

CHAPTER IV

GALATIANS 3:1-4:31 PAUL'S VINDICATION OF GOSPEL SANCTIFICATION

A. INTRODUCTION.

We now enter into the very heart of this epistle where Paul, by means of interrogative questioning, illustration, and exhortation, forcefully drives home the crucial nature of gospel sanctification. He has already introduced this principle, especially in 2:19-20, through the stimulation of Peter's hypocrisy at Antioch, which may well have led to the spread of legalism in the Galatian churches. Now the same problem is confronted in a more direct manner with regard to the symptoms of legalism that Paul has come to learn about. This necessitates an emphasis upon the regenerating and indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit.

It needs to be reiterated that the whole controversy which Paul addresses here is that of Christian sanctification, that is the ongoing life of the child of God, which is based upon the gospel of justification by grace through faith alone. Summary proof is as follows: a. The problem that necessitated the Jerusalem council, 2:1-10, cf. Acts 15: 1-11, concerned Mosaic demands being placed upon Gentile Christians. b. The problem that Peter faced in Antioch concerned the promotion of legalism amongst believers, 2:11-14. c. The response of Paul focuses upon "the life which I now live in the flesh," 2:20. d. The challenge of 3:3 concerns not so much "having begun by the Spirit" as "now being perfected by the flesh." e. Similarly in 4:8-11, Paul is concerned about post-conversion legalism.

Let us emphasize that the gospel is of crucial importance in this situation, even as Paul has made abundantly clear, 2:16, yet the main focus is upon the *present life* of the Christian which is so fundamentally based upon this gospel.

B. GOSPEL SANCTIFICATION BY THE SPIRIT, 3:1-5

Almost in staccato fashion Paul thrusts a series of five questions at the Galatian saints that are intended to stimulate careful thought. Not surprisingly he addresses his readers as, "You foolish Galatians," as ἀνόητοι, anoētoi, that is literally as "unthinking," being neglectful of thinking about the truth of God and experience. In Luke 24:25 Jesus Christ uses the same word in addressing the Emmaus road disciples as, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!" Here as well, the problem is not ignorance or lack of knowledge, but failure to heed that which is already known. John Stott wrote an important booklet titled *Your Mind Matters*, which was subtitled, "The Misery And Menace Of Mindless Christianity." He declared that, "if we do not use the mind which God has given us, we condemn ourselves to spiritual superficiality and cut ourselves off from many of the riches of God's grace."¹

Scripture constantly exhorts us to employ and exercise our minds. "'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the LORD" (Isa. 1:18). "And do not be conformed to this world, but

¹ John Stott, *Your Mind Matters*, p. 46.

be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell/ponder/think on these things” (Phil. 4:8). “Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth” (Col. 3:2). Hence Paul now sets the Galatians these five questions that are intended to stimulate thinking concerning the ramifications of the only true gospel.

1. Question 1 – Have you thought about initial gospel proclamation? v. 1.

“O foolish/unthinking [ἀνόητος, anoētos adj vpm] Galatians, who has bewitched/cast a blinding evil spell upon [βασκαίνω, baskainō v aais] you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed/placarded [προγράφω, prographō v apis], having been crucified?” These Galatian saints have lost sight of foundational truth; the gospel has become passé while legalism has gained prominence.

The “disturbers,” 1:7, had bewitched the Galatian believers, mesmerized, hypnotized them, with their subtle, appealing, persuasive approach. There was probably Jerusalem authoritarianism about them, also biblical fluency regarding the books of Moses, a fastidious lifestyle, passionate, even admirable zeal, 4:17, along with seeming personal concern, 6:13. But the most deceptive aspect was the fact that, like most American cults and sects, Christ was included in this presentation, though not in the exclusive way that Paul had originally proclaimed.

Back in the days when Paul first evangelized this region, there was a distinctive characteristic; he exclusively preached redemption in Christ and made no mention of the necessity of added works of the Law. He set Christ forth as the continuing object of our faith, ever our only ground of hope, 2:20; 6:14-15. Likewise at Corinth, he “determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (I Cor, 2:1-2). No other doctrine was allowed to have the same prominence, whether eschatology or ecclesiology. Hence the Galatians ought to appreciate that by glancing back to Moses and then to Christ in the present, a decline in the preeminence of Christ has become inevitable and evident.

2. Question 2 – Have you thought about reception of the Holy Spirit? v. 2.

“This only do I wish to learn [μανθάνω, manthanō inf aa] from you; from the works of the Law did you receive the Spirit or from the hearing of faith?”

Paul is not concerned here with the truth of the prevenient work of the Holy Spirit by which a blind sinner is led to the gospel and granted faith, as true as this is (Eph. 2:8-9; II Thess. 2:13; I Pet. 1:1-2). Rather he focuses on that distinctive gift of the Spirit who comes at conversion, co-terminus with faith. Paul does not ask. “Did you receive faith through hearing on account of receiving the gift of the Spirit.” Rather, “Did you receive the gift of the Spirit as a result of hearing that led to faith?” At the moment of saving faith, the life of God has become implanted in the soul. However, most significant here is the point that the Holy Spirit was received at that time of authentic conversion. In v. 3, we “began in the Spirit” (cf. Tit. 3:5-7). For Paul, it is a fundamental point that, when we first believed, at the same time God “made us alive together with Christ” (Eph. 2:5). And such a work of conversion was through faith alone. And the obvious point is that if you started with life received this way, then also

appreciate that it is maintained on the same basis and not by means of necessary legal stimulus.

Hence, this indwelling Spirit is not a soft option, but a vital accompaniment with faith. Otherwise, how can you “*walk in the Spirit*”? 5:16; how can you be “*led by the Spirit*”? 5:18; how can you manifest the “*fruit of the Spirit*”? 5:22; how can you “*sow to the Spirit*”? 6:8. Paul elsewhere declares that, “all those who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Rom. 8:14, cf. vs. 9-11; Rom. 7:6; II Cor. 3:6).

3. Question 3 – Have you thought about continuance with the Holy Spirit? v. 3.

“Are you so foolish [ἀνόητος, anoētos adj npm, as Galatian Christians]? Having begun with/by the Spirit, are you now being completed/perfected [ἐπιτελέω, epiteleō v pmip] with/by the flesh?” Again the challenge is to the renewed mind and its shameful neglect.

a. The problem of thoughtless, carnal Christianity.

Today one of our greatest problems is irrational, unthinking Christians who are too lazy to toil with their minds. TV and the media do it for them. Extreme welfarism leads to trust in government to do the thinking for us. The common desire is for stimulation rather than edification, excitement, not truth. Hence serious thinking is unthinkable. Such drones hardly ever read, study, or learn. Jettisoned minds are replaced by sensation, impulses, feelings. Hence the Christian gospel is sentimentalized, dramatized, made abstract, and inevitably corrupted.

Here the gospel is being stood on its head; the light of truth is being subjected to leavening darkness; the Spirit of God is being subjected to carnal priorities. Here Christians may be likened to escaping from a sinking ship; on being rescued by a lifeboat that safely heads to shore, yet some jump back in the water to go it on their own!

Here the essence of the Galatian error is described as the employment of carnal/legal thinking for the ongoing life of the Christian. Eyes have moved from beholding Christ through the Spirit, as formerly placarded, v. 1, to themselves; faith and grace have become dim as the value of human merit and religious formality has increased. There is an attraction to ritual, outward form, competitive morality, legalistic asceticism, congratulatory self-discipline, 6:12-13.

b. The solution of thoughtful, spiritual Christianity.

In church history, the greatest Christian leaders have been deep thinkers, whether formally educated or not. Further, in true conversion there is the emancipation of the mind that yet must be exercised (Col. 1:21-22; 3:1-2). So here Paul stimulates the Galatians to think about the seduction of the greater, the gospel, by the lesser, the Law of Moses, of the defilement of the gospel of free and sovereign grace by, “the weak and worthless elemental things to which you desire to be enslaved all over again,” 4:9. It is like a man with an earned doctorate going back to high school, like attempting to reach a higher floor on a down escalator, like an adult returning to childish behavior (I Cor. 13:11).

Rather a man saved by the Spirit will, “*walk in the Spirit,*” 5:16, and be “*led by the Spirit,*” 5:18, and manifest the “*fruit of the Spirit,*” 5:22, and “*sow to the Spirit,*” 6:8. In other words, *the beginning of the Christian life is forever!* The gospel that justifies is also the gospel that sanctifies. In the parable of the sower, the seed and the soils (Matthew 13:20-23), Jesus Christ tells of some who claimed to be Christians and whose initial experience proved to be far superior to that which later developed. But then there were others who persevered fruitfully, v. 23. Since Christ is the Spirit baptizer (Matt. 3:11), the giver of Spiritual gifts (Eph. 4:8), and the source of Spiritual fruit (John 15:4-5), it is obvious that true spirituality is sourced in him.

Your justification is solely through Christ (Rom. 3:24), and so will be your glorification (Rom. 8:16-17); then what about that period between justification and glorification (Rom. 8:30, 38-39)? We are presently, “*beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit*” (II Cor. 3:18; 10:3-5). But the Galatians have lost this vision in the present, and there is no better aid to corrected vision in this instance than earnest participation around the Lord’s Table and study of the life of the Lord Jesus.

4. Question 4 – Have you thought about the possible vanity of your suffering? v. 4.

“Have you endured/suffered [*πάσχω*, paschō v aaip] so great/numerous things in vain/for nothing [*εἰχνη*, eikē adverb]—if indeed it was in vain?” In other words, “Hopefully, perhaps your *present* legal zeal will not ultimately be in vain, that is if by it you repent of your misunderstanding of Christian sanctification. Have you thought about how your present incorporation of works righteousness nullifies the legitimacy of your past sufferings for the cause of free grace?” That is, to suffer for what proves to be a false understanding of gospel sanctification is futile/vain suffering!

a. The past steadfastness and present capitulation.

Paul recalls the earlier stand for the gospel that was uncompromising; there was a singular, unclouded commitment to Christ alone. There was evident genuineness that resulted in Jewish persecution for abandoning Moses. Then the Judaisers arrived from Jerusalem and seduced many with their gospel supplements and additives. The result was a cessation of the former Jewish criticism that in fact invalidated the former suffering. In 6:12 this gospel neutralization is described: “Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.” Many, including Barnabas, 2:13, initially capitulated to this call, originating from Jerusalem, for supplementary, sanctifying Mosaic works through obedience to the Law/flesh. Consequently grace was voided, while former persecution was disqualified and then waned.

b. The present capitulation and future prospects.

So what does this present concession to the Law indicate? It could be that original conversion was in fact fraudulent, like the temporary enthusiasm of seed sown on rocky soil (Matt. 13:20-21), like those religious zealots that Christ will disown

(Matt. 7:22-23), like Ignorance in *The Pilgrim's Progress* whose vain pilgrimage reaches the very gates of the Celestial City only to be transported away to hell because of his trust in Christ and works-righteousness. Imagine a person who attends church regularly, is a member, and contributes with time, talent, and substance. But in reality, that person is not an authentic Christian, not converted. All of the professed blessings and trials of fellowship are utterly vain, worthless; supposed Christian living has been a complete delusion, a charade.

On the other hand, Paul is optimistic in this instance even as was the case with his dealing with the carnal Corinthians (I Cor. 3:1-4). Thus here he infers that earlier suffering was authentic and fruitful rather than counterfeit and fruitless since he subsequently asserts that, "I have confidence in you in the Lord that you will adopt no other [new legalistic] view," that you will experience a resumption of suffering on account of renewed focus on the gospel of free grace and consequently repudiate "the disturber/s" (5:10; cf. 1:7).

5. Question 5 – Have you thought about the basis of God's miracles which He has worked in your midst through the Spirit? v. 5.

"Therefore, He who is generously supplying/providing [ἐπιχορηγέω, epichorēgeō par pansm] you the Spirit and working [ἐνεργέω, energeō par pansm] powerful miracles [δύναμις, dunamis n apf] among you, [is He accomplishing this] by [the] works of the Law or by hearing with faith?"

- a. The implied answer.

It is God who is described here as performing these miracles through the imparted Spirit; He acts this way, not in response to human effort, but according to His grace which responds to non-meritorious faith. Miracles, gifts of the Spirit, originate from God's good pleasure and not the religious labors of man, such as tarrying, bargaining, weeping, drumming up faith as a work, repentance, etc. (I Cor. 12:4-11). We cannot pride ourselves in our Spiritual gifts since they are not dispensed according to merit, but are the spoils of gospel grace that Christ victoriously obtained and dispenses (Eph. 4:7-8). Thus the initial baptism of the Spirit (I Cor. 12:13) mediated through faith (Gal. 3:26-27) that consequently inaugurates gifts and graces in the believer (I Cor. 12:11), is the same Spirit who, through the believer's persevering faith, enables sanctified living; however, the relationship from start to finish is one of the graces of the Spirit mediated through faith alone, not the combination of faith and augmenting works.

- b. The applied answer.

The Galatians are not the only ones who are "unthinking" in their attitude toward this gospel of grace that totally excludes human works as the ground of justification and sanctification (Eph. 1:3-14; 2:8-10). Unconsciously we pride ourselves in our strong faith; we congratulate ourselves on account of our mature thinking; we secretly applaud our spirituality, or pride ourselves that we won't; we become blind to the truth that our justified standing and sanctified state before God are alone due to sovereign grace that is rooted in Christ's applied work of redemption. Both our justification and sanctification are grounded in Christ's

atonement and both are appropriated through faith alone in that same atonement, except for one vital distinction. The faith of justification is passive apart from “the works of the Law” (2:16), whereas the faith of sanctification is active, that is “faith working through love” (5:6).² As Henriette Auber has written:

And every virtue we possess,
And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness,
Are His alone.

What then is the essence of Paul’s emphasis behind these five provocative questions? It is that we are not to think of graduating beyond the saving grace of God which in fact leads to disqualification. We certainly do this when the gospel is relegated to mere initiatory status that necessitates some sanctifying additive. You looked steadfastly and singularly toward Christ when you first believed; so now continue to walk with your eyes focused on him with the same steadfastness and undivided loyalty. Further, don’t depreciate the work of the Holy Spirit by your present manner of life which suggests that His initial role in your life is now augmented by your own contribution. You received life through looking to Christ (John 3:14-16); so now continue to look to Christ for the continuance of that life. Don’t be like a man traveling in a Rolls Royce who decides he can travel faster and more securely by bicycle. Don’t sell your gracious birthright for a mess of carnal pottage (Heb. 12:16-17). Don’t depreciate or muddy “the fountain of living waters,” a source of continual life, and consequently attempt to drink from “old wineskins” (Matt. 9:17), that is “broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jer. 2:13; 17:13).

C. GOSPEL SANCTIFICATION AND THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT, 3:6-29

1. Introduction.

Having boldly confronted the Galatian Christians with their deviant ways, and directed them back to the root of their faith that must remain as an ongoing foundation, v. 1-5, Paul now reviews that gospel truth, v. 6. Remember that the issue here is Christian sanctification, the key word being “faith,” *as an ongoing lifestyle*, that connects to “Christ” and “life” in contrast with the augmenting “works of the Law/flesh,” 2:16, 20; 3:2, 5. So a model is introduced for the first time in Galatians who represents the epitome of the justified/sanctified child of God; it is Abraham, who continually lives the life of faith.

a. The mythologizing of Abraham.

During the last half of the nineteenth century, critical/liberal scholarship assigned the five books of Moses to four unknown authors or editors known as J, E, D, P, and even more. At the same time, Abraham as a person was critically dissected.

² On 5:6 J. B. Lightfoot comments that here, “[t]hese words . . . bridge over the gulf which seems to separate St. Paul and St. James. Both assert a principle of practical energy, as opposed to a barren, inactive theory.” *Galatians*, p. 205.

Julius Wellhausen, one of the best known of these critical scholars at that time, rejected Abraham's historicity and suggested he was created by means of a writer's free imagination. Another scholar suggested that Abraham was a deity who had fallen to a mere human level. Others considered him to be a tribal personification or legend.

b. The demythologizing of Abraham.

However, from the early twentieth century even till today, archaeological evidence has given us good reasons for doubting these humanist critics and trusting the Bible and Abraham as a historical person. In 1922-1924, Sir Leonard Woolley of the British Museum, excavated Ur of the Chaldeans where Abraham grew up and found evidence of an advanced civilization dating back to 2000 B.C. (Gen. 11:27-31). In Mesopotamia, clay tablets dating back to 2000 B.C. have been found on which are the names "Abarama" and "Aba(m)rama," akin to Abram, and "Aburahana," akin to Abraham.³ In Genesis 14:1-16 Abram goes to rescue Lot from capture by Mesopotamian kings, whose names were considered fictional. In 1933 the Mari tablets were discovered near the Euphrates river, confirming the currency of these names.

c. The historical significance of Abraham.

However, why is it important that we stress that Abraham was a real person who lived and walked this earth according to the Bible? First, because the Son of God, Jesus Christ, declared Abraham to be a historical person saying, "before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8:58). Second, because in Galatians 3:6-29 Paul describes Abraham in realistic terms and not mere idealism. We live in a pragmatic, practical world where people are only interested in truth that works and is proven by experience. Hence, if Abraham did not exist, his example as a man of great faith has little impact. The same is the case with Joseph and his many trials. But Abraham was a real man exercising real faith that proved to be strong. Therefore strong faith today becomes a real possibility.

d. The character of Abraham.

a. His failings.

Here is the proof that God fundamentally dealt with Abraham on the basis of grace alone. In Genesis 12:9-20, before Pharaoh in Egypt, Abraham denies that Sarah is his wife. She was in fact his half-sister so that he hid behind a half-truth. In Genesis 16:1-2, Abraham's unbelief, via Sarah, in the face of God's promise breeds sin. Concubinage was wrong, so that the resulting Ishmael became a continual thorn in the flesh for Isaac's seed. In Genesis 20:1-18, Abraham again denies that Sarah is his wife before Abimelech, a king in the Negev.

³ K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, p. 48.

b. His virtues.

Here is the proof of what happens to a man when God deals with him on the basis of grace alone. He was *peaceable* when strife threatened (Gen. 13:8), *generous* when he stood to lose (Gen. 13:9), *courageous* in rescuing Lot (Gen. 14:14-16), *hospitable* when guests arrived (Gen. 18:2-8), *compassionate* when Sodom was threatened (Gen. 18:23-32), but above all Abraham was *faithful*, full of faith, in his manner of living. “And he believed in the LORD; and He [the LORD] reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:5-6).

2. Abraham was justified by faith alone, v. 6.

“Just as [καθώς, kathōs con] Abraham ‘believed God, and it was reckoned/counted [λογίζομαι, logizomai v apis] to him as righteousness [δικαιοσύνη, dikaiosunē n asf].”

a. Introduction.

There is a tendency to depreciate Old Testament characters today, to portray them as having limited vision being subject to a primitive culture. Thus Abraham is represented as being nomadic, uncivilized; we patronize him with the comment that he did well in the circumstances. Yet surely he is the primary human character of the whole Bible, ranking above Adam, Moses, Elijah, David, and the Apostles, even Paul. The New Testament upholds all children of God, all Christians, as being of the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:29).

In Hebrews 11:8-19, Abraham is the outstanding witness amidst a catalog of faithful children of God; here more verses describe the example of his faith than any other person, for the reason that believers might learn (Heb. 12:1-2). He was saved by faith when called out of Ur of the Chaldees (Heb. 11:8). He walked by faith day by day, as a continuous sanctifying lifestyle, in the land of unfulfilled promise (Heb. 11:9). However his faith was not in his faith, but in a mighty God who he believed could even raise Isaac from the dead (Heb. 11:17-19).

