. Paul develops his argument along the following lines:

- The Galatians growth in Christ must continue the way their lives in Christ began—by faith (3:1-5).
- Abraham, the great patriarch of Judaism, was justified by faith and that principle is an abiding one (3:6-9).
- Christ redeemed from the curse of the law all who place their faith in him (3:10-14). The curse of the law is our inability to keep it, exposing our inability to be self-justifying beings despite our pretense.
- God's covenant with Abraham was not nullified by the Mosaic Code given 430 years later (3:15-18).
- The law's purpose was to expose sin and drive us to Christ, not to supplant Christ as a surrogate access to God (3:19-22).
- Believers in Christ are God's adopted children and are no longer bound in tutelage to the law for what the law pointed to has now come (3:23-4:7).
- In yearning to return to the tutelage of the law as a supplement to faith, the Galatians were going spiritually backwards (4:8-20).
- Paul concludes with an allegory based on Isaac and Ishmael, Abraham's sons, to show the superiority of the Abrahamic Covenant to the Mosaic Covenant, of faith to law as a principle of life (4:21-31).

A. Vindication of justification by faith in Christ (3:1-29)—Life in the Spirit is linked to the Cross. In this section, Paul is attacking the project mentality, Perfection is not humanly achieved. What we are and will be is by faith.

Beginning here and running through chapter 4, Paul uses a diatribe style, a vivid teaching style characterized by imaginary interlocutors, rhetorical questions, and intense, often in your face, reasoning.

1. Galatians' experience: Spirit received by faith, not by legal observance (3:1-5)—Paul asks the Galatians a series of rhetorical questions. Did they begin by law or faith? By human striving or by the Spirit? By trying or by trusting? Having begun by the Spirit, were they to be completed by the flesh?

He asks them basically, whether they were out of their minds. Having started by grace were they going to complete things by the law that no one can really obey? They were part of the family of God by being in Christ, not by jumping through Jewish legalistic hoops. Messiah's family is one forged by faith. Are they trying to be part of the Jewish ethnic family defined by a physical descent that they really will never have?

What of their initial experience? It was by grace and Spirit, not circumcision and the law. Paul argues from the standpoint of consistency with their conversion. The legalists were arguing that complete Christianity including obedience to the law. Converts to Judaism had to prove their genuineness by this test and converts to Christ should too. Paul points out that the Galatians' conversion: Paul presented Christ and him crucified to them (3:1). They had received the Spirit (3:2-4). Miracles were worked in their midst (3:5). Did those things occur just so that now they observe the law?

The Spirit is mentioned numerous times in Galatians. His ministry among believers includes:

- He convicts people of their sin and reveals Christ to them (Jn. 16:7-11);
- He regenerates people, making them a new creation (Jn. 3:1-8);
- He baptizes people, incorporating them in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13);
- He seals believers (Eph. 1:13; 4:30);
- He indwells them, enabling the to live appropriately (1 Cor. 6:19-20);
- He fills them, empowering them for life and ministry (Jn. 7:37-39; Eoh. 5:18-21).

In addition to these, believers can grieve the Spirit when they disobey God (Eph. 4:30), doing what he doesn't want, and quench the Spirit when they don't do what he leads them to do (1 Thess. 5:19).

3:1—Paul adopts vivid speech to press home to the Galatians the seriousness of their situation. Who has “bewitched you” is literally “double-eyed you,” suggesting an evil spell confusing people. Paul calls the Galatians foolish, a term that means “spiritually dull”. The apostle is really getting into his argument!

2. Abraham: Father of faith-based righteousness (3:6-9)— Paul takes them back to Abraham in Genesis 15. He was credited with righteousness by faith not by the law. God's covenant promised that through Abraham, all nations would be blessed. That meant people just like the Galatians, were blessed without legalistic hoops to jump through. People who believe the gospel are already Abraham's true children. Faith is not a temporary badge to be exchanged for circumcision later on. Just as Abraham was saved by faith, so are his spiritual descendants, both Jew and Gentile. Paul can say this because the

New Covenant's outpouring of the Spirit on people of every race and nationality is the unveiling of the comprehensive aspects of the Abrahamic Covenant.

In this section Paul quotes frequently from the Old Testament. He established that Abraham was saved by faith (3:6-7) by quoting Genesis 15:6 where righteousness is imputed to Abraham because he believes God. Then he notes that salvation was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews (3:8-9) by quoting Genesis 12:3.

3. Law's curse and Christ's redemption (3:10-14)—Paul continues his Scriptural argument. Justification must come by faith alone once one properly understands the implications of relying on the law. Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27:26 to show that the law demanded perfect observance. He then contrasts faith and law as having different, mutually exclusive points of reliance for justification. This he does by quoting Habakkuk 2:4 and juxtaposing that text with a quote from Leviticus 18:5. Paul concludes this section by describing Christ's substitutionary atonement and again citing the Old Testament (see Deut. 21:23).

The cross of the Lord Jesus and the gift of the Spirit dealt with our sin problem and enables blessing to reach the whole world, Jew and Gentile alike. The law was no remedy, it only graphically pointed out our sin problem.

Pause and ponder—So why the fascination with law? This has been a recurring issue in Church history. How is it that law bewitches us, casts a spell as it were?

- It appeals to the flesh, our sense of doing it by ourselves. There is a draw to being religious, to being seen as right, even superior.
- It appeals to the senses. Instead of worshipping God in "Spirit and truth", the legalists invent their own system and even make God their debtor. Worship should engage the senses, but these external things are but windows through which faith perceives the eternal.
- The legalists use religion to measure themselves and compare themselves with others.

3:15-29— The idea of promise runs throughout this section. It refers to God's promise to Abraham that in him all nations of the world would be blessed. The promise was spoken to Abraham and his seed (singular). That seed was Christ. The promise given to Abraham and his seed was realized through the Lord Jesus. This was to be a spiritual posterity, a family defined by faith, not ethnic descent or legal observance. What the law does is prepare us for grace by showing us our inability to keep the law. The law in effect kept Israel as a strict guardian until Messiah, the Lord Jesus, delivered us from sin and gave us the Spirit to live faithfully unto God.

4. Covenant priority: Abrahamic over Mosaic (3:15-18)— This portion answers the argument that the law, coming after God's covenant with Abraham, superseded it and changed the basis of salvation from faith to law-keeping. Paul asserts that just as a human covenant that is properly established is not set aside or supplemented, so too the promises of God are immutable. God's promises in his covenant with Abraham are not rendered void by the law which was introduced 430 years later. The Greeks used the same word to convey the idea of "covenant", "testament", or "will". Wills were sealed so they could not be altered. So too, the covenant with Abraham was not altered by the Mosaic Covenant. God would not institute a covenant that retracts his earlier promise based on faith.

3:17—"Four hundred and thirty years" comes from Exodus 12:40.

5. Law's purpose: Lead us to faith in Christ (3:19-25)—The law does not negate the promise, so what is the law's purpose? The law functions to show us our need for grace, not as a vehicle of self-salvation. It points out our sin and drives us to Christ. The law is conditioned on complete obedience that no one (except Christ) can do. In addition, Paul tells us—

- Law was given because of transgressions. That it is a means of checking sin by showing us that sin incurs God's wrath (3:19).
- Law is temporary (3:19).
- Law is inferior to the Abrahamic Covenant because of its manner of bestowal. God made promises directly to Abraham while the law was established through angelic agency (3:20).
- Law was not given to impart righteousness or to give life (3:21) but declared that all people are hostages to sin (3:22, 24). It serves as a tutor to lead us to Christ (3:22-25).

3:19—According to post-Old Testament Jewish tradition, the law was given through angels and the mediator was Moses himself.

3:24—The law was a strict teacher or guardian (*paidagogos*). In privileged Roman society, a master would commit his young sons (typically as young as six or seven years of age) to a teacher or guardian (often an educated slave) until they reached puberty. These teachers were expected to be strict disciplinarians assigned the task of protecting their young charges from society's evils and providing moral training and instruction. This was the law's function until Christ came to redeem us. The law was a guardian looking after the people, until the time of Messiah. It was meant to lead us to Christ by showing us our need.