In Romans 4:1-5, 9-25, Abraham is the perfect model of a man justified by faith alone apart from human works. Works are excluded since faith alone justifies (Rom. 4:3-5). Circumcision, any ritual act, is excluded because Abraham was saved through faith before he was circumcised (Rom. 4:10-11). Again, his faith was not in his faith, but in a mighty God whom he exalts in and glorifies. Thus he trusts God’s attributes and character (Rom. 4:18-20), specifically, he “grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,” v. 20. So Lloyd-Jones comments:

What does it mean exactly to say that he gave glory to God? It means that Abraham considered God, he considered who God is and what God is. That is how he gave glory to God. It does not mean primarily anything that Abraham said or anything that Abraham did. That followed. Abraham glorified God just by realizing who and what God is. In other words, he contemplated and meditated upon all the glorious attributes of God. That is how one glorifies God. We glorify God by realizing something of the truth about Him, and worshipping Him because of that, and committing ourselves to Him in the light of that.⁴

⁴ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans, Atonement And Justification*, 3:20-4:25, p. 221.

Concerning his renowned faith, George Muller writes in his autobiography that it was, “the self-same faith which is found in every believer . . . for by little and little it has been increasing for the last sixty-nine years.”⁵ So in Galatians 3:6-29, Abraham is preeminently renowned as the man of faith, the perfect model of a man who is justified by faith alone apart from human works and who continues to walk by faith, resulting in sanctification. Hence in Galatians 3:1-5, the gift of the Holy Spirit, thus regeneration and conversion, comes by faith alone when we initially believe the gospel, vs. 2-3a. The continuing work of the Holy Spirit is based on the same principle of faith alone, v. 3b. Further, supernatural wonders, signs and miracles were not wrought by God on account of works, but through faith alone, v. 5.

Hence, “in the same way, Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,” (3:6). How significant it is that Genesis 10-11 describes Nimrod, the kingdom of Babel in Shinar, and man proudly aspiring to build a tower reaching to heaven so that he might make a name for himself. But in Genesis 12 there is stark contrast with God reaching down to Abraham with gracious promise concerning what He would do, being desirous of faith alone. Thus, a holy, living relationship with God is established and maintained through faith in Him without human religious initiative! More specifically that faith is placed in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, so that “in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith,” 3:14, and walk according to this enabling.

- b. Abraham illustrates the foundational, abiding principle of justification by faith alone.

Paul reverts back to that gospel message which he originally placarded, v. 1, because of the necessity of revision that will revive authentic sanctification. The supreme question for any creature is that of being in a right, blessed relationship with his Creator, and the maintenance of that relationship. This was Job's great concern (Job 9:2), and that of his friend Bildad the Shuhite (Job 25:4-6). Of course this question presupposes present alienation on account of thorough sinful pollution, and accountability before a holy God, and the restlessness and torment of such a condition. But further, where is the security in being rightly related today if there is the possibility of being unrelated tomorrow?

- (1) Right standing with God comes through belief in Christ crucified as my substitute righteousness and effectual Mediator (I Tim. 2:5); thus the Father declares His verdict, His just declaration that I am fully pardoned and reckoned as righteous, for Christ's sake. This being “reckoned,” λογίζομαι, logizomai, is a judicial declaration like that of a judge in a courtroom, based upon the judge's holy grace (Rom. 3:24).
- (2) The parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector especially illustrates the saving of the repentant sinner solely through the look of saving faith (Luke 18:9-14; cf. 7:28-29; 10:25-29; 16:14-15). As a result of his heartfelt cry,

⁵ George Muller, *Autobiography*, p. 173.

“God, be merciful to me a sinner,” he “went to his house justified [δικαιώω, dikaioō] rather than the other.” His salvation was wholly of God, and not a cooperative deal! It was the same with the look of saving faith on the part of the smitten Israelites (John 3:14-16).

- (3) Reverently attempt to look at this whole matter of salvation from God’s point of view, He who is infinitely holy and sovereign. You reveal to man that salvation is strictly according to particular grace and mercy. Man responds that he believes his contribution is important. Not surprisingly God is insulted at such impudence since it denigrates His power and purpose.
- (4) So Genesis 15:6 is quoted to support the great Reformation truth of “Sola Fide,” that is salvation “solely by/through faith [in Christ].” Such solitary faith is by its very nature self and works excluding. It repudiates human contribution and boasts in God alone (Rom. 4:5), as Peter so well demonstrated when sinking in the Sea of Galilee and in desperation he cried out, “Lord, save [not merely assist] me!” (Matt. 14:30).
 - (a) Abraham never boasts in himself, but he does boast about God (Rom. 4:20-22). He was “fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.”
 - (b) Abraham’s faith is wholly in God the Father and His only begotten Son since Jesus said, “Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it and was glad” (John 8:52-59). Consider also Abraham’s conversation with the Theophany (Gen. 18:1-22), an Old Testament revelation of Christ.
 - (c) Paul means here, as in Romans 4:9-11, that all ritual, such as circumcision and baptism, is excluded.
 - (d) Justification by faith alone is therefore both a converting and *abiding* principle whereby the creature is wholly and perpetually dependent upon its Creator.
- (5) By way of application, have you got a better life to plead than Abraham, who in fact did not plead his life? What will you plead when you stand before the God of heaven (Heb. 9:27)? There are only three possibilities.
 - (a) Plead your own righteousness, which neither Abraham nor Paul would ever presume to do. It was unthinkable. God sets the standard for entrance into His heaven, not man.
 - (b) Plead another’s righteousness, that of a mere mortal guru, which does not qualify in God’s sight, perhaps a loved one, a faithful friend. Yes you need a good attorney before God, but one that He accepts as qualified.
 - (c) Plead another’s righteousness, which does qualify, even the acceptable righteousness of Jesus Christ, obtained through faith alone in him. This

attorney will be heard in heaven (Gal. 6:14; Phil. 3:8-9; Heb. 11:6; I John 2:1).

c. Paul and James on Justification by faith, James 2:14-26.

(1) By way of introduction, someone says, "Paul! Paul! Paul! You are constantly harping upon Paul. But what about, James! James! James! He has a different message that definitely declares that the Christian is also justified by works." Yes we hear you, and so we now give attention to this most vital matter. However the presupposition is that the epistles of both authors in the Bible, being inspired Scripture and thus the Word of God, must be in essential agreement. What then is this harmonious truth?

(a) What in brief is the teaching of Paul on justification?

Romans 3:28, "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law," cf. Galatians 2:16; 3:6. Through faith alone we receive pardon for all of our sins and are declared to have the righteousness of Christ, quite apart from any claim of human righteousness. Not only is our guilt amputated, but the righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed. The Westminster Shorter Catechism, designed in 1647 for children, states: "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone."⁶

(b) What then is the supposed conflict between the teaching of Paul and that of James on the doctrine of justification by faith?

James 2:24, "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone." Is this apparent paradox in fact a real contradiction? Martin Luther was, for a time, unhappy with James' teaching, He called it "really an epistle of straw" for "it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it," yet at the same time he wrote, "I praise it and hold it a good book, because it sets up no doctrine of men but vigorously promulgates God's law." After the first 1522 edition of his German Bible, he withdrew his famous critical remark and others from his prefaces."⁷

(c) The broad context of James 2:14-26 with regard to justification by faith and works.

To begin with consider that James does make some Pauline statements. He writes of the primacy of faith, 1:5-6, of God's sovereign grace, 1:18, of "the perfect law of liberty," 1:25, cf. 2:8, 12, that is the law of Christ

⁶ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, III, p. 683.

⁷ John Warwick Montgomery, "Lessons from Luther on the Inerrancy of Holy Writ," *God's Inerrant Word*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery, pp. 78-80.

written on men's hearts, not tables of stone. Further recall Galatians 2:9 where Paul and James shake hands in obvious doctrinal agreement concerning the essence of the gospel.

Note also that the preceding context of James 2:14-26 concerns "the tests of true faith," which are as follows:

- 1) Faith tested by trials, 1:2-4.
 - 2) Faith tested in time of need, 1:5-8.
 - 3) Faith tested in varying circumstances, 1:9-11.
 - 4) Faith tested in temptation, 1:12-18.
 - 5) Faith tested through our communicative faculties, 1:19-27.
 - 6) Faith tested by works, 2:14-26.
- (2) Justification is by faith alone *before God* (Rom. 3:28), but also by faith affirming works *before man* (Jas. 2:14-26).
- (a) False faith without compassion, vs. 14-17.
 - 1) It is merely verbal, not heart faith, v. 14.
 - 2) It is continuous "saying" (present tense), or verbose piety, v. 14.
 - 3) If you were the one in need, would you consider such a professor to be a Christian simply on the grounds of his audible faith alone? vs. 15-16?
 - 4) From the human perspective, to accept every mere verbal confession of faith alone, especially in the area of church membership, is dangerous for the health of the church. By excluding the evidence of a changed life you may confirm an unregenerate person in his dead condition, 17.
 - (b) False faith without expression, vs. 18-20.
 - 1) James here does not speak of "faith and works," but rather of dead versus live faith, of works emanating from faith, "the works of my faith," v. 18.
 - 2) A knowledge of God is not the same as a relationship with God. Demons have mere knowledge, yet they "shudder" or "tremble," the meaning of φρίσσω, phrissō, being onomatopoeic, hence they bristle as hair or have goose bumps in anticipation of their doom, v. 19.

- 3) The man with verbal yet dead faith is empty, void of spiritual life. He may profess justification, but there is no regeneration. He has no saving relationship with God, v. 20, cf. v. 26.
- (c) True faith with expression, vs. 21-26.
- 1) Illustrated by a Jew, Abraham, vs. 21-24.
 - a) Paul speaks of Abraham being justified in the eyes of God before he was even circumcised (Rom. 4:3-11, cf. Gal. 3:11).
 - b) James speaks of justification in the eyes of man after Abraham was circumcised. His initial faith was “completed/perfected” by the later evidence of works, vs. 21-22.
 - c) Recall God’s dealings with Abraham in Genesis.
 - i) Gen. 12:1-3, the original declaration of the covenant.
 - ii) Gen. 12:6-7. the ratification of the covenant.
 - iii) Gen. 13:14-17, the ratification of the covenant.
 - iv) Gen. 15:1-21, the cutting of the covenant.
 - v) Gen. 17:1-14, the sign of the covenant.
 - vi) Gen. 22:15-18, the ratification of the covenant through the faith offering of Isaac at Moriah, which is the incident of James 2:21.
 - d) The Living Bible makes a very bad translation of v. 24 when it declares: “So you see that a man is saved by what he does as well as by what he believes.” A more literal translation would be: “You see [ὁράω, horaō v paip] that of works a man is justified [δικαιοῶ, v ppis] and not of faith alone.” So the NASB reads: “You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.”
 - 2) Illustrated by a Gentile, Rahab, vs. 25-26.
 - a) Rahab was a disreputable, pagan Canaanite of Jericho, probably converted to faith in Jehovah through the testimony of the spies (Josh. 2:1, 9-14), hence justified before God at that time.
 - b) Rahab expressed or demonstrated her faith by protecting the spies (Josh 2:15-16), v. 25.

- c) Rahab was justified before the spies when she hid them (Josh. 2:4-5) and before Israel when a report of her action was received (Josh. 2:23-24).
- (d) By way of application, justification according to Paul and James may be summarized as follows.
- 1) The four biblical aspects.
 - a) Justification is by grace, *the cause* (Rom. 3:24). It is free, sovereign.
 - b) Justification is by blood, *the price* (Rom. 5:9). The offended holy God required satisfaction for sin's penalty.
 - c) Justification is by faith, *the response* (Rom. 3:28). It is not "man's part," but the appointed sole linkage to the Justifier.
 - d) Justification is by works, *the product* (Jas. 2:24). It is not faith plus works, but works visibly proceeding from faith (Eph. 2:9-10; Tit. 3:5-8).
 - 2) Paul describes the faith that justifies as:
 - a) Faith that is perceived by God (Gal. 3:11).
 - b) Faith that exclusively, totally, continually cleaves to Christ.
 - 3) James describes the faith that justifies as:
 - a) Not pious, verbose, empty faith.
 - b) Not sterile, orthodox faith.
 - c) Not lifeless, unobservable faith.
 - d) But faith that is perceived by man
 - e) But faith that is productive of works, as Galatians 5:6 declares, "faith working through love" (cf. I John 4:19).
 - f) But faith that is active, dynamic, even as Old Testament saints "conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouth of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight" (Heb. 11:33-34).

3. Abraham is the father of all who are justified by faith alone, vs. 7-9.
 - a. By way of introduction, many people would dearly love to have inherited a distinguished name because of the status it conveys. An admirer of naval or military achievement would covet the names of Mountbatten, Churchill, MacArthur, or Eisenhower. A lover of wealthy friends and high society would long to be known as a Rockefeller, a Rothschild, or a Dupont. But the inconsistency of such desires is obvious. What is the use of such a name if you do not legitimately reflect what that name stands for? What if you are a Rockefeller and a pauper at the same time? People will only laugh at you.
 - (1) Jews living at the time of Christ had similar desires and failings. Hence even today their names such as Abrahamson, Isaacson, Jacobson, Cohen, etc. reflect a proud Jewish heritage.
 - (a) Abraham in particular was venerated by the Jews to an extreme degree during Christ's ministry (John 8:39a). The ships on the sea were said to be preserved on account of his merit; likewise the rain descended on account of it; Daniel was heard for the sake of Abraham.⁸
 - (b) But Jesus Christ strongly reacted against those Jews who proudly aligned themselves with such a name, especially through circumcision, while their lives remained a direct contradiction concerning this boasted association (John 8:39b-40).
 - (2) Paul faced a similar problem when he was confronted with legalistic believers concerning circumcision and the eating of certain foods.
 - (a) These legalists said that for a Gentile to become acceptable to God, he had to become a son of Abraham not only through faith in Christ, but also through obedience to circumcision as initial signification of entrance into Judaism, then kosher or clean food and a host of other such Torah requirements. Hence external laws and rites were of fundamental importance with regard to being right with God and the destiny of the soul.
 - (b) Hence, the question was whether an outward religious name or rite, using Abraham as an example, was basically essential in terms of one's acceptance and continuance with God? In other words, does having the right name really make one a good soldier or obtain wealth and status or genuine religious status?
 - (3) Review the revelation of the Abrahamic Covenant.
 - (a) Genesis 12:1-3, the original declaration of the covenant, revealed outside the land.

⁸ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah*, pp. 271-2.

- (b) Genesis 12:6-7, the ratification of the covenant, inside the land at Shechem.
 - (c) Genesis 13:14-17, the ratification of the covenant, near Bethel.
 - (d) Genesis 15:1-21, the unilateral cutting of the covenant.
 - (e) Genesis 17:1-14, the signification of the covenant by means of Abraham's new name, v. 5, its everlasting character, vs. 7-8, and circumcision, v. 10.
 - (f) Genesis 22:15-18, the ratification of the covenant at the land of Moriah through the faith offering of Isaac.
- (5) What then was meant by the recurring promise, "in thee shall all families/nations of the earth be blessed," which was made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (12:3; 17:4-5; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4)?
- (a) Matthew 1:1 declares: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."
 - (b) Acts 3:25-26 reveals how Peter preached Christ at the temple as the promised seed of blessing from Abraham, who is first offered to the nation of Israel.
 - (c) But how does this blessing also fall upon the Gentiles, even in Antioch? How is it appropriated? How do they enter into the root of Abraham so as to become partakers of "the rich root of the olive tree" (Rom. 11:17-19)? How can Gentiles also become "Abrahamsons"?
- (6) Paul teaches that for the Gentile, participation in the Abrahamic Covenant is through faith alone in the promised seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16, 29).
- (a) Paul's legalistic opponents claimed God promised Abraham that all nations of the earth would be blessed through his seed. Jesus Christ is the promised seed of Abraham, a full Jew, through whom the blessing comes. Thus Christ is offered to the Gentiles so that they must believe in him *and* become Jewish through circumcision, even as were Abraham and Christ; otherwise one is not a Christian, the only kind being a Jewish Christian, or really for them, a Christian Jew.
 - (b) On the other hand, Paul himself taught, along with the support of the council of Jerusalem, that God promised Abraham that all nations of the earth would be blessed through his seed. Jesus Christ is the promised seed of Abraham, a full Jew, through whom the blessing comes. Thus Christ is offered to the Gentiles so that through faith *alone*, excluding the necessity of circumcision and entrance into Judaism, they are engrafted into the root of Abraham as wild olive

branches (Rom. 11:17-19), and so become faithful sons of faithful Abraham (Rom. 4:13; Gal. 3:9, 29).

b. Jew and Gentile are children of Abraham through faith, v. 7.

“Therefore know [γινώσκω, ginōskō v oaimp] that those who are of faith [and continue this way], these are sons of Abraham.” The principle of “like father, like son” applies here (John 8:39; I John 2:29). The distinguishing feature of Abraham was his faith, v. 6, even faith in Christ (John 8:56). Therefore, those who have faith in Christ indicate their lineage with Abraham; they are his children. Circumcision merely distinguishes part of his seed, but not all. Therefore the Gentile Christian, in taking the name “Abrahamson,” does so legitimately. The Christian is a true child of Abraham, albeit one who has been engrafted into this lineage as a wild olive branch (Rom. 11:17-19).

So are all true believers Jewish Christians? “No, this is an illogical and unbiblical conclusion.” Or are all true believers Gentile Christians? “No, this is similarly unbiblical.” Are all distinctions now null and void? “No, as 3:28 plainly indicates.” There was distinction even within the nation of Israel, that is twelve tribes. Likewise when a Jew or Gentile becomes a Christian, he retains distinguishing characteristics. The Christian does not become neuter in gender. In the unity of the body of Christ there are differently gifted members. Paul continued to distinguish himself as a Jewish Christian (Acts 21:39; 22:3; Rom. 11:1), and Israel, even in unbelief, retains ongoing national identity (Romans 9:4-5; 11:28). So there remain “natural olive branches” (Rom. 11:21-24) and “wild olive branches” (Rom. 11:17-19), yet all being joined to the one olive tree. We will focus on this point when we come to 6:16 where Paul addresses the matter of the Jewish Christian remnant (Rom. 11:5).

Circumcision, water baptism, ritual, self-denial, penance, good works, do not in any measure gain acceptance with God (5:2-3, 6; 6:15), or for that matter a notable name. What matters is genuine faith alone in Jesus Christ, his person and work; it is exclusive faith that wholly excludes personal merit and titles, that looks to Jesus Christ for mercy and redemption. Thus, “if you belong to Christ [through faith alone in Him], then you are Abraham’s descendants [seed], heirs according to promise,” v. 29, cf. v. 9.

c. Gentiles are blessed in the Abrahamic Covenant, v. 8.

“The Scripture foreseeing [προοράω, prooraō par aansf] that by/through faith, God would justify the Gentiles, [He] preached the gospel beforehand [προευαγγελίζομαι, proeuangelizomai v amis] to Abraham [saying] that ‘all the nations will be blessed [ἐνευλογέω, eneulogēō v fpip] in you.’” Perhaps the most damaging work of Satan during the past two centuries has been the loss of biblical authority in Western society. From this blight on modern man has inevitably resulted a diminution of the power of the pulpit and the gospel it ought to proclaim. However, we should note here how Paul vigorously upholds the authority of Scripture when he is in the midst of proclaiming the gospel of justification by faith alone; here particularly the gospel is “for all those who have believed [Jew and Gentile]; for there is no distinction” (Rom. 3:22).

- (1) The authority of the gospel is in Scripture.

“The Scripture foreseeing [προοράω, prooraō] that God would justify the Gentiles,” speaks of ἡ γραφή, hē graphē, the objectively written, concrete record of Genesis 12:3 in particular, not some supposedly inspired meaning divorced from the verbal record. Hence this divine body of revealed, definitive truth, “foresaw” that God would save the Gentiles, the reason being that He predetermined their redemption and wrote down this certain prospect. Consequently God’s foresight is based upon His foreordination; foresight does not establish foreordination.