6. Abraham's seed: Children of God through faith in Christ (3:26-29)—Paul contrasts our standing as children of God with what was described as one's standing under law. Three significant changes are noted:

- All who believe in Christ are children of God.
- Believers are all one in Christ and human distinctions lose their significance.
- Believers are Abraham's seed and heirs with Christ to all God promised in His covenant with Abraham.

If you belong to the Lord Jesus by grace, you are in the family. People do not become children of God by physical descent but by spiritual descent, by faith and not by ethnic participation in an exclusive covenant. Legal observance is irrelevant. Your status is determined by being in Christ.

B. Old Testament illustrations of justification by faith (4:1-31)

1. Legal heir as child compared to people under law (4:1-7)—Paul compares those under law to a minor child who is an heir to an estate prior to his full sonship when Roman child received the *toga virilis*, his formal acknowledgment as son and heir. The minor heir was kept in subservience and lacked freedom and decision-making authority even though by birthright he owned the entire estate. When the son attained his majority, he began to step into his role as the heir to the estate. Paul projects this situation into the spiritual realm. We were slaves under worldly principles until Christ came and redeemed (*exagorase* = buy or redeem) us from under the law, freeing us from a legalistic yoke and secured for us full rights as heirs.

Paul's aim here is to help the Galatians realize as Gentiles that their pilgrimage from paganism to Christian faith is matched, stride for stride, by the Jewish pilgrimage from a young child in bondage to the law as a guardian to faith in Christ. What is relevant now for both Jew and Gentile was the atonement of the Lord Jesus made applicable by the Spirit. The law had served its purpose.

2. Paul perplexed by the Galatians (4:8-20)—Paul now turns from an analytical argument to a personal appeal. From 2:15 to 4:11, Paul was on a step-by-step argument pointing out the folly of the Galatians heeding the direction of the legalists. Now comes the heart-to-heart moment. He reminds the Galatians of their initial acquaintance. The Galatians received Paul and his message eagerly. Paul wants to know what has gone wrong. Paul is perplexed! He is in labor again for them until the Lord Jesus was formed in them.

a. Turning back to enslavement to the law (4:8-11)—The Galatians were observing the special days and seasons of the Mosaic calendar perhaps thinking that these observances garnered them extra credit with God (see Col. 2:16). Paul is alarmed by these developments. They were giving up on the power of the gospel for the weakness of the law. All of us must be aware of the legalistic spirit that caters to fleshly human effort instead of spiritual dependence, is deeply prideful rather than humble, and makes outward prominence the substitute for inward experience.

The reference to special days, months, and seasons is a reference to keeping Jewish festivals. All of those festivals looked forward to God's great act of redemption in the Lord Jesus. By keeping these festivals, even after the redemption, is to act as if they were not sure God had done what He said would. That is to call the gospel and God's fidelity into question. Sometimes, it is easier to rule your life by the old line-up of options: by racial or tribal identity, by various convenient loyalties, by the dictates of money, sex, and power. It's harder to follow God in Jesus and in the Spirit.

b. Paul's initial ministry and Galatian response recalled (4:12-16)—The apostle recalls the Galatians' warm reception to his initial ministry, receiving him as an emissary from God even in his weakness. Some have used 4:15 as a proof-text that Paul's thorn in the flesh (see 2 Cor. 12:7) was an eye disease, perhaps ophthalmia. Others have suggested malaria. While the initial reception was warm, there was a distinct change in the emotional environment. Coolness and suspicion had replaced love and trust.

4:16—Moralists pointed out that flatterers were not concerned with their hearers' good, but just told them what they wanted to hear. The one who told them the truth openly was the one who really loved them. Paul is identifying himself as the truth-speaker, who was telling them the truth in love. Those peddling the claims of the law were the flatterers.

c. Jewish legalists' deceit to win Galatians over (4:17-20)—The Judaizers had attempted to alienate the Galatians from Paul, to monopolize access to them, and thus to shut up the Galatians to their exclusive influence. Paul ministered to help them know Christ and glorify him. Now they were pandering religious types that were doing none of those things. Beware of religious leaders who claim your exclusive allegiance because they are the only ones who are right.