There is a personification of Scripture that also should be noticed here; it is intentional. This means that the saving of the Gentiles through faith alone, after the manner of Abraham, was not an afterthought, even if they were wild olive branches that subsequently became engrafted into the rich root of Abraham (Rom. 11:17-19). This indeed was good news, “gospel,” since like Abraham this saving grace was, from the initial promise, even for the Gentiles, that is free grace in Christ Jesus through faith alone in him. But furthermore, in this instance it was the Scripture that “preached the gospel beforehand.”

- (2) The authority of the gospel is in God.

But also note that it is in fact God here who “preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the nations will be blessed in you.’” The quotation here of Genesis 12:3 is in reality a record of the voice of God. Hence, what “the Scripture foresaw” concerning the gospel was in fact that same message which “God preached beforehand to Abraham,” that is even before this gospel record was written down by Paul. Hence, what the Scripture says is what God says.” Thus Romans 9:17 similarly declares, “For the Scripture says to Pharaoh,” when in fact it was what God had first declared to Moses (Exod. 9:16). Refer to B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, pp. 299-348.

- (3) The authority of the gospel is in its divine origination.

This reminds us of the truth of II Timothy 3:16 that, “All Scripture is inspired [θεόπνευστος, theopneustos] by God,” that is breathed out or exhaled from the mouth of God. Therefore, what the written Word of God says is in fact what God himself says. Therefore, the word of the gospel has intrinsic authority; the gospel of the free grace of God has authority because the Bible reveals this good news for Gentiles as well as Jews, and the gospel in the Bible is what God says!

Paul is really saying, “Believe it, this gospel, because God has written it and therefore God has spoken it.” Believe that there is not only full pardon for Jewish Jerusalem sinners through faith in Christ, but also for Gentile sinners, Babylonian sinners, Nineveh sinners, barbarian sinners, American, Australian and British sinners! There is identical pardon through identical faith in the same Christ, and identical blessing as v. 9 reveals.

d. Faithful Gentiles are blessed with faithful Abraham, v. 9.

“So then those who are of [genuine] faith [and continue this way] are blessed [εὐλογέω, eulogēō v ppi] with Abraham the believer.” This is not talking about varying rewards and functions in the kingdom of God, but rich, gracious acceptance of the aliens and the derelicts of this world by God who were previously subject to eternal judgment, as well as scorn by self-righteous Jews. This would surely include those of Gentile faith from Adam to Abraham, that is Abel, Enoch, and Noah (Heb. 11:4-7). However, over 4100 years ago, God unconditionally, unilaterally promised to bless the world through one man, Abraham. Some 2100 years later, the blessing came through the “Blessed One” (Luke 1:42; 19:38; Rom. 9:5; Rev. 5:12), Jesus of Nazareth. And now, 2000 years later, 4100 years after the promise, entrance into that blessing is still available; the door that will eventually close, presently remains open.

4. Abraham and his seed in relation to the Law, vs. 10-25.

a. Introduction.

In this world there are many things that appear to be beneficial, yet if misused the consequences are damaging or fatal. Vitamins are generally good for us, but if taken in excess, that is the fat soluble variety, they can be the cause of damage to our health. Sunlight acts on the body to produce vitamin D, yet it can lull you to sleep so that one awakens sunburned, likewise with a sun lamp. I read of a woman who lay on a sheet of tinfoil to speed up her tan, but fell asleep and was almost fried to death.

The Law of God is intrinsically good and holy, yet if misunderstood leads to bondage, despair, pride, and death. Paul declares that “the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good; . . . the Law is spiritual, . . . I joyfully concur with the Law of God in the inner man. . . . the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully” (Rom. 7:12, 14, 22; I Tim. 1:8).

However Paul also declares that “the Law brings wrath; . . . this commandment which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; . . . [it was] weak through the flesh,” Rom. 4:15; 7:10; 8:3. But why? Because Israel demonstrated that you cannot become righteous by pursuing the Law. “[T]hey did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works” (Rom. 9:32).

So the Law reflects God’s righteousness but it cannot produce God’s righteousness in a man. The Law demands obedience, but it cannot produce obedience in a man. Thus the misuse and abuse of the Law leads to bondage and the curse of God (Gal. 3:10; 5:3). When a man falls overboard into the ocean, the salt water helps by giving buoyancy, but if he thinks it will satisfy his thirst and give life, then he is deceived since it will in fact lead to addiction, madness, and death.

b. The Law brings condemnation, but Christ brings redemption, vs. 10-14.

The term “law,” νόμος, nomos, is used 32 times in Galatians. At least 22 of these references are to the Law of Moses, of which none commend, either explicitly or implicitly, the Law for sanctification. There is one reference to “the law of

Christ” (6:2). There are also nine explicit quotations from the Old Testament in Galatians, they being Genesis 15:6 (3:6); 12:3 (3:8); Deuteronomy 27:26 (3:10); Habakkuk 2:4 (3:11); Leviticus 18:5 (3:12); Deuteronomy 21:23 (3:13); Isaiah 54:1 (4:27); Genesis 21:10 (4:30); Leviticus 19:18 (5:14). While Paul here employs from the Tanakh both Torah or Law and Neviim or prophets, there are seven references to the Pentateuch. Of these, only four are concerned with moral imperatives with regard to the curse of the Law for disobedience (3:10), the practice of the Law as contrary to faith (3:12), hanging as a penalty for infraction of the Law (3:13), and love as the fulfillment of the Law through the Spirit (5:14, 16). In general, the Law is portrayed with negative connotations that contrast with the overwhelming positive characteristics of the gospel.

(1) The Law brings condemnation, v. 10-12.

Here there is sharp contrast between the Law as demanding perfect obedience, its consequent engendering of a curse and being antithetical to faith, and justification by faith alone that results in life through sheer grace.

(a) The Law brings a curse, v. 10.

“For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse [ὕπὸ κατάρων, hupo pre kataran n asf], for it has been written [γράφω, graphō v pfpis], ‘Cursed [ἐπικατάρατος adj nsm, epikataratos] is everyone who does not continue/abide [ἐμμένω, emmenō v pais] in all things that have been written in the book of the Law, to perform/obey them.’” Would it be too strong a statement to suggest that millions of people are under the curse of God? Paul claims that every man or woman who continues to seek acceptance and fellowship with God on the basis of works, self-effort, religious activity, social duties, is under the curse of the Law, hence His condemnation.

1) The state of being under the curse of the Law.

Literally, hupo kataran means to be “under a curse, under hovering condemnation” like Damocles, the 4th century courtier of Dionysius, a tyrant of Sicily, who spoke extravagantly of his sovereign’s happiness. So Damocles was invited to a sumptuous banquet where he sat under a sword suspended by a single thread. This was to teach him of the precariousness with which rulers sit in power.

The tragic irony of this situation is that people think they are pleasing God when in fact they are subject to His wrath: “[T]hose who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8). “And without faith it is impossible to please [God]” (Heb. 11:6). Those who pursue righteousness by the Law are oblivious to the fact that “the Law brings about wrath” (Rom. 4:15).

But you reply, surely many people acknowledge that their works are accomplished through the assisting power of God? Yes, and so

did the Pharisee in Luke 18:11-12 who boasted, "God, I thank you/I acknowledge Your assistance that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get." He reasoned that God responds according to the principle of reward due to merit rather than grace, and he was thoroughly condemned by Christ.

2) The reason for being under the curse of the Law.

By way of illustration, when living for five years in the State of Oregon, I remember holidaying at the beach on the Pacific Ocean and nostalgically longing to be home in Australia; I pondered that Melbourne was only a non-stop swim away. The proposition was perfectly true, but the real problem was my inability to swim such a great distance, or even a mere fraction of it. Furthermore, once embarked upon, this journey required full and constant compliance, otherwise the consequence was certain death.

So here Paul teaches us the vanity of man attempting to attain acceptance, peace, and favor with God by means of the Law, or good works. Those who so choose to please God through living by the Law face an impossible task. God's Law must be kept *totally*, *perfectly*, and *eternally*. Hence God's expectation of perfect righteousness means certain judgment for those who do not fully comply.

3) The explanation of being under the curse of the Law.

So Paul draws attention to the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 27:26, where perfect obedience to the Law is required. The only alternative is to discover someone who performs that perfect obedience for you in such a way that God finds acceptable.

Note here in Galatians and the next two verses Paul's repeated reference to the Old Testament, namely Deuteronomy, v. 10, Habakkuk, v. 11, and Leviticus, v. 12. But does he refer to the ceremonial Law only at this point, or is the Moral Law (the Ten Commandments) included as well? Consider Deuteronomy 27:26 and the context of vs. 1-25. In v. 15 there is reference to the second commandment concerning idolatry, in v. 16 to the fifth commandment concerning obedience to parents, in vs. 20-23 to the seventh commandment concerning adultery. Other verses deal with a variety of civil and social matters. Hence, it is "the book of the Law" that condemns us, the *whole* of the Law!

So, however sincere or well intentioned we may be, we are unable to keep the Law according to God's perfect standard that reflects the utter holiness of His person. My sincerity would not satisfy you if I offered to take out your appendix, or perform cosmetic surgery. How much more will your most sincere intentions of

keeping God's Law yet utterly be incapable of satisfying His righteous demands.

- 4) By way of application, at the heart of modern man's problem here, the most difficult thing for him to do is to admit to his thorough pollution in unrighteousness, hence his moral inability and spiritual impotence. At this point one of the chief purposes of the Law becomes evident. Like a surgeon's scalpel it cuts deep revealing that, while we might look well outside, within we are mortally sick and corrupt, especially at the level of the mind. So Matthew 5:27-28 convicts us of adultery in our mind; I John 3:15 convicts us of murder in our mind. The verdict then is plain. Man is "thoroughly guilty, as charged by the Law!" with the result being despair at the justifiable wrath of God.

It is humiliating for a man to be told that he cannot please God with his works, his religion, his morality, and that the Law proves that he cannot. The Law crushes our claims that we are self-sufficient, good enough. Paul testifies that the Law so awakened him to his sin that he was slain (Rom. 7:11). What then shall I do? The Law and works cannot save me; I am cursed. What hope is there? In Romans 8:3-4 we are told: "For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit," which works through faith, v. 11, in Christ, vs. 24, 26.

- (b) Human works do not obtain salvation, v. 11.

"But that no one is justified [δικαιόω, dikaiōō v ppis] in/by the Law before God is clear/evident [δῆλος, dēlos adj nsn], because 'the righteous man, by faith, shall live [ζῶω, zaō v fms].'" There are two basic ways to view the universe in which we live, either according to God or according to man. Hence perspective or a right world-view is everything. The person who views all through the prism of man, his vaunted dominion and performance, even if religious, is a fool, and he has been described in v. 10. He is a man who trusts in the ability of man, the sufficiency of human works. But Paul here wants us to view our destiny through God's prism, which means that being unholy we have to stand in his holy presence and view our shabby, grubby, filthy offerings as they really are, and then face our naked guilt and shame.

So we give an expanded translation here of v. 11 in Galatians 3, and notice how this godward perspective is stressed. "Because it is clear that by means of the Law of Moses no one is justified *in the presence of God*, since Habakkuk the prophet has written, 'The just [righteous]

person [in the eyes of the just God of Abraham] shall live by faith [*alone* in that same justifying God].”⁹

1) It is justification before God.

Some time ago following our study of v. 6, and the justification of Abraham through faith alone, we had an interlude and considered James 2:14-26, especially focusing on vs. 23-24 where Abraham also illustrates that, “a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.” The point was that there Abraham was justified *before man* by his works when he offered up Isaac in Genesis 22. But here Paul is emphatic that we are talking about justification *before God*, and this is a more fundamental matter. In other words, amidst all of the horizontal matters of life and our relationships with man, of supreme importance is our vertical relationship with God. But more specifically, *why* this priority?

a) God has priority because *He created you*.

Your very existence, including your gene pool, your DNA, indeed your very soul, your being, your self-consciousness, your life and breath, your racial heritage, all about you originates with God (Gen. 2:7; Job 12:10; Acts 17:25, 28). As a consequence, before anything in life, you owe him creaturely allegiance.

b) God has priority because *He created a moral universe*.

First and foremost God is a holy moral Being, who preeminently reveals Himself as perfectly righteous, as “Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all” (I John 1:5). Hence God’s creation is subject, above all else, to His moral administration (Isa. 6:1-4; Rev. 16:5, 7). You owe Him moral allegiance and total conformity.

c) God has priority because *He requires accountability*.

The sovereignty of God’s reign means that His administration of this moral universe is absolute, so that He calls upon man to yield conformity to His holy dominion with resultant blessing. However nonconformity brings judgment (Heb. 9:27). Hence you are called upon to give an accounting of your life, that cannot be avoided!

d) By way of application, it plainly follows, “that no one is justified by the Law *before God*.” Such a thought is really

⁹ So Luther, in commenting on this verse, describes faith here as “faith only and alone.” *Galatians*, p. 263. If the text does not exactly use this language, it is certainly Paul’s intended meaning.

absurd, since the Law must be kept perfectly, totally, eternally. However this then is a matter of most critical importance in an absurd world! If there is no holy God, according to materialism and humanism, there is no ultimate accountability. But this *is* a moral universe with tension between sin and righteousness, especially in the soul; you *are* accountable; you stand before the Almighty in filthy rags; and your attempt to add only more filthy rags is the height of foolishness! Your only hope is new clothing in righteousness. Where shall it be found (Isa. 61:10)?

2) It is justification according to Habakkuk.

So Paul provides an answer to the preceding dilemma of man, and quotes Habakkuk 2:4 to prove that faith alone in God's saving mercy is man's only hope. The same passage is quoted in Romans 1:17; then there is the quotation of Hebrews 10:36-38. All three references give a different nuance concerning justification; Romans 1:17 stresses *faith alone*; Hebrews 10:38 stresses *living by faith*; here the stress is on *exclusion of human works*. Recall the Old Testament setting of Habakkuk 2:4.

a) Impending judgment due to sin, 1:6-7, 9, 12-13.

The prophet Habakkuk has noticed that sin has become so rampant and decadent amongst God's people that he wonders why He appears to be indifferent and hesitant, 1:2-4. However God responds that His patience will eventually run out, and then His judgment will be savage, 1:5-11. Yet Habakkuk becomes troubled at God's solution, 1:12-2:1!

b) The faith that justifies is proclaimed by God, 2:4.

So the question remains as to how a child of God will endure this inevitable judgment of sin, even a prospective Assyrian scourge. God provides the answer, namely faith alone in His saving grace that will transport him through such a dark valley. Habakkuk never thinks to offer his own contribution of righteousness before God.

c) The faith that justifies is vindicated, 3:3-4, 10-13.

But why should any sinner trust God in the light of His prospective judgment, as well as His invitation to believe? What makes Him reliable as a Savior who therefore is to be believed? It is His reputation, His past and ongoing faithfulness in being so zealous in coming for "the salvation of His people." His intense zeal for His own is boundless; for this reason the whole created order yields to His saving fury!

- d) The faith that justifies is confessed to God, 3:16-19.

So Habakkuk believes God, though not with casual indifference or patronage. Though traumatized by prospective judgment, he will trust God's saving grace even if he encounters famine or plague or tragedy in the interim. He has such a vision of the Lord as his strength and salvation that he exults, rejoices and skips along like a deer. As von Zinzendorf has written:

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
'Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.

- e) By way of illustration, in 1974 two O.M.F missionaries, Minka Hanskanp of New Zealand and Margaret Morgan of Great Britain, were captured by Communists in Thailand and held to ransom. Their bodies were found, shot and buried, with a note ending with Habakkuk 3:17-18. That is the justified living by faith at its most practical.

- (c) Human works and faith are mutually exclusive, v. 12.

“But the Law [νόμος, nomos n nsm] is not of faith; rather ‘he who does/practices [ποιέω, poieō par aansm] them shall live in/by them.’” We live in an age of synthesis, of dealing with problems down the middle-of-the-road, of political compromise, and it ought not to surprise us that some professing Christians today proclaim a middle-of-the-road gospel insofar as Law-works and faith are concerned. Supposedly you offer to God some faith and some works. But not so the Apostle Paul. You cannot negotiate with truth, especially gospel truth (2:5)!

- 1) The principles of Law and faith are antithetical.

“The Law is not of faith,” and we could likewise say that “faith is not of the Law.” They are mutually exclusive like oil and water. A little bit of Law-works and a lot of faith will not do, even as a lot of Law-works and a little bit of faith will not please God.

Suppose a friend has just obtained his driving license and asks that I take a ride with him. I agree but then state, “I will only ride in a vehicle with dual controls!” Many try this approach with God.

- 2) The principle of Law requires obedience for life.

Here Leviticus 18:5 proves this point, “He who practices them [the Mosaic commandments] shall live by them,” and it particularly has in mind moral/immoral relationships (Lev. 18:6-

30). Now such a way of living, it is assumed in the presence of God, requires a lot of personal effort, and the only acceptable standard is total conformity to the Law, also perfectly, eternally! So a rating of even 99.9% is not good enough, notwithstanding protest from the world. This is the way of human self-sufficiency, trust in human ability, and here it concerns both initial salvation and ongoing sanctification (cf. 3:3).

3) The principle of faith brings life for obedience.

However Paul does not directly expound upon this opposite principle here, though it is implicit. Even so, in vs. 13-14 he will explain much more about this faith principle. The point is that the principle of faith is based upon humble dependence, the ability of another to save and impart life rather than self. And this principle applies to both initial conversion and sanctification.

(2) Christ, Abraham's seed, brings full salvation, vs. 13-14.

Now the emphasis of vs. 10-12 has been upon the condemnation that the Law brings to those who attempt to live by it and inevitably fail. Hence the problem remains one of human impotence to fulfill the righteousness of God. The Law has no power (Rom. 8:3-4), but there is ability given to those who, through faith, "walk according to the Spirit" that Christ has purchased for his own (John 7:38-39).

(a) Christ redeems from the curse of the Law (justification), v. 13.

"Christ redeemed [ἐξαγοράζω, exagorazō v aais] us from the curse [κατάρα, katara n nsf] of the Law, having become a curse for us/on our behalf because it has been written, 'Cursed [ἐπικατάρατος, epikataratos adj nsm] is everyone who is hung [κρεμάννυμι, kremannumi par amnsm] on a tree.'" One of the great delusions amongst many Christians is the belief that the Law of Moses gives assistance in my Christian walk, whereas the language of Paul is that that same Law is a ministry of condemnation, not sanctification (II Cor. 3:7-11). So here we have Paul making the same point that he taught in 2:18-21.

1) The holy Law of God can only condemn (curse) sinners.

There I was, captive in the market place of sin, always under the lash of the Law; I lived under the Law's merciless dominion. I cried to my taskmaster Moses for mercy, and he said, after the language of Moses to Faithful, represented by Bunyan in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, "I know not how to show mercy."¹⁰ To live in his house required full compliance, otherwise there was constant whipping for every infringement.

¹⁰ John Bunyan, *Works*, III, pp. 118-119.

- 2) The holy redemption of Christ converts (justifies) sinners.

Then Christ came to that market place, disputed with Moses and made full satisfaction concerning his demands; he paid the price of my redemption, ἐξαγοράζω, exagorazō, with a perfect, holy obedience unto death that Moses could not deny. On his cross was the title, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews,” and he set seal to his payment with the cry, “It is finished.” Then he conquered death itself, led me away to his residence where my former taskmaster had no jurisdiction. In that new mansion I received adoption, gifts of grace, new clothing, and the inheritance of the Holy Spirit. What Moses was impotent in providing, Christ imparted with full, saving, rich potency.

- 3) By way of application, search history, search mankind in all ages and see if anyone is willing to bear your curse for you. Do you know anyone today who would willingly die for a condemned murderer? Do you know of anyone who would die for a despised, incarcerated outcast of society? Philipp Bliss tells of one alone who is willing.

Man of sorrows! What a name
 For the Son of God who came
 Ruined sinners to reclaim!
 Hallelujah! what a Savior!
 Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
 In my place condemned He stood;
 Sealed my pardon with His blood:
 Hallelujah! what a Savior!
 Guilty, vile, and helpless, we;
 Spotless Lamb of God was He:
 Full atonement—can it be?
 Hallelujah! what a Savior!

- (b) Christ blesses the Gentiles through Abraham (regeneration), v. 14.

“In order that the blessing [εὐλογία, eulogia n nsf] of Abraham might come to the Gentiles [ἔθνος, ethnos n apn, even in Galatia], in Christ Jesus, in order that we might receive the promise [ἐπαγγελία, epangelia n asf] of the Spirit through faith.” Hence the gospel is more than emancipation from guilt. When God promised Abraham over 4000 years ago, “And in you all the families [the Gentiles] of the earth will be blessed” (Gen. 12:3), the benefits mediated through Christ included more than pardon, namely “the promise of the Spirit through faith” as well.

- 1) The soul that has been made right with God must also be made alive unto God. There must not only be sins forgiven, the just satisfaction of offences against God, but also revival of the dead

heart and the impartation of holy affections. There must be both new standing before God (justification) and new life from God (regeneration of the new birth), Titus 3:5-7.

- 2) “The promise of the Spirit through faith,” cf. v. 2, also means the grace gift of the Spirit through faith alone in Christ, who is the fount of all blessing (John 15:26; 16:7; Acts 1:4; 2:17; Ephesians 1:13). Here is what distinguishes mere cerebral faith from true conversion.
- 3) *True conversion* involves righteousness imputed and righteousness imparted, as Charles Wesley has written:

No condemnation now I dread;
 Jesus, and all in Him is mine!
 Alive in Him my living head,
 And clothed in righteousness divine.

Counterfeit conversion involves professed justification, mere decisionism, without the indwelling and renewing life of God, and thus the absence of holy affections. *Genuine conversion* is the soul pardoned and empowered; it combines cleansing and awakening; it is becoming right with God and alive unto God; it is holy standing arousing holy affections.

- c. God’s promise to Abraham came before the Law, vs. 15-18.

When a man has a large estate and an only son, when is it that he usually decides to lavish all that he has on his only heir? When his son has grown up and proved himself, or when the father is near death? No! Rather it is when the father first holds his son who is totally dependent and has not walked a step. The rules of the house are not the ground of him receiving his inheritance, that is when he learns to live by them. Rather he was an heir before he knew them, from birth! This was also the case with the Son of God (Ps. 2:7-8).

So it is with God and His children, and in particular Abraham and his children. God both appeared before (Gen. 12:7; 17:1; 18:1) and spoke to (Gen. 12:7; 17:1) Abraham who responded with initial saving faith (Gen. 15:6; cf. Rom. 4:2-3), and as a child of God received a will, a testament, a covenant, that is an oath from God (Gen. 12:1-3). It was unconditionally confirmed and cut (Gen. 15:1-21). It made him heir to a land, a nation, and a blessing that would extend throughout the world by means of his “seed.” Some 490 years later, 430 of these having been spent in Egypt, God gave the Mosaic Law to Israel, which in no way abrogated the original unconditional promise.

So here Paul’s intent is to similarly indicate that salvation rests in the purpose and promise of God, and not man’s proud boast that he can earn God’s favor. A child can never boast in his parentage; he can only be thankful and live accordingly, since he did not cause himself to be born. His existence and resultant life is by grace alone, that is the grace that bestows personal, individual being. Thus a child of God cannot boast in his divine parentage as if he contributed toward it; he can

only, with self-renouncing, God-affirming faith, look to Him and be thankful in lip and life. He lives by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ, even as Paul personally acknowledged (I Cor. 15:10).

(1) God's promise through Abraham is irrevocable, v. 15.

“Brethren, according to men [human terms/expressions] I speak: even though a covenant/agreement has been validated [κυρώω, kupoō par ppasf] by man, no one annuls [ἀθετέω, atheteō v pais] it or adds a condition [ἐπιδιατάσσομαι, epidiatassomai v pmis] to it.”

- (a) Covenant terminology in the Bible has spawned all sorts of doctrine. There is *hyper-covenantalism*, which derives covenants from the Bible even though they are not explicitly described as such. There is *hypo-covenantalism*, which gives scant attention to the Bible covenants that are plainly revealed. Here, in vs. 15-18, we deal with three plainly stated covenants, the human or secular or commercial agreement, v. 15, then the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, vs. 16-18, these being two of God's big promises.
- (b) So Paul begins to argue from the case of a secular agreement. It is his favorite *a fortiori* type of reasoning, from the lesser to the greater. For example, “If I love my dog, how much more will I love my family.” So in Romans 5:17: “For if by the transgression of the one [Adam], death reigned through the one [Adam], much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.”
- (c) Thus even a human agreement or covenant, once confirmed or signed and sealed, cannot be broken. Hence how much more then is it impossible for God to break His covenant to bless and perpetuate Abraham's seed. Thus, “let God be found true, though every man be found a liar” (Rom. 3:4). God's unilateral promises will be broken only if the sun, moon, and tides pass away, or if the heavens can be measured (Jer. 31:35-37).

(2) Abraham's promised seed of blessing is Christ, v. 16.

“Now to Abraham the promises were spoken and to his seed. He does not say ‘And to seeds/offspring [σπέρμα, sperma n dpn]’ as [referring] to many, but [referring] to one, ‘And to your seed [n dsn],’ who is Christ.” In the expanse of O.T. history, here three successive events must be kept in mind: 1- the Abrahamic covenant; 2- the Mosaic covenant 490 years later; 3- the coming of Christ, the “seed” of Abraham 1450 years later (Matt. 1:1; Luke 3:23-34).

(a) The promises to Abraham.

Several times the basic Abrahamic Covenant was revealed to Abraham, but here, “And to your seed” specifically has Genesis 13:15; 17:7-8; 22:17-18 in mind,¹¹ though this “seed” is also to receive the land and be as the stars of the heaven. Hence this fundamental promise to Abraham was directed toward his “seed” (singular) or progeny (plural), though here in Genesis it also indicates numerous inhabitants of the promised land. But supposing this only included children of Abraham up to the time of Moses, and then subsequent obedience to the Torah made the promises to Abraham conditional? This would mean that faith and works were necessary for salvation. However Paul will now prove that the promise to Abraham passes over the Mosaic covenant and finds certain fulfillment in Christ,

(b) The Seed of Abraham.

So Paul now argues in a Jewish way that Gentiles do not readily appreciate. Now the term “seed” in Hebrew is grammatically singular and thus here he refers to it in an applicatory, illustrative manner concerning Jesus Christ, the promised Messianic, redeeming seed, who came 1450 years after Moses. This is a common Jewish manner of teaching called Midrash which *does not nullify* the basic plurality of the promise that Genesis 12:7; 13:15-16; 15:5, 13, 18; 16:10; 17:7-10, 19; 22:17-18; 24:7; 26:3-4, 24; 28:4, 13-14; 32:12; 35:12, plainly indicate.¹² So in Galatians 3:29 Paul addresses the Galatians, with the plural “you,” as being the plural “seed/descendants” and “heirs” of Abraham. Therefore the promise to Abraham still stands since it was fulfilled in Christ, and no intervening Mosaic covenant could disannul it. Therefore the Abrahamic Covenant of promise is irrevocable, and its fulfillment was and remains based solely on the gracious integrity of God. Therefore salvation for the believer, past, present, and future, is likewise based upon the gracious, promise keeping integrity of God that is covenantally secure in Christ.

(3) Law and works do not nullify the promise, v. 17.

“Now this I say, a covenant having been previously ratified [προκυρώω, prokuroō par ppassf] by God, a Law brought about four hundred and thirty years later does not invalidate [ἀκυρώω, akuroō v pais] so as to nullify [καταργέω, katargeō inf aa] the [original] promise.” Thus the Law does not abrogate grace; works, even bad works, do not nullify grace. “The Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later [after the promise given to

¹¹ Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, III, p. 28.

¹² Paul is not ignorant of the fact that, while “seed” is technically singular, it is also a collective noun since he uses this very meaning in 3:29. For a helpful explanation of this textual problem, refer to William Hendriksen, *Galatians*, pp. 134-7, and better, David H. Stern, *The Jewish New Testament Commentary*, p. 549.

Abraham], does not invalidate a unilateral covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.”

Christ has not come because man was good enough in terms of obeying the Law as best he can, but because God promised Abraham unconditionally he would come in spite of our rebellion and badness and bless us according to grace and mercy alone.

(4) God's salvation is sure through promise alone, v. 18.

“For if the inheritance [κληρονομία, klēronomia n nsf] is based on Law, it is no longer based on promise [ἀπαγγελία, epangelia n gsf]; but to Abraham God gave it by means of a promise,” which still avails in Christ. So Paul concludes that the believer's inheritance or salvation, from the point of initial saving faith and on during his earthly sojourn, is sure because it is based upon God's promise to Abraham, and secure being confirmed in Christ. It is not maintained by means of ongoing human works.

(a) The reign of Law nullifies promise.

Inheritance based upon present performance negates former promise; in this regard we have a slave/master relationship. The Law declares, “perform or perish.”

(b) The reign of promise nullifies Law.

Inheritance based upon promise means that bargaining with works is negated; rather we have a Father/son relationship. Promise declares that I am:

A debtor to mercy alone,
 Of covenant mercy I sing;
 Nor fear, with Thy righteousness on,
 My person and offering to bring;
 The terrors of Law and of God
 With me can have nothing to do;
 My Savior's obedience and blood
 Hide all my transgressions from view.
 The work which his goodness began,
 The arm of His strength will complete;
 His promise is Yea and amen
 And never was forfeited yet.
 Things future, nor things that are now,
 Not all things below and above
 Can make Him His purpose forego
 Or sever my soul from His love.
 My name from the palms of His hands
 Eternity will not erase;
 Impressed on His heart it remains
 In marks of indelible grace;

Yes, I to the end shall endure
 As sure as the earnest is given;
 More happy, but not more secure,
 The glorified spirits in heaven.

When a son eventually inherits his father's estate, do we expect him to declare that he earned it (like the elder brother of Luke 15)? No, he is overcome with the free bestowment, the sheer grace of it all (like the prodigal son). It is all of promise; it is all of the father's doing and kindness! So in v. 26, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus," through free justification (Rom. 3:24), and the ongoing life of the son is maintained on the same basis of promised inheritance, not present performance.

d. The right role of the Law in salvation, vs. 19-25.

Paul's teaching on the law, particularly that of Moses, has been emphatic, relentless, and exclusionary, cf. 2:16, 18-19, 21; 3:2-3, 10-11, 18. Hence it is not surprising that he raises the question in v. 19, "Why the Law then?" If he had wanted to emphasize the sanctifying role of the Law, then now would have been the perfect moment; but he does not. Rather he only all the more focuses on the negative necessity of the Law: "It was added because of transgressions."

(1) The Law awakens man to his sinful need, vs. 19-20.

In essence, the Law is a propositional statement concerning the righteousness of God revealed to and required of accountable national Israel (Ps. 147:19-20) that involves blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience. In the case of the Ten Commandments here, it was revealed propositional truth mediated through tables of stone and angels and Moses (Ex. 20:1-17; Deut. 11:26-28).

(a) The Law was added, v. 19a.

"Therefore why the Law? It was added/placed alongside of [προστίθημι, prostithēmi v apis] for the sake of [defining] transgressions." Here is explained the adjunct manner of this revelation being made. But when? The context of the "mediator," being Moses, indicates following Israel's redemption and immediately prior to and during the prophet's Mt. Sinai encounter with God. However Jeremiah 11:7-8 also confirms that, "I solemnly warned your fathers in the day that I brought them up from the land of Egypt, even to this day warning persistently, saying, 'Listen to My voice.' Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked each one, in the stubbornness of his evil heart; therefore I brought on them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did not." So with Romans 5:20, "The [Mosaic] Law came in along side [παρεισέρχομαι, pareiserchomai v aais, not to improve Israel spiritually, but rather] so that the transgression [παράπτωμα, paraptōma n nsn] would increase." So Lloyd-Jones comments on Romans 5:20: "The Law is not something

fundamental, not something that is essential. It has a function, but it is not vital in the matter of salvation. That is the key to the understanding of this statement.”¹³ Moreover, the meaning here, “to come in alongside,” is also used in Galatians 2:4 to describe “false brethren secretly brought in.” Thus the *distinctive* Law of Moses was first given to Israel alone as a redeemed nation, and not at the creation of the world as a whole (Neh. 8:1; Ps. 147:12, 19-20). This is *not* to say that the righteousness of God placed no demands upon the child of God prior to Sinai, as was exemplified at that time by Melchizedek, “a priest of God” (Gen. 14:18), or by righteous Lot (II Pet. 2:6-10; nevertheless, at Sinai there was given a distinctive administration of this same righteousness, necessitated by sin in God’s people.

(b) The Law was necessitated because of sin, v. 19b.

“Therefore why the Law? It was added/placed alongside of for the sake of [defining] transgressions [παράβασις, parabasis n gpf].” Here is explained the necessity of this injected Law revelation. Something in the constitution of the recently redeemed Israelites required the administration of the Law, namely “the righteousness violations,” “the overstepping of boundaries,” after the manner of Adam (Rom. 5:13-14). Thus Israel sinned without the Law, from redemption in Egypt to Sinai, Exodus 14:11-12; 15:23-24; 16:2-3, 9-12, 19-20, 27-28; 17:1-7; 18:15-16, so that God saw the need of clarity of focus.

This leads us to conclude that the main purpose of the Law was like an x-ray machine, a magnifying glass, a surgical scalpel, so that in sin being exacerbated, accentuated, aroused, the redeemed Hebrew sinner might be more aware of his exceeding sinfulness (Rom. 7:13b), seek cleansing through the provided sacrificial system, and thus maintain fellowship with God through faith. So in Romans 3:20, “through the Law comes the greater/accumulating knowledge, [ἐπίγνωσις, epignōsis] of sin;” also, “I would not have come to know sin except through the Law [as codified in the Ten Commandments],” Romans 7:7; “when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died,” Romans 7:9; the intent was that “through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful,” Romans 7:13. Thus, the “Law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane” (I Tim. 1:9).

(c) The Law was temporarily mediated through Moses, vs. 19c-19d.

We could better translate the order here of v. 19: “Then why the Law? It was added for the sake of defining transgressions until [Christ] the seed [of Abraham] would come to whom the promise had been made/enacted, [the Law] having been ordained through angels by the hand/agency/authority [χείρ, cheir n dsf] of a mediator [μεσίτης, mesitēs

¹³ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 5*, p. 285.

n gsm].” Here now is explained the transmission process of this Law revelation, that was “added.”

1) Moses’ administration was temporary, v. 19c.

Not only was the Law “added” immediately following the exodus, but also it will have validity only “until” the promised seed, who is Jesus Christ, would come. This is speaking of historic sequence here. So Luther comments here:

Paul maketh not the Law perpetual. . . . Let the Law then give place, which indeed is added to reveal and to increase transgressions, and yet no longer but until that blessed Seed be come. When that is come, then let the Law leave off to reveal sin and to terrify any more: and let him deliver up his kingdom to another; that is to say, to the blessed Seed, which is Christ: who hath gracious lips, wherewith he accuseth and terrifieth not, but speaketh of far better things than doth the Law, namely, of grace, peace, forgiveness of sins, victory over sin, death, &c., gotten by his death and passion and freely given unto all believers.¹⁴

2) Moses’ mediation was indirect, conditional, bilateral, v. 19d.

God ordained that the Law be channeled or mediated, first through angels, messenger servants (Acts 7:53; Heb. 2:2; cf. Deut. 33:2), and thence to Moses. Even so the Decalogue was certainly written with the hand of God (Ex. 31:18; 32:15-16; 34:1, 28; Deut. 9:10). Perhaps the complementary details of the Torah were communicated by angels. Nevertheless, Moses is unquestionably the mediator between God and Israel indicated here (Deut. 5:4-5).

(d) The Law was mediated until God’s direct revelation, v. 20

“Now a [human] mediator [μεσίτης, mesitēs n nsm] is not of/does not represent one [party, but several parties, cf. v. 15]; whereas God is [only] one [party in terms of His sovereign unilateral promise to Abraham].” Now Paul comes to his logical conclusion concerning the difference between the Old Testament and New Testament dispensations, that is the superiority of Christ over Moses. In the Old Testament economy there was an indirect chain of command, from God to angels to Moses, and then to Israel for a response; Moses was a mere link in a chain; even that role was temporary. But in the New Testament there is direct connection between God and Abraham through sovereign unilateral promise. The Seed of Abraham, having now come, is God in direct communication, directly saving and sanctifying, unconditionally!

You go to your doctor, but he sends away for blood tests, a cardiogram, x-rays, which are done by others, mediators for the doctor. But when the results come in, none of these individual agencies can provide a

¹⁴ Martin Luther, *Galatians*, pp. 305-6.

remedy. It is your doctor alone who, in surveying the results, then executes a remedy, even by means of surgery.

Moses has been a helpful and a temporary auxiliary; he can focus on the problem, but he is no surgeon. So now that the surgeon has come, the Lord Jesus Christ, we are under his care and administration for life and spiritual health. He is superior in every way, and now we are exclusively residents in his house, by adoption as sons, and are no longer servants (4:1, 4-5; cf. Heb. 3:1-6).

(2) The Law is complimentary to God's promise, vs. 21-22.

Recall the chronology associated with the early history of Israel that v. 19 introduced. From the redemption of Israel in Egypt to the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai, God's people continually sinned. For this reason God added the Law to accentuate these transgressions. Then He ordained the sacrificial system to signify cleansing from sin and defilement, as revealed in Exodus 25-40 (instruction for building the tabernacle, and the establishment of the priesthood), and Leviticus 1-9 (instruction on the theology of the offerings). Thus Israel was to journey as a pilgrim people by faith alone in their redeeming Jehovah, yet Israel perverted the use of the Law turning it into a supposed means of producing meritorious righteousness rather than being a revealer of personal unrighteousness (Rom. 9:31-32).

Now God had made a momentous, unconditional promise to Abraham of a land, a seed, and a blessing (Gen. 12:1-3). Approximately 2,100 years later the promised redemptive, messianic "Seed" was born, Jesus Christ, being a divine invasion that no earthly action could thwart or nullify through demerit, such as the worst sins of Israel or the worst sins of the Gentiles. However even the Mosaic covenant in between, notwithstanding its design for exposure of sin, in no way abrogated the original promise to Abraham or the certainty of this coming Seed. Even so, some appear to contentiously challenge Paul's teaching here regarding his explanation about the purpose of the Law, and to this he vigorously responds.

(a) The distinguished use of the Law, v. 21.

"Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be/the thought is unthinkable [μή mē adv γίνομαι ginomai v amos]! For if a Law had been given being able [δυναμαι, dunamai par pm nsm] to make alive/to give life [ζωοποιέω zōopoieō inf aa], then righteousness would certainly have originated from Law."

1) Why is this question raised?

That depends, since if the Law is understood as God intended, then the answer is plainly "no." But if the purpose of the Law is perverted, then the answer is "yes," since works conflict with promise. So some raise this question because they, with their faulty

view of the Law and the gospel, experience conflict! And this is to be expected.

Suppose I maintain that in spite of the sure promise to Abraham, my works in obedience to the Mosaic Law determine whether I participate in the blessings of that original promise or not. Then I am caught in an impossible tension concerning whether my works are sufficient in quantity and quality, v. 18a; then I wonder if I will be blessed through Abraham, because the promise is now regarded as being conditioned according to my Law obedience; then I doubt, become anxious, and have no hope of assurance; indeed I may have a false assurance; then again, my assurance may turn into hopelessness, because I end up looking at self. But if salvation is wholly of sovereign, unconditional promise, then I look to God through faith alone and find rest for my soul! So we are led to sing by Baptist pastor, Edward Mote:

His oath, his covenant, his blood
Support me in the whelming flood;
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

2) The false notion about the power of the Law.