Paul is asking them what happened to their relationship. He was their spiritual father.

Aside—Parents never outgrow their children. When they're little, they are a handful. When they are grown they are a heartful.

3. Hagar and Sarah: Allegory of grace and law (4:21-31)

4:21-23—Let's provide some background. When Abraham (then Abram) was seventy-five, God called him to go to Canaan and promised him an abundant posterity (Gen. 12). His wife, Sarah was barren. When Abraham was eighty-five, they still did not have children, and Sarah became impatient with the situation. She proposes that Abraham have children through Hagar, Sarah's servant (Gen. 16:1-3). This was legal and even customary in the society of the day, but not at all what God had in mind. Within a year, Hagar is pregnant, and Sarah is jealous. Sarah mistreats Hagar and Hagar runs away. God intervenes and Hagar returns and give birth to Ishmael (16:4-16). When Abraham was ninety-nine, God again speaks to him, promising him a son (Gen. 17-18). A year later, Isaac is born (Gen. 21:1-7). The blended family has problems. When Abraham was one hundred two or one hundred three, at Isaac's weaning, Ishmael mocks his step-brother. Sarah demands that Hagar and Ishmael must go, and Abraham reluctantly agrees (Gen. 21:9-14).

Paul uses this reality to contrast law and grace, flesh and promise in the lives of Abraham's two sons, Ismael and Isaac. Ishmeal was the son of Hagar, a slave woman, and was born in the ordinary way. Isaac was the son of Sarah, a free woman, and born in accordance with God's promise in a most extraordinary way (see Rom. 4:18-21). According to ancient customs, the status of the mother affected the status of her son.

4:24-27—Paul applies this Old Testament story figuratively to two covenants—the Abrahamic and the Mosaic. Thus—

<i>Old Covenant</i>	<i>New Covenant</i>
Law	Grace
Hagar, the slave	Sarah, the free woman
Ishmael, conceived after the flesh	Isaac, miraculously conceived
Earthly Jerusalem, in bondage	Heavenly Jerusalem, which is free

The Mosaic Covenant issued from Mount Sinai, bound people as slaves. Paul allegorizes this to compare Hagar and Ishmeal to earthly Jerusalem and her brood of legalists. The Abrahamic Covenant is implicitly understood as a gracious system which, through the fulfillment of the Messianic promise, brings forth free children. Paul allegorizes this covenant to compare Sarah and her line to the Jerusalem above and to children of grace and promise.

4:28-31—Paul continues the allegory to draw his application:

- The birth of Isaac is compared to that of Christians.
- The persecution of Isaac by Ishmeal (Gen. 21:8-10) is compared to the false teachers' deceitful manipulation of the Galatian believers.
- The action of Abraham in sending away Hagar and Ishmeal (Gen. 21:11-14) is compared by implication to the Galatians' obligation to show the false teachers the door.

Paul elaborates on the practical blessings. The Galatians, like Isaac, were children of the promise. Grace, pictured by Sarah, was the spiritual mother. The law, pictured by Hagar, was the source of bondage. How to solve this dilemma? Not by trying to change the law or our old nature, or by working an acceptable compromise. The solution was to cast them out. The legalists had credentials, high standards, effective in promoting and advertising themselves. They had rules for every facet of life

which made things easy for their followers to know what was “spiritual” and what was not. However, the rules constituted an external cage. The people were being led into bandage and defeat, not liberty and victory and they did not seem to know the difference.

IV. Defense of Christian Liberty: Justification by Faith in Christ Does Not Lead to License

(5:1-6:18)—Paul answers the charge that grace is dangerous. It replaces law with license. We should not teach about our liberty in Christ because it will result in religious anarchy. But it is legalism that is dangerous because it seeks to do the impossible by using the law to do what it was never designed to do. It seeks to change the old nature and make it obey the law. Paul develops his thought as follows:

- We have been set free by Christ and are no longer under bondage to the law (5:1-12). Believers are called to be free in Christ from the fetters and pretense of the law-based righteousness.
- We need the Holy Spirit to control our lives from within (5:13-26). Believers are called to be free in Christ also from the bondage of sin and license (5:13-15). We need to be alive in the Spirit (5:16-26) who leads us to mature responsibility and set apart living unto God.
- Through the love the Spirit supplies, we can live for others and not ourselves (6:1-10);
- A life of liberty is to be lived to the glory of the God who makes it all possible (6:11-18).