Those who look to the Law, as do those who question Paul, tend to do so with a wrong assumption, namely that it has some intrinsic power that enables the keeping of its commands. But Paul explains that this is a fallacy; it is simply an imperative statement! He further argues that if the Law did have life, the power to regenerate, to save the soul and sanctify, literally “the power to make alive/to give life,” then that is all that would have been needed, and Christ’s atonement would have been unnecessary, redundant, cf. 2:21b. However, such a way of thinking perverts God’s purpose for the Law, since in reality it is impotent (Rom. 8:3).

Imagine a jar of seeming clear water that has been gathered from an outside downpour of rain. It looks clean, but stir it with a stick and dirty sediment arises. The stick is useful in revealing the dirt at the bottom, but it is less than useless as a means of cleansing impurities from the water!

(b) The purposeful use of the Law, vs. 22.

“But the Scripture has shut up/enclosed [συγκλείω, sunkleiō v aais] everyone [everything] under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe [πιστεύω, pisteuō par padpm].” So Paul presses home his argument using another picture

concerning the purpose of the Law, that of imprisonment and the prisoner's problem of being set free.

- 1) Again, the right purpose of the Law was incarceration.

“But the Scripture [incorporating the Law] has shut up [enclosed, like fish caught in a net] everyone [everything] under sin.” The picture here is not of a jailor who has the key to lock and unlock prisoners, but rather the holy Word of God, the Law convicting, accusing of guilt so that man better appreciates the reality of his being “under sin,” imprisoned by sin, and hopelessly incarcerated.

But further, the picture here concerns the history of Israel, from its redemption to the coming of Christ. Down the centuries it has manifestly been captive to sin. Aside from a godly remnant, the historic course of Israel has been, most plainly, one continuing demonstration of bondage to sin. The clarity of this revelation is on account of the Law's relentless diagnosis and ugly exposure of this malady, as if it were a form of spiritual leprosy.

- 2) Again, the right purpose of Christ is emancipation.

Now this effect upon Israel, of incarceration because of revealed sinful infection, has been divinely intended. In this regard, the Law has done its work well; it has shown its efficiency in terms of its divine purpose, but at the same time it has also demonstrated the impotence of the Law, the impotence of Israel, and the captivity of Israel to sin. However, now that the “Seed” of promise has come, in fact the surgeon has come; he has looked at the Law's analysis, and declared that the only hope is His radical, redemptive surgery. No one else can save man!

Here is the only hope of diseased, corrupt mankind. It is “*the promise* [given to Abraham that is appropriated] by faith in [the Seed] Jesus Christ . . . given to those who believe.” It is, more specifically, the “fulfilled promise,” 3:29; (Matt. 1:1).

Look at the history of mankind, but especially Israel, and you will see the hopelessness of the Law, notwithstanding that this engraved code of ethics is also described by Paul as “holy and righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12). Indeed look at any tribe or nation, and you will see its inevitable failure before less specific standards of righteousness, and you and I are but participants in this whole human disaster. A recent book gives the clearest proof of this, it being called *The Black Book of Communism*, published in 1999, that documents the savage slaughter of 100 million by Communism during the past twentieth century, putting the monstrous Nazi atrocities of the same century in the shade! Here is the fruit of man pursuing his works agenda.

But the Lord Jesus Christ declared that he has come “to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18). He has come “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). He alone is qualified, having come from heaven as the Son of God. He alone is qualified having established the ground for true emancipation, the gracious bestowal of pardon and life. As Charles Wesley has written:

Plenteous grace with Thee is found,
Grace to cover all my sin.

(3) The Law dispensation is the prelude to Christ, vs. 23-25.

The Bible distinguishes itself in being a book of world history, and especially the history of God’s dealings with the human race. There is a whole drama played out in which we are presently on stage. Major events include the creation, the fall, the pre-flood generation, the birth, redemption, and course of Israel, the promised Messiah, his arrival, atonement and resurrection, his church being built, then the prospect of his church completed, and the return of Christ. In all of this there has been progression from sin to redemption, from shadow to substance, from promise to fulfillment, and from Law to grace (John 1:17). Until Christ came, Israel’s role was one of a forerunner culminating in John the Baptist, the last of the prophets; but now that Christ has come we are no longer under that past representation. The fact that “the Law was added . . . until the seed would come,” v. 19 (cf. Rom. 5:20), indicates that the Old Testament economy was one in which Israel became imprisoned to sin by means of the Law. But now that the seed, Jesus Christ, has come, “in the fullness of time” (4:4), the old age has past and a new age has dawned (II Cor. 3:7-11; Heb. 7:19, 22; 8:1-13).

(a) We were imprisoned through the Law, v. 23.

“But before the faith came, under Law, we [as the nation of Israel, cf. 4:3-5] were held captive [φρουρέω, phroureō v ipip], being locked up/shut up [συγκλείω, sunkleiō par pnpm, cf. v. 22] to the coming faith which was to be revealed [ἀποκαλύπτω, apokaluptō inf ap].” Simply put, Paul is out to demonstrate that for the Christian, he now lives in a new administration or age compared to that of the Old Testament. Unfortunately, some Christians want to straddle both the old age as well as the new, as suggested in v. 21, and the result is futility, conflict of the soul, like attempting to pour old wine into new wineskins (Luke 5:33-39). Such was the major failing of the Puritans.¹⁵

¹⁵ “[W]ere they [the Puritans] not too much influenced by the analogy of the Old Testament and of Israel? Here, it seems to me, was the source of the trouble, that they would insist in taking the analogy of Israel in the Old Testament and applying it to England. Was not that the real error?” D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans*, pp. 64-65.

- 1) “But before the faith came,” refers not simply to that time before I personally, individually believed, but before the dispensation or age, of justification by grace through faith alone in the Lord Jesus, dawned on this planet, at a point in history. So Luther expounds, “Before the time of the Gospel and grace came, the office of the Law was, that we should be shut and kept under the same, as it were in prison.”¹⁶
- 2) Like being “shut up under sin” in v. 22, here “we were kept in custody . . . being locked up . . . under the Law.” That is the Mosaic economy and Law led to imprisonment through the aggravation and arousal of sin (Rom. 7:9-11). While Israel had sinned before the Law, after Sinai the Mosaic code stirred up sin. And as if caught in a vicious circle, Israel attempted to use the Law to produce righteousness, while in fact it only all the more provoked transgression, as ongoing Hebrew history well illustrates. The story of Israel in the Old Testament is one of bondage to sin, of national confinement, not liberty, of types and shadows and promissory notes, not soul redemption.
- 3) So, “we [the Jewish nation] were being shut up to the faith later to be revealed,” that is the “faith in Jesus Christ” described in v. 22, or the gospel message. In other words, Israel was “shut up as in a fortress, or confined within certain limits, . . . [in] uneasy confinement,” that was by no means ideal yet still separate from raw paganism.¹⁷ This containment was “until the faith which was later to be revealed,” according to God’s timing (4:4). Something emancipating and glorious was in prospect.

(b) We are tutored to Christ, v. 24.

“So then, the Law became to us a strict guardian [*παιδαγωγός*, *paidagōgos* n nsm, directing/driving us] to Christ, in order that we might be justified [*δικαιώω*, *dikaioō* v apsp] through faith.” Paul now moves to an illustration of the principle of v. 23 that is not to be pressed in every direction. It concerns Greek or Roman family life in which the father or head employed a “paedagogue,” *παιδαγωγός*, *paidagōgos*,” or “school-master” KJV or “tutor” NASB, but better “strict custodian.” He was a slave engaged to watch rigidly over and supervise a boy’s behavior from about the age of 6 to 16, that is until the time of sonship rights and adult responsibility arrived. The thought of “teaching” here is at best secondary to the main idea of severe, disciplinary restraint that stimulated eager anticipation of manhood and freedom. Likewise Israel endured the Law as a rigid, burdensome disciplinary restraint. So Peter declared, at Jerusalem, that this Law was “a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear” (Acts 15:10).

¹⁶ Luther, *Galatians*, pp. 324.

¹⁷ John Brown, *Galatians*, p. 71.

However the end historic purpose of this harsh confinement was, to use Paul's words in 4:4, until "the fullness of time came, [when] God sent forth His Son." Once adulthood had come, the role of the paedagogue was concluded. His role was like that of a roundup cowboy who, having driven cattle into a corral or cattle pen, then withdraws. So "[the Law became Israel's strict custodian] until [Christ] the seed would come," v. 19, "so that we [Jews] might be justified by faith."

But does this not teach here that today we need the Law of Moses preached first so that men may see the exceeding sinfulness of their sin, and so by this means be directed to Christ for salvation? No, this passage is not saying this in any exclusive evangelistic sense, though the more broad principle of "Law/righteousness revealing sin," revealed in "Scripture," v. 22, is ever valid, indeed most necessary (Rom. 3:19-20). However, the context here concerns sanctification, not evangelism, vs. 26-29. Yes, it is imperative that man needs to be convicted of his sin through the revelation of God's righteousness throughout Scripture. Nevertheless, our passage here is speaking about the course of history, that the Mosaic era has passed, and that the superior era of Christ has come, under which the Christian dutifully abides (cf. 4:1-7).

- (c) The faith in Christ era has ended Moses' tutelage, v. 25.

"But [the] faith having come, we are no longer under a strict guardian [paidagōgos n asm]!" Christ has come, and we are now exclusively under his righteous gospel administration. The context here calls on me, as a Christian, to remember that I am not under the "pedagogue" Moses' distinctive discipline, especially as an administration. Rather I am now under the new, privileged, adopted relationship that the headship of Christ affords, that is the obtaining of sonship with the Father (Rom. 7:1-4). The illustration of v. 24 is still very much in mind.

"All right," you say, "but as a Christian do I not still need the Law of Moses to reveal my sin?" Yes, as a believer your sin needs to be revealed, and the Mosaic code can do it within the parameters of its summary mandates. But consider the underage boy who eventually leaves the pedagogue or strict custodian and enters into adulthood and sonship under his father. Then, when he sins, who reveals it to him, the pedagogue or the father? The father of course. So the idea that as a son of God, through Christ, I still need Moses to reveal my sin is an insult to Christ who can do this work far more comprehensively and with greater penetration (Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-35, 38-39, 43-44; Luke 5:8). At the end of this age, this will especially be the case when man is judged by Christ, not Moses (Acts 17:30-31). This truth is also implicit in the implications of "sonship" in v. 26.

The problem people have at this point is due to the fact that Moses looms too large and Christ looms too small. Christ is the righteousness of God personified; Moses is a sinner mediating a brief summary of the righteousness of God. Charles Wesley has put the truth so plainly concerning Christ's condemning *and* saving righteousness.

Thou, O Christ, art all I want,
 More than all in Thee I find.
 Raise the fallen, cheer the faint,
 Heal the sick, and lead the blind:
 Just and holy is Thy name,
 I am all unrighteousness;
 False and full of sin I am,
 Though art full of truth and grace.

5. Abraham and his seed are one in Christ Jesus, vs. 26-29.

While the “strict custodian” illustration of v. 24 focuses on Israel, on that period in history when the Law of Moses was “added . . . until the seed would come” v. 19, we now live in that subsequent age described in v. 25: “But now that [the] faith has come, we are no longer under a strict custodian.” We live in the era of “the faith,” the better dispensation (Heb. 7:22; 8:6; 12:24) when both Jew and Gentile partake of “the promise [of the seed solely] by faith in Jesus Christ,” v. 22, cf. vs. 28-29. Now Paul presses this point home, namely that we become and remain a Christian through *sola fide*, faith alone, in Christ that excludes ethnic and cultural distinctions.

a. Jew and Gentile have sonship through faith in Christ, v. 26.

“For you [not the “we” of vs. 23-25; 4:3-5] are *all* [emphatic position] sons [υἱός, huios n npm] of God through the faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Here Paul strenuously declares that in becoming and being a son of God, all ethnic and cultural distinctions are voided, *in terms of our relationship with God*. Under Moses, the Jews claimed sonship exclusively through circumcision, and thus they became “sons of Abraham” (John 8:39, 41; cf. Luke 19:9; Gal. 3:7). But now Paul makes it clear that this sonship comes through faith alone in the One who has far more gloriously supplanted Moses (Heb. 3:1-6; 7:23-24, 28). It should also be noted that the present tense, ἐστε, este, is used here to describe an ongoing faith alone relationship, not simply initial saving faith. Hence, “You *are presently being* sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” This is the basis of the Galatian believers ongoing hope, not faith in Christ and Moses. The Galatians have entered into the freedom and privileges of the Father’s house, as “grown-up children” as John Brown puts it.¹⁸ He further adds:

Now that the gospel revelation has been made, and believed by us, we stand no more in need of such an elementary, restrictive, external dispensation as the Law; for through this gospel believed we are introduced into a state, and formed to a character, to which such an introductory institution, however well fitted to serve its own purposes, is utterly unsuited.¹⁹

b. Jew and Gentile identify with Christ through baptism, v. 27.

“For as many of you who were baptized [βαπτίζω, baptizō v apip] into Christ have put on/clothed yourselves with [ἐνδύω, enduō v amip] Christ.” The supreme

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 74.

matter here concerns whether, through faith alone, you have thoroughly identified with Jesus Christ. In other words, the *quality* of saving faith is now defined. Is it that which has *decisively* and *comprehensively* and *exclusively* and *radically* identified with Christ? Such identification is portrayed through ritual water baptism by immersion and thus points to a real baptism into Christ. The use of the word “baptize” would immediately awaken remembrance of the rite that speaks of a spiritual reality. Water baptism becomes the trigger for emphasis upon the primacy of union with the Lord Jesus Christ. Water baptism by immersion represents the character of true saving faith. As distinct from the contemporary signification of “walking the aisle/making a decision/coming forward” at an evangelistic meeting, and thus testifying of saving faith, water baptism is the explicit biblical means of making such a visible and public witness. Romans 6:3-11 similarly suggests the *rite* of water baptism that points to the *reality* of spiritual union with Christ. However, the confusion that commonly erupts at the mere mention of baptism” calls for clarification at this juncture.

(1) The baptisms of the Bible are seven in two categories.

(a) *Ritual* baptisms.

- 1) *John the Baptist's* water baptism of genuinely repentant Jews, as preparation for Christ's coming (Luke 3:2-7, 16; John 1:26-33).
- 2) *Jesus Christ's* water baptism, by John the Baptist, to fulfill all righteousness and identify with the righteous remnant (Matthew 3:13-17).
- 3) *Christian* water baptism, as indicative of identification and union with Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 8:36-39; Romans 6:3-11; Col. 2:12).

(b) *Real* baptisms.

- 1) The baptism of *suffering*, undergone by Jesus Christ, that he regards as distressing (Luke 12:49-50).
- 2) The baptism into *Moses' leadership*, undergone by Israel (I Corinthians 10:1-2).
- 3) The baptism in/by *the Holy Spirit* (Luke 3:16 I Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:5).
- 4) The baptism into *Christ* (Romans 6:3-11; Galatians 3:26-27; Ephesians 4:5).

(2) The baptism into Christ.

- (a) Here in vs. 27, implicit water baptism by immersion (as a ritual) portrays *decisive* identification (real baptism/union) with Christ.

The aorist here of βαπτίζω, baptizō, speaks of a past, singular occasion, following conversion, when the new believer was baptized into the name of the Father and of Son and of Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). In the early church, water baptism was a *sign* of repudiation of an old life and entry into a new life, specifically being plunged into and thus thoroughly washed by and joined to Jesus Christ. Such a witness was understood to be an unequivocal commitment, consecration and witness to Christ, as a result of having repudiated a godless, worldly past.

- (b) Here in v. 27, water baptism portrays *comprehensive and total* identification with Christ.

Two words here describe this thorough, inclusive relationship. The word βαπτίζω, baptizō means to “dip, immerse, plunge, wash, sink, drench, overwhelm;²⁰ the word ἐνδύω, enduō, means to put on as a garment.²¹ The whole thought here is one of the entire Christian person being completely enveloped and shrouded by salvation in Christ. Here is the reason why sprinkling so inadequately represents biblical baptism, including the aspects of pardon and cleansing. Being overwhelmed by immersion in water best pictures being overwhelmed by and immersed into Christ through the purifying Holy Spirit.

- (c) Here in v. 27, water baptism portrays *exclusive, absolute* identification with Christ.

The sole requirement for water baptism is genuine faith in Christ, v. 26. But further, here Jesus Christ is the sole, exclusive object of this saving faith. He alone is to be grasped and embraced by faith, so that the gospel here involves both *sola fide* and *sola Christos*. Any additive is insulting to Christ; Moses has no part in Christian baptism because we “were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead” (Rom. 7:4). No bigamy is allowed. This is what biblical baptism is about.

- (d) By way of application, have you had questions about the rite of water baptism, the mode, the subjects whether babies or adults, different emphases in the ordinance? Paul here indicates that such concerns are of no importance if you have not first become immersed into Christ Himself through faith alone. Such real baptism is an imperative presupposition of ritual baptism.

²⁰ *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, eds. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, pp. 131-132.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

c. Jew and Gentile are one through faith in Christ, v. 28.

“Not in being [žvi, eni v pais] a Jew or a Greek; not in being a slave or a free man; not in being a male or a female [is there any distinct gospel status], for you are all one [through faith] in Christ Jesus.” Many years ago this writer recalls attending Keswick Conventions in Melbourne, Australia, as well as one in Keswick in the Lake Country of England, where a distinctive holiness message was promoted under a platform banner that read, “All One In Christ Jesus,” based upon Galatians 3:28. From another perspective, this same verse has also more recently been quoted to support the idea that women should be ordained to the Christian ministry since in Christ Jesus, “there is neither male nor female.” Both movements, but especially the second have really used this verse to support a particular agenda that is far from Paul’s intent.

(1) What Paul is *not* teaching in this verse?

- (a) He is *not* teaching that Israel as a nation has no future, since here this distinction has been done away with. Paul is not thinking this way, any more than he is saying that maleness and femaleness have been abolished!
- (b) He is *not* teaching that slavery should be abolished, even though Paul gives no justification for this inhuman practice. The reason is that not only the role of the “slave,” but also that of the “free man” is equally nullified in terms of *divine acceptance* (cf. 5:1).
- (c) He is *not* teaching that women should be ordained as pastors, since male and female roles have been abolished. When you became a Christian you did not cease to be male or female functionally speaking. Further, I Timothy 2:11-12 was written several years after Galatians. Further, Colossians 3:9-11 parallels v. 28 here, yet is shortly followed by 3:18-22 where distinct male/female roles are clearly upheld.

(2) What Paul *is* teaching in this verse.

- (a) Recall the context from 2:15 onwards.

The great concern of Paul for these Galatian believers is the maintenance of their Christian lives following conversion. Certainly conversion was solely through faith alone in Christ for both Jew and Gentile (2:15-16), resulting in regenerating life (3:1-3). However, ongoing life as a Christian involves the same faith alone principle (2:20).

However the Galatians have attempted a bigamous relationship with Moses as well as Christ: “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (3:3). They need to be reminded that, “you [Jew and Gentile] are all Sons of God [in the sight of God] through faith [alone] in Christ Jesus.” Any proposed human additive to the saving and keeping grace of God is insulting, nullifying (Rom. 4:14).

- (b) “There is neither Jew nor Greek.”

The boasting of the Jew over the Gentile permeates all of the four gospels (Luke 4:24-29; John 8:33, 39; 9:28-29). The boasting of the Gentile over the Jew is the shame of the Christian church for centuries, from Justin Martyr, Chrysostom, and Augustine on through Luther and most Reformers on to this day (cf. Rom. 11:17-21).

But now that the gospel age has dawned, all racial boasting and slander is voided, with regard to African-Americans, Mexicans, Vietnamese, Italians, Greeks, Irish, French, Germans, Spaniards, British, Australians, and all shades in between.

- (c) “There is neither bond nor free.”

Aristotle called a slave “an animated implement.” Under Rome there were over 4 times the number of slaves as citizens. If a slave murdered his master, all the other slaves of that household were put to death; in one instance four hundred fellow slaves died. The slave owner was regarded as “Lord,” κύριος, kurios, or “Master,” δεσπότης, despōtēs.

But if the slave and master are Christians, then they have equally confessed themselves to be sinners in the sight of God; thus in trusting in Christ they are equally rich in grace and are to regard one another as *essentially equals* even if they continue to *function* on a slave/master basis (Col. 3:22-4:1; Philem. 12-18).

- (d) “There is neither male or female.”

Josephus, writing in the first century as a cultured Jewish historian, states: “A woman is inferior to her husband in all things.” However biblical Christianity brought emancipation from this tyranny. So Peter writes: “You husbands, . . . live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life” (I Pet. 3:7).

The man and woman, equally sinners, are in Christ regarded as equal by God, and as a consequence are to regard each other as equal. The essential point is that we are to *regard* each other as equal even though our *roles* may differ (Col. 3:9-11, 18-22). Our oneness in Christ should bring forth mutual respect quite apart from our differing roles, with man as the head and the wife submitting to that loving headship.

Jesus Christ is equal to the Father in terms of attributes and essential deity; yet in his role as the Son of God, he is totally submissive to the Father (John 14:28; Phil. 2:6-8). Likewise in the church, both man and woman are equal in *regard* to each other even though their *roles* differ. The man teaches and lovingly leads; the woman teaches women in particular and submits to male headship (I Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:22-25).

- (e) “For you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Christians are one because they confess a common nature inherited from Adam, the same pollution, outward distinctions notwithstanding. Christians are one because they have the same soul physician who has performed identical, spiritual, heart transplant surgery. Christians are one because they have been clothed alike with Christ, v. 27b. Christians are one because they are the objects of pure grace and mercy in Christ. Christians are one because they are adopted children of God, and thus are of the same family and have the same Father.

Christians are also one because they regard each other as equal in Christ; doctor, trash collector; lawyer, laborer, pastor, elder, church member. The ground is level at the foot of the cross, as Charles Wesley has written:

Love, like death, hath all destroyed,
 Rendered all distinctions void;
 Names, and sects, and parties fall;
 Thou, O Christ, art all in all.

Non-Christians are also one, that is under the wrath of God, because they have not believed in Christ and received his free mercy. Whether they are Jew or Gentile, bond or free, male or female, executive or clerk, president or pauper, all are condemned outside of Christ (John 3:18, 36).

- b. Jew and Gentile are heirs with Christ through Abraham, v. 29.

“And if you belong to Christ [as one], then you are Abraham’s seed [σπέρμα, sperma n nsn], heirs [κληρονόμος, klēronomos n nrm] according to promise.” Remember that in v. 19, the Law “was added because of transgressions, until the seed [of Abraham] would come.” Now in context, that seed was undoubtedly Jesus Christ who has now come, and therefore those who have become joined to Christ through faith alone have become part of this lineage; they are also children (seed) of Abraham. As Jesus Christ declared, upon being amazed at the faith of the Gentile Roman centurion: “Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. I say to you that many [such Gentiles] will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob [Jews] in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 8:10-11). This is the unity of Galatians 3:28.

Does this then mean that the Jewish racial distinction has been eliminated? Hardly so since the Gentile is here described as being included in the original promise given to Abraham. This was part of the original covenant in Genesis 12:1-3 when, not only would God “make you a great nation,” obviously Israel, but also, “in you [Abraham and his descendants] all the families [Gentiles] of the earth will be blessed.” The same point is made in Romans 11:17 where the Gentiles, described as “wild olive branches,” are grafted into “the rich root of the olive tree,” which is the Abrahamic covenant. Further, the “new covenant” of Hebrews 8:1-13; 10:15-18 was originally made with “the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (Jer. 31:31-40), not the church.

Does this then mean that all Gentiles will become Jews? No, for while both Jew and Gentile are blessed through Abraham and his seed, Jesus Christ, yet the major passage of Romans 11 (cf. Galatians 6:16) indicates that a national distinction will remain under Christ, a fullness of the Gentiles (Rom. 11:25), then a fullness of the Jews (Rom. 11:12), as Jeremiah 33:7-9; Ezekiel 36:23, 36; 37:28; Zechariah 2:10-13 also confirm. Here the point is that certain distinctions that obviously remain such as maleness and femaleness, are not factors that distinguish us insofar as salvation and sanctification are concerned. So when, as Jonathan Edwards and C. H. Spurgeon describe, Jesus Christ will reign from Jerusalem over the Jews and Gentiles as distinct entities, then the whole earth, comprised of Jews and Gentiles will proclaim that they are “all one in Christ Jesus;” all Jews and Gentiles will similarly boast that in Christ, they are “Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.” There will be glorious diversity in unity.

Of course the fundamental point here is, “if you belong to Christ,” and not, “if you are a Jew or Gentile,” or accomplished or cultured, or a non-achiever or disreputable. To “belong to Christ” means to be owned by Christ, to be in a saving union with him, to be “baptized into/clothed with Christ,” v. 27, to be a vital member of his body. And just as it is discernable if a child or son belongs to its parents, so it is the case with the child of God.

- a. The son or heir always stays close to its parents.
- b. The son or heir is always bringing its needs and concerns to its parents.
- c. The son or heir is exclusively fed and clothed by its parents.
- d. The son or heir is frequently bragging about its parents.
- e. The son or heir conveys a sense of security under its parents.
- f. The son or heir shares in the whole estate of its parents.

Hence, in being joined to Christ as a sinner through faith alone, exclusive of any claim to status, yet the result is the reception, through grace alone, of enviable status, sonship; we become “Abrahamsons” by name, but even more astonishing is the endowment of heirship, “heirs [of God] according to the promise” (cf. Rom. 8:16-17; Tit. 3:7; I John 3:1), and therefore sons of God (4:5-7).

D. GOSPEL SANCTIFICATION AND THE ADOPTION OF THE BELIEVER, 4:1-31

The major point then about “belonging to Christ,” 3:29, is that it results in “son- placement,” v. 5, that is adoption into the family of God and participation in all of its glorious privileges. So in v. 7 we read, “Therefore you are no longer a slave [under Moses, and the Law, and an addictive works relationship], but a son; and if a son, then an heir [of the promise] through God” (cf. Heb. 3:1-6).

Which would you rather be, a “slave of God” or a “child of God?” Would you rather live in an orphanage as an orphan with all of its uncertainty, or a home as a son or daughter of a mother and father? The answer is obvious and it reflects our preference for a family rather

than a servant relationship. Further, a slave has an impermanent performance contract while a child has a permanent/abiding covenant relationship. There is a vast difference between being employed by God according to a task agreement, in which we address Him as “Master,” and being adopted into his home as a son in which we call Him, “my Father.” But how insulting it would be for me as a son to treat “my Father” as if He were a “Master” and I merely His slave! That was the problem with the Galatians, vs. 9-11. It is an insult to the spirit of grace! Rather, “in Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith [in Christ] working through love,” 5:6. Hence the sharp distinction between “slavery” and “adoption” is indicated as follows:

SLAVERY	ADOPTION
↓	↓
is under a <i>master</i>	is by the <i>Father</i>
as a <i>servant</i>	as a <i>son</i>
for <i>wages</i>	for <i>inheritance</i>
according to <i>performance</i>	according to <i>promise</i>
under the <i>law</i>	under the <i>Spirit</i>
as a disciple of the <i>world</i>	as a disciple of <i>Christ</i>

1. The believer is adopted as a son into the Father’s house, vs. 1-7.

Paul now reverts to his previous illustration of a Roman boy being subject to a form of slavery under a “tutor” or “strict custodian” who longs for the privileges, freedom and responsibility of sonship (3:22-26). However the emphasis now changes, according to the conclusion of 3:26. In 3:23-29, Paul was emphasizing that “you are *all* sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” This “all” includes “Jew and Greek, slave and free man, and male and female,” 3:28. Now in 4:1-7 Paul is emphasizing that “you are all *sons of God* through faith in Christ Jesus.” This new adopted status contrasts with former servitude.

In plain terms, before I was a Christian I was under servitude to sin through the Law; thus sin mastered me; sin owned me as a slave; sin had dominion over my mind, my choices, my affections. But having become a Christian, Jesus Christ has adopted and owned me as a son; he has brought revolutionary change to my mind, my choices, and my affections. Like the prodigal son who was received back into his father’s house, it is unthinkable that he would subsequently have desires again for the pig pens of the far country.

- a. Servitude revisited, vs. 1-3.

Why is there now this expanded emphasis on captivity and bondage to sin, as with a child, as an heir, being under sever custodial care, cf. 3:23? Because it provides stark contrast with emancipation through adoption and sonship. What is it that has made the series of novels on *Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery so popular? It is because the large picture concerns the life of an orphan who is raised in a loving home, as a trouble-prone adopted daughter, who

eventually comes to satisfying adulthood. It is the triumph of grace and redemption in it all! Charles Dickens frequently uses this thematic contrast between poverty associated with being a social outcast and eventual inheritance or elevation that results in social redemption, as with *Oliver Twist*, *Great Expectations*, and *A Christmas Carol*.

- (1) Israel was in servitude, even as an heir, v. 1.

“Now I say, as long a time as the heir [ὁ κληρονόμος, ho klēronomos n nsm] is a child [νήπιος, nēpios adj nsm], he does not differ from a slave, although he is lord/the legal owner/head of all [his father’s estate].” The history of Israel in the Old Testament involves a paradox of a redeemed nation under grace and favor that was yet rebellious. Such mutiny would often lead one to believe that there was not much difference between Jew and Gentile! Further one might conclude therefore that there was not much hope for Israel. Nevertheless there was a radical difference, namely “heirship” based on covenant promise and grace (Isa. 65:9; Amos 9:11-15)! So here “the heir,” ho klēronomos, is “[legally] owner of everything,” that is “lord of all [belonging to the Father],” even though actual appropriation has not taken place.

- (2) Israel was captive to the Law, according to the Father’s will, v. 2.

“But he is under guardians [ἐπίτροπος, epitropos n apm] and appointed stewards [οἰκονόμος, oikonomos n apm] until the time set [προθεσμία, prothesmia n gsf] by the father.” So *Israel* was “under guardians and managers,” this being inferred from the plural here, cf. 3:23-25, in agreement with the “we” here of v. 3. Surely these included Moses, Joshua, the Judges, Kings and Prophets, even the pagan Babylonians, Greeks, and Romans, most of whom were “strict custodians,” who whipped the people of God into line according to the Law of God and civil law.

But such restriction was only “until the date set by the Father,” or “until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made,” 3:19. This is the day of emancipation, of “son-placement,” v. 5, of transference from bondage to adoption, to fulfilled heirship. However it is the Father’s bestowal, solely according to his gracious good pleasure and timing, v. 4. The process of salvation is solely God’s determination.

- (3) Israel was captive to legalism, even as an heir, v. 3.

“In the same way we also, when we were children [νήπιος, nēpios adj nrm], were enslaved [δουλεύω, douleuō par prnrm] under the elementary principles [στοιχεῖα, stoiceia n apn] of the world.” Here the reference to Israel is more explicit, that is “we, while we were children,” cf. “you,” v. 6. Thus here is described the period of Israel’s captivity to the Law, of being “under the Law,” v. 5, except that this incarceration through the centuries of the Old Testament is described as “bondage under the elemental things of the world.” These John Brown describes as, “the commandments and ordinances of the Mosaic Law, . . . as elementary modes of instruction, . . .

as the elementary modes of discipline belonging to, and characteristic of, the preparative Jewish dispensation, . . . [thus] the whole system of external observances under the Law.”²² This was what Peter described as “a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear” (Act 15:10), and thus the cause of longing for adoption (Rom. 8:19-21).

However, every person outside of this adoption in Jesus Christ is under captivity to personal performance, to the broad law system of this world. Those who are atheistic or pagan perform to impress man or gods; those who in some measure are believers in the only true and living God of creation and Israel, also perform to impress. In either case it is an offering of self-righteousness, thought to be worthy, atoning and saving, while in fact being a useless “filthy garment” (Isa. 64:6).

b. Sonship accomplished, vs. 4-5.

“But when the fullness of the time came,” is but another way in which Paul transfers us from the bad news to the good news (cf. Rom. 3:21; Eph. 2:4). God did not consult with man concerning when it might be suitable for His Son to come, nor did man consult with God. Rather it was “at the right time [that] Christ died for the ungodly,” Rom. 5:6.

It was a time when circumstances were ripe and conditions would assist the spread of the gospel including: a. The Roman peace (*pax romana*) that permitted wide and relatively safe travel. b. The Roman roads likewise allowed wide travel. c. The Koine Greek language was a precise international language. d. The Jewish people were, in their captive misery, ripe for the arrival of Messiah. e. The multiplicity of synagogues in many lands provided rallying points for missionaries.

Of course it was also a time of opposition nevertheless, from Herod the Great, the Roman Empire, the Jewish Sanhedrin, yet none of these could interfere with God’s timing. Further, none of this could stop His coming, even Satan or hell! God was determined, with all of His sovereign will, that His only Son would come, and be born of a woman. But why?

The answer of God Himself is crystal clear, so that He through His Son might “redeem,” that is rescue from the market place of sin, that is deliver from “bondage to the elemental things of the world,” v. 3. And the Son came with the same determination as that of His Father. And this Son both invites and draws as was the case with Peter and Andrew, calling: “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19), and with Matthew, “Follow Me!” (Matt. 9:9), and with Zaccheus: “Come down [from that tree], for today I must stay at your house” (Luke 19:5). However here is a gracious invitation to everlasting, adopted sonship, not temporal servitude.

²² Ibid., p. 79. So Burton, Lightfoot, Luther, cf. Col. 2:8, 20.

(1) Through the *qualified* Son of God, v. 4.

“But when the fullness [πλήρωμα, plērōma n nsn] of the time [χρόνος, chronos n gsm] came, God sent forth [ἐξαποστέλλω, exapostellō v aais] His Son, begotten [γίνομαι, ginomai par amasm] of woman, begotten under Law.” His declared *credentials* were *first*, that “God sent forth His Son;” He was not created, but came forth from the holy bosom of the Father (John 1:1, 18). He was God the son, and thus satisfied the holy divine demands made upon human kind.

Second, he was “born of woman;” he was born of human flesh, the virgin Mary, and therefore “made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God” (Heb. 2:17; cf. John 1:14).

Third, he was “born under Law [the Mosaic administration],” the instrument that was added to bring about an acute sense of sin (Rom. 5:20; Gal. 3:19), nevertheless as “one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). In simple terms, God sent forth the verified, holy God-man who is His Son, according to His own specifications! So an anonymous hymn sums up Paul’s teaching here:

Now are the days fulfilled,
 God’s Son is manifested,
 Now His great majesty
 In human flesh is vested.
 Behold the mighty God,
 By Whom all wrath is stilled,
 The woman’s promised Seed—
 Now are the days fulfilled.

Now are the days fulfilled,
 Lo, Jacob’s Star is shining;
 The gloomy night has fled
 Wherein the world lay pining.
 Now, Israel, look on Him
 Who long thy heart hath thrilled;
 Hear Zion’s watchmen cry:
 Now are the days fulfilled.

Now are the days fulfilled,
 The child of God rejoices;
 No bondage of the Law,
 No curses that it voices,
 Can fill our hearts with fear;
 On Christ our hope we build.
 Behold the Prince of Peace—
 Now are the days fulfilled

(2) Through the *redemptive* Son of God, v. 5.

“So that those under [ὑπό, hupo pre] Law might be redeemed [ἐξαγοράζω, exagorazō v aass], in order that we might receive son-placement/the adoption as sons [υιοθεσία, huiiothesia n asf].” The qualified Son of God came with a task to accomplish (John 4:34). His appointed *task* was that of a “redeemer” of “those who were under Law” so that they might receive “son placement,” huiiothesia. The context suggests that Jesus Christ came to save Israel (Matt. 15:24), and this He shall ultimately accomplish (Rom. 11:26-27), yet, by means of which deferment, the Gentiles shall also be saved (Rom. 11:17). He came to redeem that nation from the strict custodian of the Law, so that “we [Jews, along with Gentiles]” might receive “adoption as sons” or literally “son-placement.”²³

But why ought they, the Gentiles, enter into such gracious elevation? Because they also through faith “belong to Christ,” and hence “are Abraham’s descendants, and heirs according to promise” (3:29). The Gentiles too have been invited to the great banquet (Luke 14:15-24), to receive sonship.

c. Sonship appropriated, vs. 6-7.

It could wrongly be understood that this merciful adoption of enslaved sinners, their emancipation and elevation to spiritual royalty, is mainly declarative, whereas such a promotion in fact results in an eruption of lively adulation, praise, and bold expectation. And there is a very dynamic reason why this is so. All three persons of the Trinity are involved in the bestowal of the divine bounty (3:2; 5:1-5; cf. John 16:7).

(1) The Spirit generated cry of the Son, v. 6.

“Because you are sons, God sent forth [ἐξαποστέλλω, exapostellō v aais] the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying [κράζω, krazō par paasn] ‘Abba [Ἀββᾶ]! [the] Father!’” Justification through the Son, bringing holy standing even as Jesus Christ is holy, also obtains the identical life of that same Son, that is “the Spirit of His Son,” which is “the Spirit of Christ” or “the Spirit of God” (Rom. 8:9), who is in fact the promised Holy Spirit. Justification and regeneration are inseparable, though distinguishable elements of biblical conversion.

The receptacle of this gracious endowment is the justified, cleansed and adopted “heart” that becomes divinely animated and erupts with the cry, “Abba! Father!” Abba, is a transliteration of the Aramaic word for “Father,” used by the Lord Jesus of His heavenly Father while agonizing in prayer in Gethsemane (Mark 14:36). It equates the Greek, πατήρ, patēr. In the Talmud, slaves in a Jewish household were forbidden from using this term in addressing the head of the family.

²³ The distinction between “we” and “you” in 3:23-26, and similarly here in 4:3-7 is cautiously upheld by Alford, *The Greek Testament*, III, pp. 35-36, 38-40.

But here in v. 6 and Romans 8:15-16, *Abba*, is used to describe the cry of the newly adopted child of God. By way of tone of expression, it is associated with “crying,” κράζω, *krazō*, being onomatopoeic, sounding like a screeching bird, or the children “shouting in the temple, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David’” (Matt. 21:15).” In the human realm, one of the first expressions of recognition by a young child is “papa” and “mama.” It is this *early* appreciation of an intimate, sustaining relationship, never known before due to prior restriction, that is intended by Paul. However, there are other aspects of this adoption that are involved here.

(a) It is the Spirit of assurance.

The slave of sin has little assurance; he must perform or perish, and he knows his performance is coerced, wretched. But the child of God knows that Christ has performed satisfactorily, while “the [bestowed] Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:16). Thus he sings: “I am His and He is mine, forever and forever.”

(b) It is the Spirit of bold access.

The slave cannot draw near with confidence because he lacks a heart “sprinkled clean from an evil conscience” (Heb. 10:22). He lacks right status and suitable clothing. Further he has no mediator or advocate concerning his captive cause. But the child of God has clothing provided, like the prodigal (Luke 15:11-24), as well as a qualified high priest who maintains initial emancipation. Consequently he can “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace” (Heb. 4:15-16).

(c) It is the Spirit of resourcefulness.

All that the Father has, the riches of His grace, is lavished upon His children with unstinting generosity. And further, the administration of His kingdom becomes the charge of His children. And the fellowship of the family becomes the chorus of praise to the glory of a reconciling God. So the song is that which Charles Wesley has penned:

My God is reconciled,
His pardoning voice I hear;
He owns me for His child,
I can no longer fear;
With confidence I now draw nigh,
And Father, Abba, Father! Cry.]

(2) The Spirit generated heirship of the son, v. 7.