A. Called to be free from law-based righteousness (5:1-12)—Paul warns against nullifying Christ (5:1) and falling away from grace (5:4). He is not speaking of losing salvation but of nullifying the grace of God so that Christ’s life within is of no tangible benefit to their living right now. This is true because their approach to being set apart to Christ in sanctification is in fact negating the cross of Christ (5:7-12).

1. Stand firm against circumcision and law-based righteousness (5:1-6)—Anyone who insists that circumcision is necessary for salvation is adding works to faith and thereby negating Christ’s sacrifice. If law is to be observed for the sake of righteousness, then the entire law must be obeyed (see Jas. 2:10), which is impossible and subjects a person to bondage all over again.

So legalism robs us of our liberty (5:1) but also of the riches that are in Christ (5:2-4). To live by grace is to depend on God’s abundant supply. To live by law is to depend on your own resources and ability to jump through all the hoops. It makes works necessary for salvation and seeks to establish some external standards of behavior as necessary marks of spirituality. And here lies the Achilles heel of law-keeping—we can’t pull it off.

2. Law-based righteousness hinders spiritual progress (5:7-9)—The cross marked the end of the law system and rendered circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic Covenant as the basis of righteousness as unnecessary as it was impossible. Paul would not stand for someone pooh-poohing this issue.

Paul moves quickly through illustrations. First there is an athletic image of a runner cutting in on another runner (5:7), which the legalists had done to the Galatians, knocking them off stride and nearly out of the race altogether. Then he moves to a courtroom scene of a persuasively misleading argument (5:8), which the legalists had done to the Galatians, to a kitchen with yeast spreading through an entire lump of dough (5:9). In the Old Testament yeast is often used as a symbol of evil and evil permeates a situation. Legalism is like yeast in that way. It enters a situation attitudinally almost unnoticed, grows and spreads, and begins to adversely affect the entire operation. The yeast principle demonstrates the danger of sitting on your hands when falsehood and error are being taught.

3. Anathema on preachers of law-based righteousness (5:10-12)—Paul’s opposition to the Judaizers is clear cut. He wished that they, who were so enthusiastic about circumcision, would go the whole way and castrate themselves (as did the pagan priests of the cult of Cybele in Asia Minor). The Jewish people abhorred eunuchs and castrated men (see Deut. 23:1). This word picture is a very graphic one! Paul’s desire is that they would be spiritually impotent and unable to make additional converts. Paul is past being nice at this point. Sometimes we church people can be so friendly and nice that we fail to confront false teaching that can do lasting damage to the church of Jesus Christ and to individual Christians.

B. Freedom to serve not to indulge the sinful nature (5:13-6:10)—Freedom from law does not mean license to sin. Legalism’s danger is to externalize righteousness and to foster a self-righteous meritocracy that makes a God a debtor to a self-satisfied “deserving” sinner. The idea of obedience that is never fully accomplished (see Lk. 7:17) is gone as is a sense of fellowship with God based on his grace. However, there is a danger in the other extreme—that of license. This too externalizes righteousness, making it a declarative show rather than an internal reality. The law is not set aside by lawlessness, but by grace.

1. In general (5:13-15)—The Galatians are warned not to let their freedom in Christ become license and thereby give sin a base of operations. Indulgence in the sinful nature leads to slavery, not to freedom. We are to be free to obey the law of love (5:13). Paul cites the second part of the Great Commandment. It is the Spirit within that enables us to do this (Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:6, 22). They were backbiting and devouring each other rather than obeying the law of love.

2. Life in the Spirit (5:16-26)—Franklin Roosevelt concluded a speech to Congress by referring to what he described as the four basic freedoms inherent to Americans—freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. One commentator adds a fifth freedom—freedom from sin and self. In this section, Paul describes the ministries of the Spirit that enable a believer to enjoy liberty in Christ. The Spirit enables us to fulfill the law of love (5:13-15). The Spirit enables us to overcome the flesh (5:16-21, 24). The Spirit enables us to live fruitful lives (5:22-23, 25-26).