“Therefore [it is evident that] you are no longer a slave but a son, and if you are a son then you are also an heir [κληρονόμος, *klēronomos n nsm*] through God.” The cry of “Abba! Father!” in v. 6 distinguishes a son from a slave; there is a radical difference in attitude. But further the son’s inheritance also

sets him apart. What is this “heirship”? Here it is also κληρονόμος, klēronomos, as described in v. 1, yet with a distinction. In v. 1 this heirship is legally owned but not actively appropriated, that is even though the young heir is legally “owner [lord] of all.” Here in v. 7 this heirship has been actively appropriated, so that the son is experientially “lord of all.” Whereas in v. 1 the inheritance was a secure prospect, here it is an experienced reality that ought to be evident in a new lifestyle according to food (at the Father’s table), clothing (fit for the Father’s holy presence), residency (in the Father’s royal house), activity (administration of the Father’s kingdom), etc., “through God.” Thus “the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (II Cor. 5:17).

Therefore in moving toward a practical expression of his original illustration, Paul makes his address more particular in the use now of “you [singular]” rather than the plural “we” and “you” of vs. 3, 6. He has expectations of a new evident lifestyle, through the reign of grace, except that presently he has a measure of disappointment. It seems incomprehensible that the heir should regress to his former state of bondage, vs. 8-11, as if the exalted prodigal son would return to the pig pens, yet to a degree this is in fact the present situation.

2. The believer is not to return to the far country, vs. 8-20.

The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) is very applicable here since it portrays a son, the recipient of an inheritance, yet squandering his privilege so that he finds himself in miserable bondage. Then “he came to his senses,” v. 17, and found a gracious reception back at his father’s house. Imagine the grief and perplexity of the father should he learn that his son has once more returned to the far country! It would be like Joseph, exalted to the rank of prime minister in Egypt, then returning to the role of a slave in Potiphar’s household. It would be like the Babylonian exiles, having returned to Jerusalem, desiring to return to their captive state! So Paul is bewildered or “perplexed,” v. 20, that the Galatian believers, like redeemed Israel lusting after the “fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, garlics” (Num. 11:5) enjoyed when captive in Egypt, the house of bondage, should similarly hanker after their former slavish lifestyle. It would be like Lazarus, resting in Abraham’s bosom, deciding that he wanted to return to the gutter outside the rich man’s house, and the company of street dogs (Luke 16:19-31). It would be like the son in the father’s house here requesting that he be allowed to return to the harsh dominion of the strict custodian (4:1-2)!

a. Present backsliding and legalism, vs. 8-11.

Paul’s pastoral heart is very evident here, even as in I Thessalonians 2:7, 11, like “a nursing mother, . . . a father,” in agonizing over his spiritual children (cf. Col. 2:1), where Paul describes “a struggle [ἀγών, agōn] I have on your behalf.”

(1) Recollection of former far country lifestyle, v. 8.

“But then, on the one hand, not having known God, you were enslaved to those [gods] that by nature [φύσις, phusis n dsf] are not gods [θεός, theos n dpm].” In other words, bring to mind your earlier religious atheism; at that

time you were not “knowing God,” protestations notwithstanding. There was “god-talk” and “god-activism” and enthusiastic, slavish devotion to “gods,” but these did not have the nature and attributes of the only true and living God. Rather, they were “in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures” (Rom. 1:23). Such dedication was in fact slavery to a system requiring “perform or perish;” grace and redemption and adoption and inheritance and assurance had no part in this life of bondage.

(2) Reminder of present regression in the Father’s house, vs. 9-10.

Nevertheless an astonishing turn of events has happened, for in the household of God, where grace and redemption and adoption and inheritance and assurance abound, yet an unthinkable, irrational attitude has developed. The children want to return to former slavery. They are like Esau, who was ready to sell his birthright, his inheritance, like the prodigal son, for a mess of pottage, a bowl of “lentil stew.” He “despised his birthright” (Gen. 25:27-34), that is he undervalued and trivialized it; he did not esteem the glory and high privilege and grace of it.

Likewise many of the Galatians have undervalued the gospel of the grace of God, and for this reason Paul writes so that he might instigate necessary course correction. “You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? . . . A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough” (5:7-9). But how shall this corrupting influence, this leaven of gospel perversion be done away with? For Paul the answer is a review of the one true gospel and its ramifications for present Christian living. A related means of such cleansing, of course correction is the Lord’s Table, that repeated time of gospel remembrance; it wonderfully purges the lump of false-gospel pollution.

(a) To legalism in general, v. 9.

“But now, on the other hand, having known God, or much more being known by God, how is it that you turn [ἐπιστρέφω, *epistrephō* v paip] again to the weak [ἀσθενής, *asthenēs* adj apn] and poor/worthless [πτωχός, *ptōchos* adj apn] elementary principles [στοχεῖα, *stochēia* n apn, as in v. 10], to which you desire to be enslaved [δουλεύω, *douleuō* inf pa] all over again.” Once again Paul uses his “But now” to remind the Galatian saints of the transformation that true Christian conversion has brought about (cf. Rom. 3:21; 6:22; 7:6; Eph. 2:13; Col. 1:22). In dealing with a present problem in Christian living, he sees the necessity of believers reviewing the foundation of their hope, especially the contrast that the gospel produces between the past and the present, the distinction between pre-conversion and post-conversion living. “But now” causes us to reflect, not on evolving growth, but new life compared with the old.

1) Paul confesses gospel course correction, v. 9a.

“But now having known God, or much more being known by God.” Here Paul applies course correction to himself; he turns from a man-centered perspective, which so easily falls from our lips, to a God-centered confession. Man is naturally Arminian, boasting in his seeking of God, and only supernaturally Calvinistic, in the best sense of that term, as a result of a Copernican revolution in his soul. God is now truly comprehended as the center of the universe, not himself. Thus he has confessed that God “called me through His grace, [and] was pleased to reveal His Son in me” (1:15-16). Even so, the Christian needs constant reminder of the sovereignty of grace in his life (cf. Jas. 4:13-15). So Paul adjusts his thinking to that God-centeredness which predominates in this epistle (1:6; 4:2, 4, 6).

In J. I. Packer’s helpful book, *A Quest For Godliness*, he perceptively observes that today we are far more prone to speak of “I and God,” rather than “God and me,” as the Puritans spoke about in earlier days.²⁴ In Psalm 2 we see this same contrast in perspective. In vs. 1-3 there is seen a raging, complaining, rebellious, God-dethroning world. Mankind plots and schemes to oppose the reign of Jesus Christ. Man violently attempts to throw off the cords of God’s sovereign and moral restraint. But in vs. 4-9 we see the perspective of God in His holy heaven, His sure decree to appoint His Son as King of the whole earth. Here is also revealed His holy indignation, His scoffing at man’s impudence, His fury that shall ultimately be unleashed, His holy appointment of Jesus Christ as Savior and King and Judge. So in the true testimony of becoming a Christian, the emphasis is upon being “saved,” or being “known by God” (passive voice), not my “decision” or “knowledge of God” (active voice). So Luther comments:

[I]ndeed our knowledge is passive rather than active; that is to say, it consists in this, that we are rather known of God, than that we know Him. All our doing [that is, all our endeavor to know and apprehend God], is to suffer [through given faith] God to work in us. He gives the Word, which when we have received by faith given from above, we are newborn and made the sons of God. This is then the sense and meaning: “You are known of God,” that is, “you are visited with the Word, you are endued with faith and the Holy Spirit, whereby you are renewed. Wherefore, even by these words, “you are known of God,” he takes away all righteousness from the Law, and denies that we attain the knowledge of God through the worthiness of our own works. “For no man knoweth the Father, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him”

²⁴ J. I. Packer, *A Quest For Godliness*, pp. 216-217.

(Matt. 11:27); and also: “He by his knowledge shall justify many, because he shall bear their iniquities” (Isa. 53:11).²⁵

The Galatians very much need to focus on this divine perspective, which adjusts my understanding of sanctification. To “know God” is conditional on “my knowing” about God; but to be “known by God” is to rest in His sovereign initiative and keeping. The same sovereign initiative is evident when His true sheep are called by name by the Good Shepherd and led by Him toward nourishing pasture (John 10:3, 9, 14).

2) Paul condemns gospel course deviation, v. 9b.

Here believers are described in regression, backsliding, reversion, and Paul is astonished at such foolishness. It is like Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress* wishing to return to the City of Destruction and Vanity Fair. But what is the territory Paul envisages the Galatians are returning to? Primarily it is the Law of Moses (cf. vs. 10, 21; 5:2-3), previously repudiated, but presently embraced as a means of sanctification.²⁶ Yet pagan religious elements may also have become incorporated.

However note the descriptive terms of the Law here that also represent all forms of works based religion. 1. It is “weak,” that is impotent in producing acceptable righteousness (3:21; Rom. 8:3). 2. It is comprised of “beggarly [impoverished] rudimentary principles,” v. 3, that lack rich endowment. It is the administration of the “far country,” not the Father’s house (Luke 15:13-16, 17-24). Whereas Abraham was looking for “the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (He. 11:10).

(b) To legalism in particular, v. 10.

“You are observing [παράτιθημι, paratithēmi v pmip] days and months and seasons and years.” So Paul lists these legalistic pursuits in greater detail. They were Mosaic Law rites and celebrations: “days” were Sabbaths, fast days, feast days, new moon days; “months” were sacred months, such as the first month that began harvest, the eighth month being dedicated to rain; “times” were seasons such as Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles; “years” were sabbatical years, the year of Jubilee, etc. However enthusiasm for such a regimen was investment in old wine skins, not new wine!

²⁵ Luther, *Galatians*, p. 385.

²⁶ Granted that the Galatians are, in the main, Gentiles, then how could they return to Judaism? To begin with, as with any Gentile Christian, their faith is solidly and rightly grounded in so much of the New Covenant that is embodied in the Old Testament. However they have been seduced by Judaizers and their embrace of this substitute legalistic gospel has been, in principle, no different from their former pagan religion.

(3) Reproof of present backsliding in the Father's house, v. 11.

“I fear [φοβέομαι, phobeomai v pmis] for you lest my toiling [κοπιῶω, kopiaō v pfais] amongst you has been in vain [εἰκῆ, eikē adv].” So Paul almost despairs at the apparent absence of any spiritual discernment or maturity in so many of the Galatians. It almost breaks his heart to hear of his labors coming to naught, seemingly that is. He may now be thinking in terms of II Peter 2:20-22, of “a dog returning to its vomit.”

Likewise Christian leaders are also led to despair about some members and adherents within a local church, with the exclamation, “How could they do such a thing? They seem to have little understanding of the first principles of the gospel!” (I Cor. 3:1-3; Heb. 5:11-14). What is the answer then?

- (a) Recognition that all believers are not identical in growth (6:1; I Cor. 3:1). Some are “little children,” “children,” “young men,” “fathers,” (I John 2:12-13), in the faith.
- (b) Return to the primacy of teaching that stimulates an experiential union with Christ resulting in His likeness, vs. 19, 31; (Rom. 6:11, 17; 7:4; 8:10).
- (c) Return to the “milk of the Word” (I Cor. 3:2; I Pet. 2:2), the “elementary principles of the oracles of God” (Heb. 5:12), especially the incomparable riches of the grace of God in the gospel (Eph. 1:18-19; 2:7).
- (d) Return to the person of Christ, His sole redemptive glory, from whom you have been severed by false gospel ministry (5:1, 4).

b. Past liberty and present bondage, vs. 12-15.

Sometimes people make an enthusiastic profession of faith that, for various reasons, later cools with the result that initial gospel joy fades. In this case, Galatian gospel joy has diminished because the grace of God has become infected with the leaven or crutch or additive of human works. Grace brings a smile while Law brings a frown. Doubtless Paul has reports that the present manner of Christian living is not what it used to be. At best there is a mediocrity, a conformity, a stern attitude that lacks fervent, grace encompassing, God-centered blessedness which Paul continues to maintain. Consider Paul's zeal (1:8-9, 14-16; 2:4-5, 16, 19; 3:1-3; 4:9, 19; 5:1, 5-6, 25; 6:14-15).

(1) Become now as Paul in his liberty, v. 12.

“Become [γίνομαι, ginomai v pmip] as I am, because I also [have become] as you are; brethren, I entreat [δέομαι, deomai v pmis] you! You have done me no wrong.” There is both danger and appropriateness with the matter of personal testimony. The danger concerns man-focus, while the appropriateness, as here, gives example and encouragement, and proof that we are not merely in the realm of the theoretical. The fire of grace has not

stopped blazing in Paul's soul; he has the same gospel fervency as when he "preached the gospel to you the first time," v. 13. At that time he did not try to convert them as Gentiles to Judaism. Rather as a Jew he became to them as a Gentile, and they loved him for it. Paul's attitude was the opposite to that of Peter who discarded his liberty and upheld Judaism amongst the Gentiles (2:11-14).

So the Galatians should become like Paul who, in the liberty of his ministry, acted toward them as a Gentile. In other words he exhorts, "return to your former liberty (5:1), by means of trusting only and forever in Christ's saving righteousness. Put the Moses administration behind you, which I never embodied before you. Rather recollect your sonship privileges and riches in grace, and live in the light of these. But also recollect your former exuberance and goodness, through grace, that was lavished upon my own, unattractive person."

(2) Become now as your former gospel orientation, vs. 13-15.

"¹³But you know that it was because of a weakness of the flesh [σάρξ, sarx n gsf] I preached [εὐαγγελίζω, euangelizō v amis] the good news/gospel to you the first time. ¹⁴And that which was a trial [πειρασμός, peirasmos n asm] in my flesh you did not despise/consider as nothing [ἐξουθενέω, exoutheneō v aaip] or loathe/spit out [ἐκπτύω, ekptuō v aaip], but as an angel of God you received/welcome me, as Jesus Christ. ¹⁵Therefore where is the blessedness [μακαρισμός, makarismos n nsm] you [formerly] experienced/possessed? For I bear witness [μαρτυρέω, martureō v pais] to you that if you were able, you would have gouged/torn out [ἐξορύσσω, exorussō par aanpm] your eyes and given them to me." So concerning that time when Paul first proclaimed the gospel to the Galatians with evident liberty, unencumbered with Judaism, he recalls that, "You did me no wrong [caused me no injury]," that is, you did not act critically toward me, even on account of my outward manner of ministry; in fact your response was quite the opposite because of the gospel I proclaimed.

(a) Paul's outward form of ministry was not attractive, vs. 13-14a.

"But you know that it was because of a weakness of the flesh I preached the good news to you the first time. And that which was a trial to you in my flesh you did not despise as nothing or loathe." In I Corinthians 2:3-5 Paul tells us that his ministry was "in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom." Again in II Corinthians 10:10 he was charged with "unimpressive personal presence and contemptible speech."

But what was Paul's "bodily illness" here? Probably it was the "thorn in the flesh" of II Corinthians 12:7-9, and possibly it was an eye disease, v. 15b; (6:11). Certainly there was something objectionable, distracting, unappealing, which point is essential to the argument here. Why?

Because Jews especially (John 9:1-2), and Gentiles as well, regarded such infirmity with disdain (John 9:2; Acts 28:4).

Even today, especially in the light of TV and related media communication, health and wealth emphases, much Christian ministry suggests that physical presentation and appearance are of paramount importance. However Paul teaches the contrary since he is so committed to the primacy of gospel truth.

(b) The Galatian's enthusiastic reception of Paul, vs. 14b, 15b.

“But as an angel of God you received me, as Jesus Christ. . . . For I bear witness [μαρτυρέω, martureō v pais] to you that, if you were able, you would have gouged out [ἐξορύσσω, exorussō par aanpm] your eyes and given them to me.” Possibly Paul's personal affliction forced him to remain in the Galatian region so that the citizens there heard the gospel with sustained emphasis; consequently they eagerly welcomed the gospel, and also the messenger, irregardless of his evident disadvantages. Rather than despising Paul, he gladly confesses: “You have done me no wrong,” v. 12b, so that they received him as an “angel [messenger] of God, as Jesus Christ Himself,” v. 14. That is, the grace of God in the life of the Apostle was an overpowering aroma, giving him an attractiveness that transcended his bodily disadvantages. Similarly at Thessalonica, it was the holy and virtuous manner of Paul that won through (I Thess. 1:5; 2:10).

In the apocryphal work, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, c. 160 A.D., which although uninspired possibly contains some historical fact, Paul is described as, “of a low stature, bald (or shaved) on the head, crooked thighs, handsome legs, hollow-eyed; had a crooked nose; full of grace; for sometimes he appeared as a man, sometimes he had the countenance of an angel” (I:7).

Therefore there is wonderful encouragement here for those Christians who are disabled or even disfigured in some way. The grace of God in Christ can nevertheless make them attractive, winsome, and for these reasons, spiritually fruitful!

(c) Paul's impassioned plea concerning lost blessing, v. 15a.

“Therefore where is the blessedness you [formerly] experienced?” That is, “where is your initial, joyous, liberated, happy, frame of mind that radiated from you when you first believed? You loved me so fervently, you welcomed my gospel doctrine so gladly, without qualification, that you would have given me your own eyes, your most valuable organs.” Yet that former radiance is missing and it ought not so to be. The incorporation of Moses into Christian living does not stimulate blessedness, but a stern, judgmental, unassured spirit. So William Cowper, himself prone to depression at times, testifies:

O for a closer walk with God,
 A calm and heavenly frame,
 A light to shine upon the road
 That leads me to the Lamb!

Where is that blessedness I knew when
 first I saw the Lord?
 Where is that soul-refreshing view of
 Jesus and His word?

What peaceful hours I once enjoyed,
 how sweet their memory still,
 But they have left an aching void
 The world can never fill.

Return, O holy Dove, return,
 Sweet messenger of rest!
 I hate the sins that made Thee mourn
 And drove Thee from my breast.

Again, the answer is in 2:20; 6:14, 16, where here alone is to be found “peace and mercy.” Again, unadulterated saving and sanctified union with Christ is the only ground of true blessedness (Phil. 3:1, 7-10, 13-14; 4:4).

c. Future hope and transformation, vs. 16-20.

In dealing with Christian backsliding, we are faced with the problem of discerning the counterfeit from the true. The key test is whether there has been any frontsliding to begin with, any evidence of a true, initial work of saving grace. No indication of frontsliding suggests no original conversion. But to suggest backsliding has taken place when there has been no frontsliding is serious delusion. In the case of the Galatians, Paul indicates that there has been some evidence of frontsliding, according to the proof of 3:3; 4:15; 5:7, and especially the preceding v. 15.

But at the moment we are dealing with the evidence of backsliding, which for Paul is all too evident, as with heeding another gospel, 1:6, returning to legalism, 2:18, carnality, 3:3, retreat to former slavery, 4:9-10, spiritual lethargy, 5:7, deeds of the flesh, 5:19-21, and thus a turning from kinship with Pauline doctrine.

(1) The attitude change in backsliding, vs. 16-18.

When the prodigal son left his father, his attitude was probably not too friendly, in spite of his received inheritance and doubtless the father's blessing. So Paul, with great tact and grace, yet reflects on the change of attitude between vs. 14-15 and v. 16.

(a) Paul has become an enemy to the Galatians, v. 16.

“So have I become your enemy [ἐχθρός, echthros adj nsm] having spoken to you the truth [ἀληθεύω, alētheuō par pansm]?” About three

years after Paul's inaugural visit to Galatia, his second visit probably discovered signs of spiritual ill health. Subsequent reports have confirmed further spiritual decline. Now the Galatians have become aware of Paul's grief at their backsliding, and in return they have expressed a harsh attitude, having been taught by false brethren to malign him as antinomian! Now he is regarded by many as an enemy! Why? Because, as a faithful physician of souls, he has told them the truth about their poor spiritual health and they don't like it!

I recall my father telling me, as a young man, "Barry, you may be a Christian or you may not be a Christian. I don't know. But the manner of life you are leading leads me to believe that you are not!" That remark stung, and I resented it, though it was the truth.

In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, we are told of nine stages in the backsliding process of one Temporary.²⁷ Especially notice the fifth point in relation to Paul's concern.