The law of love can only be obeyed in the power of the Spirit. This is where our true identity as those renewed in Christ lies, where our deepest motivation comes from, and where the power to rule our lives is really found. Our identity is that of true child of God by faith, indwelt by the Spirit, without needing the strict guardian of the Jewish law or its physical markings of circumcision. This ties into the power and motivation of the Spirit that freed them from the snares of paganism and the behavior that went with it.

a. Conflict between the Spirit and the flesh (5:16-18)—Believers will never be free from evil desires stemming from our fallen nature. However, we need not surrender to them. The flesh (*sarx*) and the Spirit (*pneuma*) are in conflict (5:16-17). The conflict between flesh or the sinful nature and Spirit is a characteristic theme in the New Testament. Flesh (*sarx*) signifies the human being as fallen, whose desires even at best originate from sin and are stained by it. It means all the evil one is capable of apart from the intervention of God’s grace. Spirit (*pneuma*) here means the Spirit of God who takes up residence in Christians to enable us to understand spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:14), receive the Lord Jesus as Savior and Lord, to call God “Father” (Rom. 8:15; Gal 4:6), and develop Christian character and personality. The Spirit is the presence of God in the believer and blocks, when allowed, the flesh’s evil cravings (5:18).

b. Works of the flesh delineated (5:19-21)—Paul lists sins in four categories:

- Sensual sins (5:19)—These include:
 - Sexual immorality (*porneia*), that is any immoral sexual activity or relationship.
 - Impurity can mean moral or ceremonial uncleanness, but is usually used of moral impurity.
 - Debauchery conveys an open and shameless contempt for what is proper.
- Religious sins (5:20) include idolatry, worshiping the creature rather than the Creator, and witchcraft, a tampering with or worship of evil powers.
- Social sins (5:20) include hatred, discord, jealousy, rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy.
- Sins associated with the use of alcohol (5:21), including drunkenness and orgies. Today's category is substance abuse.

c. Fruit of the Spirit delineated (5:22-26)—Believers do not produce fruit in their lives. The Spirit produces it in Christians living in vital union with the Lord (Jn. 15:1-8). Fruit is a singular term. The qualities enumerated constitute a unity. They should be found in a believer's life in some measure. These qualities can be analyzed in a triad of threes:

- Love, joy, and peace, those heart-mind attitudes that find their source in God.
- Patience, kindness, and goodness, the other-oriented attitudes.
- Faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, conduct of a person led by the Spirit.

5:22-23—Spirit infused Christian virtues are listed:

- Love (*agape*) is the foundation of the other graces.
- Joy (*chara*) is an inner radiance and contentment regardless of external circumstances which rests itself in God's sovereign hands (see Jn. 15:11). It corresponds to happiness in the secular world, but without dependence on external circumstances.
- Peace (*eirene*) is an inner repose and quietness (see Jn. 14:27; Phil. 4:7).
- Patience (*makrothumia*) is the quality of forbearance when provoked (see 2 Cor. 6:6; Col. 1:11; 3:12). It puts up with others, even when severely tried. It does not retaliate when wronged.
- Kindness (*chrestotes*) is benevolence in action (see 2 Cor. 6:6; Col. 3:12). Christians show kindness by behaving toward others as God has behaved toward them.
- Goodness (*agathosune*) is the uprightness of soul which reaches out to others for good even when undeserved.
- Faithfulness (*pistis*) is the quality of trustworthiness and reliability (see Lk. 16:10-12).
- Gentleness (*prautes*) is subdued strength.
- Self-control (*enkrateia*) denotes self-mastery witnessed in curbing fleshly impulses. It is chastity in both mind and conduct.

This process does not bypass our thinking and willing, but we cannot produce the nine qualities listed in 5:22-23 by our thinking and willing alone. By the Spirit, we are in the process of becoming and these qualities will be truly a part of who we become. Against these qualities, there is no law. If the Galatians and if we live in the way the Spirit directs, there will be no condemnation. We need to learn to stay in step with the Spirit.

3. Life of service: Doing good to all (6:1-10)—The believer is free in the Spirit, from the fetters of the law and from the bondage of license. He or she is free to fulfill the law of Christ by the power of the Spirit. The liberty of love involves self-sacrificing service. Two important ministries are

discussed—bearing one another’s burdens (6:1-5) and sharing our blessings with others (6:6-10).

a. Service and attitudes within the family of faith (6:1-5)

6:1—Paul deals with the hypothetical case of a brother caught (*prolempithe* = to detect or overtake) in sin. Such a person is to be restored (*katartizete*) by other believers who are walking in the Spirit (5:16) and are mature in faith. *Katartizete* is a medicinal term used for setting bones and for expressing a mending function, as in fishing nets. This restoring work is to be done gently (*prautetos*) and warily, realizing that no one is immune to sin’s clutches.

Legalists don’t bear others’ burdens, they add to them. They are harder on others than they are on themselves. Christ commented on that reality in Matthew 23:4. The legalists are obsessed with addressing their spirituality by legalistic and fleshly means and have little patience with the faults and spiritual needs of others. Theirs is a bruising discipline. Legalists and Spirit-led believers have contrasting aims (restoring the brother versus condemning the brother) and contrasting attitudes (gentleness and meekness versus pride and condemnation).

6:2-5—Christian service involves helping others with the burdens of life. Burden here may have reference to burdens of temptation and spiritual failure given the immediate context of this text. In bearing the burdens of others, we are to avoid the twin errors of pride (6:2-4) and neglect of our own responsibilities (6:5). As the Spirit enables us, we are to help others as we hoe our own row.

There is an interesting word picture here. Burden (*bare*) in 6:2, signifies a crushingly heavy load. Load (*phortion*) in 6:5 is a word used to describe a pack carried by a marching soldier. We are to carry our own regular loads with an eye to helping our spiritual kin with their crushing burdens.

b. Law of sowing and reaping: Do not grow weary in well-doing (6:6-10)—This section commands us to do good wherever and whenever we have opportunity. This includes financial support to worthy ministers (6:6) and an earnest desire and diligence to do good to others (6:9-10). We are to labor for the common good, but especially for the good of our fellow believers.

Christians are to shoulder the financial support of the pastor-teachers in the church. This leads into a discussion of sowing to please the Spirit, rather than to please ourselves. Then he elaborates the principle behind the precept (6:7-8), the law of sowing and reaping. We should sow bountifully if we desire a good harvest. In addition, we should sow carefully, making sure that what we support are ministries of integrity. The section closes with the exhortation to continue in well-doing with an eye to an eternal harvest. Do not become weary and give up (see Lk. 18:1).

6:9-10—These are great verses to keep on keeping on. We are to do good as we have opportunity to all people, especially to those in the household of faith.

C. Conclusion: Not circumcision, but a new creation (6:11-18)—Paul takes the pen from his amanuensis adds a summary in his own hand, containing a fresh warning against the leglists, a restatement of the essence of Christianity, a reference to his own sufferings for the cause of Christ, and a benediction.

Paul concludes this letter with what is on his heart. It is not legalistic observance that God wants, but a new creation in Christ. The Judaizers were negating the cross of Christ (see 1 Cor. 1:18-25) by externalizing faith and mixing it with self-effort. Paul wanted nothing to do with this. The cross of Christ was what he boasted in, clung to, and lifted high.

6:11—Some have read this verse (and 4:15) as suggesting that Paul suffered from some sort of eye disease. Whatever “large letters” portend here, the point is that Paul himself, rather than an amanuensis, wrote this section.

6:12-13—Paul’s language here borders on the grotesque, just as in 5:12. The legalists “boasting in the Galatians’ flesh” suggests these Jewish culture-bound missionaries were sending foreskins back to their legalistic brethren.

6:16—All those who are in the Lord Jesus are the new Israel, the Israel of God by the Spirit.

6:17—The marks of Jesus refer to the scars Paul bore as a result of the persecutions he endured for the sake of his Lord. These genuine and honorable body marks contrast strikingly with the ritualistic mark of circumcision the legalists wished to impose on the Galatians.

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