- 1) Serious thoughts about God are willfully supplanted.
 - 2) Profitable religious duties are gradually neglected.
 - 3) The company of lively Christians is shunned.
 - 4) Coolness develops toward true corporate worship.
 - 5) They develop a critical spirit toward the godly.
 - 6) Association with godless people becomes preferable.
 - 7) They delight to detect hypocrites to justify self.
 - 8) Little sins are courted on the pretext of liberty.
 - 9) Bold godlessness then unveils their corrupt heart.
- (b) Judaisers have befriended the Galatians, vs. 17-18.

So often, it is the beguiling, seemingly friendly yet authoritarian approach of false teachers that so easily overcomes naïve Christians. These servants of Satan, having ulterior motives, "disguise themselves as servants of righteousness" (II Cor. 11:14-15) so as to obtain "spiritual scalps," so to speak (6:12-13).

²⁷ John Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 161.

1) Friendship that is condemned, v. 17.

“They zealously seek [ζηλώω, zeloō v paip] you, not for a good purpose, but they wish to shut you out/exclude you [ἐκκλείω, ekkleiō inf aa] so that you will seek [v pasp] them.” The carnal “flesh mutilators,” 5:12, are deftly identified as “they” in v. 17, who flatter the Galatians with their zealous interest, as is the manner of contemporary sectarians. We all have this weakness, this susceptibility to think well of those who flatter us with their supposed interest in our well-being. However these legalists seek to isolate the Galatians from Paul, even perhaps by denying them his mail, so that they might receive exclusive attention.

2) Friendship that is commended, v. 18.

“But it is always good [καλός, kalos adj nsn] to be eagerly sought after [ζηλώω, zeloō inf pm] for a good purpose, and not only when I am present [παρείμι, pareimi inf pa] with you.” Now such fervor is valid if it concerns the truth, such as when intense parental concern is directed toward their children. So Paul nicely indicates that his fervor is of this nature, and distinguished by a “commendable manner,” that is the cause of the only true gospel. Further, this apostolic passion is undiminished even if geographically separated from the Galatians; it has not given up.

(2) The attitude change in frontsliding, v. 19.

“My children, with whom again I am having birth pangs [ὠδίνω, ōdinō v pais] until Christ is formed [μορφόω, morphoō v apss] in you.” In spite of the ill health of his spiritual children, yet Paul believes they will eventually mature. So he affectionately likens his concern to a mother who, after her children are born, yet suffers birth pangs (anxiety pangs) again on their behalf (I Thess. 2:7, 11), v. 19a.

Paul declares his chief goal for them to be their radical and internal change through faith in Christ alone. He uses the word μορφόω, morphoō to signify inner transformation, spiritual maturation, Christ-likeness, after the manner of μεταμορφόω, metamorphoō in Romans 12:2. And the Apostle sees the faithful local church to be the incubator in which this change takes place (Eph. 3:19; 4:13; Col. 1:27-28).

Here is where modern day “decisionism” in evangelism falls apart being such a sham representation of the gospel. Saving faith in Christ, exclusive of human works, is yet the beginning of what God intends for His children. Conversion is but the Christian’s commencement of his real earthly pilgrimage. Through the gospel the believer is to be right with God, alive unto God, and made conformable to the image of His Son (Phil. 3:10). “We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (I John 3:2-3).

(3) The attitude of pastoral concern, v. 20.

“I wish I could be present with you now and change [ἀλλάσσω, allassō inf aa] my tone of voice [φωνή, phonē n asf], because I am perplexed/at my wit’s end [ἀπορέω, aporeō v pmis] about you.” C. H. Spurgeon once gave a message to students at his Pastor’s College titled, “The Minister’s Fainting Fits.” He lamented: “Our work, when earnestly undertaken, lays us open to attacks in the direction of depression. Who can bear the weight of souls without sometimes sinking to the dust? Passionate longings after men’s conversion, if not fully satisfied (and when are they?), consume the soul with anxiety and disappointment. To see the hopeful turn aside, the godly grow cold, professors abusing their privileges, and sinners waxing more bold in sin—are not these sights enough to crush us to the earth?”²⁸ So Paul here also expresses one of his “fainting fits.”

He would prefer to be physically present with the Galatians, in which case he would likely change his critical attitude, his “[tone of] voice” (1:6; 3:1, 3-4; 4:11, 15a; 5:7); yet for the present Paul declares, “I am perplexed/at my wit’s end” about them. The word ἀπορέω, aporeō, means “being at a loss to explain/to be perplexed,” hence “fearful/doubtful,” as v. 11 indicates. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Paul abandons these wayward sheep. Rather he goes after them to bring them back to the roots of the gospel; this he does by means of more teaching that is intended to reveal plainly the folly of their error and the glory of the truth. Scripture plays a major part here, 4:22, 27, 30.

Yes, the unbeliever surely needs the gospel for the salvation of his soul. But the believer also needs the gospel for the sanctification of his soul, and it was for this reason that the Lord’s Table was instituted.

3. The believer is a child of promise, not slavery, vs. 21-31.

As an Australian, sometimes this writer has to remind himself where he is living. The culture he was raised in is not always the same as America, and since he lives in America, he cannot impose it on Americans. Rather he has to live under a new administration. So Paul has to go to great lengths to show the Galatian Christian that he is under the administration and exalted privileges that come from grace through Jesus Christ, and not works through Moses.

a. Paul argues the Law to “would be” legalists, v. 21.

“Tell me, you who are desiring [θέλω, thelō par pavpm] to be under [the] Law [ὑπό pre νόμον, hupo nomon n asm], do you not listen to/hear [ἀκούω, akouō v paip] the Law?” Invariably legalists do not fully uphold the Law they so strenuously thunder forth. Usually they ignore certain parts, such as the sabbatarian with regard to the death penalty for sabbath breakers (Ex. 32:12-17; Num. 15:32-36); debt rest (nullification) every seventh year (Num. 15:1-2); land rest every seventh year, and the year of jubilee with property restoration, every

²⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures To My Students*, I, pp. 174-5.

fiftieth year (Lev. 25:1-17). This was all part of the fourth commandment (cf. 5:3).

So Paul challenges those who desire to be “under [the] Law,” “Are you prepared to listen to the Law?” Obviously “law” here refers to the Old Testament as a whole, being inclusive of the Mosaic Pentateuch, vs. 22-23, 30, re Genesis, the Prophets, v. 27, re Isaiah, as well as the Writings.

- b. The believer is born of promise, not the flesh, vs. 22-28.

Let us review the circumstances concerning the births of Ishmael and Isaac in Genesis 15-21. In Genesis 15, having entered Canaan, childless Abraham is worried, but God assures him that Eliezer his servant will not be the promised heir; rather, “one who shall come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir. . . . Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them. . . . So shall your descendants be,” vs. 4-5. Here the principle of faith alone is established, v. 6. In Genesis 16, having been in the land ten years, Abraham being 86 and Sarah 75, faith runs low. With the intent of attempting to “help God along,” Sarah encourages Abraham to have a child by her maid, Hagar, and consequently Ishmael is born, vs. 2, 15. Here the principle of faith and works, that is cooperating with God by offering Him assistance, is established. In Genesis 17, fourteen years later, Abraham being 100 and Sarah 90, he laughs at the prospect of a child through Sarah, vs. 16-17; nevertheless God promises Isaac, v. 19; Ishmael will not be the promised heir, vs. 20-21. In Genesis 18, the promise of a seed through Sarah is confirmed by God, but Sarah laughs, vs. 9-15. In Genesis 21, Isaac is born to Sarah as promised, vs. 1-8.

So now Paul teaches allegorically concerning this Genesis Law teaching for the purpose of showing that the Christian is born of promise realized through faith alone, not faith plus the flesh plus works.

- (1) The historical basis of Paul's Law allegory, vs. 22-23.

“²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman/maidservant [παῖδίσκη, paidiskē n gsf, Hagar] and one by the free woman [ἐλεύθερος, eleutheros adj gsf, Sarah]. ²³But on the one hand, the son by the bondwoman has been born [γεννώω, gennaō v pfpis] according to flesh, and on the other hand the son of the free woman [has been born] through promise.” Ishmael and Isaac were born according to radically different maternal parentage, Hagar the bondwoman/maidservant in contrast with Sarah the freewoman. So Ishmael and Isaac were born by sharply contrasting principles, faith in the human spirit and initiative, the flesh and its works, as against faith alone in divine initiative through the Spirit of God according to sure promise.

- (2) The allegory derived from Paul's historical basis, vs. 24-27.

Doubtless the Gentile Galatians were generally aware of this Old Testament incident, but unlike Jewish Christians they needed greater specificity by means of direct quotations from Isaiah and Genesis.

(a) The typical representation of Hagar, vs. 24-25.

“²⁴This is by allegorical interpretation [ἀλληγορέω, allēgoreō par pphn], for these [women] are two covenants [διαθήκη, diathēkē n nrf]: one is from Mount Sinai bearing [γεννάω, gennaō par pansf] children for slavery [δουλεία, douleia n asf]; she is Hagar. ²⁵Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, corresponding [συστοιχέω, sustoicheō v pais] to the present/now [νῦν, nun adv] Jerusalem, for she is in slavery [δουλεύω, douleuō v pais] with her children.”

Here the Old Mosaic Covenant is set in sharp contrast with the New Covenant; they are not portrayed as complementary. The old Mosaic, bi-lateral covenant is represented by Mount Sinai, a whole administration, which can only reproduce slavery, bondage according to its demands of perfect righteousness (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 2:4; 5:1). Simply put, Moses can only tie us up, but never emancipate!

But further, Hagar and her carnal seed, Ishmael, represent Mount Sinai, which in turn represents the carnal “now” Jerusalem, the ungodly, Christ rejecting, City of David whose children or citizenry are wholly in bondage to the Law. Jesus wept over this captivity to the Law that excluded Himself (Matt. 23:37-38).

(b) The typical representation of Sarah, vs. 26-27.

“²⁶But the Jerusalem above [ἄνω, anō adv] is free; she is our mother [μήτηρ, mētēr n nsf]. ²⁷For it is written, ‘Rejoice [εὐφραίνω, euphraino v apims] barren [στεῖρα, steira adj vsf] woman who does not bear; break forth [ῥήγνυμι, hrēgnumi v aaims] and cry aloud/shout [βοάω, boaō v aaims], you who are not in labor [ὠδίνω, ōdinō par pavsf]; because many are the children of the desolate [ἔρημος, erēmos adj gsf], more than the one who has a husband [ἀνὴρ, anēr n asm].’”

The “Jerusalem above” is not so much a description of a spatial or geographic relationship, as if defining “heaven above” in contrast with “earth below.” Rather, because God’s throne is in His holy heaven, where the design of a holy Jerusalem has originated, so Paul describes the present belief and future hope of the heavenly Jerusalem coming to earth (Zech. 8:1-3; Rev. 21:1-2, 10-27). This is the ultimate hope of the new, everlasting, unilateral covenant (Jer. 31:38-40; 33:7-11; Heb. 13:20). The same contrast is made in Hebrews 12:18-24.

But concerning the present, the children of God, the citizens of this new Messianic Jerusalem that will come to pass, have already inherited freedom under Christ, the King of this New Jerusalem (Rom. 8:21; Rev. 21:3-7, 22-27), not bondage, and participate in a large community, the fellowship of those saved and sanctified by grace. The Christian, on an unholy earth, presently belongs to the maternal Jerusalem which is above (Eph. 1:3; Heb. 12:22), in liberty (Rom. 8:21). But the consummation of the Messianic kingdom is yet to come. However, the

grace of God through promise will triumph over the works and boasted autonomy of man (Isa. 54:1). The work of Jesus Christ guarantees it. And this is a cause for great rejoicing.

(3) The application drawn from Paul's Law allegory, v. 28.

“And you brethren, according to [after the manner of] Isaac [his birth according to pure grace based solely on promise], are children of promise [ἐπαγγελία, epangelia n gsf, through pure grace in Christ].”

(a) The brotherhood of Isaac.

Christians are a “brotherhood” or “brethren” on the basis of one essential principle, that of “promise,” originally channeled through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, then David, and the New Covenant promise of Jeremiah 31:31-37 that was cut in Christ (Luke 22:19-20). Paul uses the term “brethren” ten other times in this epistle, cf. 1:2, 11; 2:4; 3:15; 4:12, 31; 5:11, 13; 6:1, 18. In Hebrews 2:9-11 this brotherhood is defined as being based supremely on what Christ has done. This is exactly what Paul means here when he makes the basis of brotherhood to be “promise” as embodied in Isaac, the child of promise.

(b) The brotherhood of promise.

Christians have become and continue as “children of promise” because their hope of salvation is based solely on what Christ has done and not themselves. Sarah tried to help God along (Gen. 16:2), even as a believer, whereas faith alone resulted in blessing (Heb. 11:11-12). God requires faith alone in His Son's capacity to deal justly and graciously with our sin (Rom. 3:26). In Romans 4:13 we are told, “For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants [seed] that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.” When Abraham “believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6), it meant that what God promised He was sure to accomplish in Abraham yet without Abraham's assistance: “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Gen. 18:14).

When an *unbeliever* places his faith in Jesus Christ, he is to accept the truth that as promised, Christ has fully dealt with his sin without the contribution of any man or himself. When a *believer* walks by faith alone in Christ, he does not revert to giving God a little help, or offer additional reasons for accepting Him. He trusts that “He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6). Imagine how foolish it would be for Sarah to attempt to revert to her carnal plan after Isaac had been born! “So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy” (Rom. 9:16). Self effort is renounced; Christ alone is embraced.

- (c) By way of application, Paul divides this world into two categories: those who trust in human flesh, human sovereignty, human autonomy for salvation; those who trust in Divine promises, Divine sovereign grace. Where is your faith placed? In the Savior alone, or the Savior and self? Jesus Christ or mankind, the work of justice and grace on the cross, the saving work of Christ alone, or human endeavor? The path of trust in man leads to bondage under man. The path of faith in Christ leads to true liberty, that is total emancipation under Christ, 5:1.

- c. The believer is born of promise that conquers the flesh, vs. 29-31.

What is really going on when a true believer backslides? Again we assume former front sliding. If we correctly understand the makeup of a Christian, then we will recognize that backsliding involves conflict, a battle, which for the present is being lost. Before conversion we were an old man with old clothes covering an old body, an old tenant in an old residence (the body), an old rider of an old horse (the body). But following conversion we became a new man with new clothing that covers an old body, a new tenant in an old residence, a new rider on an old horse. The result was that the old body did not like the new ways of the new man, and consequently opposed the new directions; the old body was uncomfortable with the new clean clothing, and as a result attempted to soil and then replace it; the old house did not like the new tenant and sought to offend and then expel him; the old horse did not like the commands of his new master, and as a result attempted to turn from the new route and eventually throw him off!

So Paul understands that the legal carnality of many of the Galatians is a result of their lack of understanding about this conflict. So he takes his Old Testament illustration a step further concerning Ishmael who was born of the flesh and human initiative, and Isaac who was born of promise and grace through faith alone, cf. vs. 22-27. Not only were these sons born of opposite principles, but they were by nature in constant, inevitable conflict. Before a doctor can successfully treat a disease, he must precisely identify the problem, especially the source and nature of the viral infection, the antigens or toxins, before he can prescribe the necessary and conquering antibodies or antibiotics. So here Paul opens our eyes to the source of our ongoing problem.

- (1) The conflict of Ishmael with Isaac, v. 29.

“But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted [διώκω, diōkō v iais] him [who was born] according to the Spirit, so also it is now[vōv, nun adv].” This tension between flesh and spirit is definitively stated in 5:17, and also dealt with in depth in Romans 7:1-25, especially with regard to conflict which the Law arouses in Christians who “know the Law” (Rom. 7:1).

- (a) Conflict in the past.

While Paul’s concern is with inner conflict between flesh and the Spirit, yet this fundamental struggle is well illustrated between carnal and spiritual individuals in Bible history.

- 1) Cain and Abel (Gen. 4:4, 8).
- 2) Esau and Jacob (Gen. 25:23, 26, 29-34; 27:41; Mal. 1:2-3).
- 3) Saul and David (I Sam. 20:30-31).
- 4) Ishmael and Isaac (Gen. 16:1-16; 21:1-21).
 - a) Personal conflict, Gen. 21:8-9.

Ishmael was destined to be “a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone, and everyone’s hand will be against him” (Gen. 16:12). Jewish tradition suggests that Ishmael, being skilled with the bow and arrow (Gen. 21:20-21), would take aim at Isaac while at the same time declaring it was all done in jesting!²⁹ Doubtless he resented being deprived as heir of the blessing promised to Abraham.

- b) Maternal conflict, Gen. 16:4-5; 21:10.

Isaac, the child of promise, is approximately 3, and Ishmael, the child of the energy of the flesh, 17. The weaning of Isaac was probably celebrated with festivities; sometimes a sacrifice was offered. Ishmael mocks Isaac as a much younger wimp, perhaps also concerning his knowledge of the promise of heirship given to his younger brother (Gen. 21:9). Sarah, in annoyance, asks of Abraham, “Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman.”

The antagonism between Sarah and Hagar, mirroring that between Isaac and Ishmael, is essentially concerned with the issue of heirship. Hagar believed that Ishmael should be heir to his father’s blessing on the basis of human initiative and *natural birth*. Sarah believed that Isaac should be heir to his father’s blessing based upon divine promise and *supernatural birth*.

- (b) Conflict in the now.

“So it is also now.” So this present world is divided along the same lines as to how a man obtains citizenship in heaven. The world teaches that a spark of goodness in man needs to be fanned, through human initiative, to God-pleasing proportions. This natural seed simply needs to evolve in response to ethical encouragement. The Bible teaches that man, with a pervasive sin nature, must be regenerated and justified by means of sovereign grace. B. B. Warfield puts it this way: “The one antithesis of

²⁹ Louis Ginsberg, *Legends of the Bible*, p. 122.

all the ages is that between the rival formulae: Do this and live, and, Live and do this; Do and be saved, and Be saved and do”³⁰ (John 8:11). Hence there is enmity between these two principles, as between Esau and Isaac (cf. 5:17). What then is to be done when this conflict erupts in the life of the Christian?

(2) The conflict of Ishmael with Isaac in Scripture, v. 30.

“But what does the Scripture [γραφῆ, graphē n nsf] say? ‘Cast out [ἐκβάλλω, ekballō v aaims] the bondwoman/maidservant and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not inherit/be an heir [κληρονομέω, klēronomeō v fais] with the son of the free woman.’” Here Paul moves from diagnosis of the conflict to a prescription that will result in ongoing victory. “Cast out [disenfranchise with intolerance] the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman.” When Sarah saw Ishmael “mocking” Isaac, when she saw the conflict, probably the jealous scorn of the elder for the younger, she asked Abraham to dispense with Ishmael, who although reluctant, was ordered by God to comply because, “through Isaac your descendants will be named” (Gen. 21:12). In other words, the son of promise is not to tolerate the challenge of the son of the flesh! “Promise” and “flesh” are incompatible, mutually exclusive; they cannot peaceably cohabit!

Hence, “cast out the flesh (Ishmael) and its administration (Hagar).” That is, “Snap out of it! Wake up to your course that is headed for certain disaster. Look at where you are heading, the miserable bondage of it!” But why? Because, Ishmael, representing the works of the Law, is headed for exclusion;³¹ so “the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption” (6:8a), and not enter into the inheritance of promise. Rather, “let the free woman (Sarah) and her son of promise (Isaac) have the dominion.” Why? Because, “the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life” (6:8b). In other words, when backsliding develops due to weakness in spiritual conflict, as evident by yielding to carnality, focus on two truths. First, according to vs. 29-30, consider your destiny if you keep going in this carnal direction. Second, according to v. 30, consider your status in the sight of God. Reaffirm your *sole* allegiance with “the son of the free woman.” Reconsecrate yourself by drawing close to Christ through various means of grace. Ratify your faith commitment to Christ alone around the Lord’s table. Focus anew on the singular glory of the grace of God that encourages and welcomes the prodigal Christian back into his Father’s house.

³⁰ B. B. Warfield, *Faith and Life*, p. 324.

³¹ J. Lightfoot writes: “The Law and the Gospel cannot co-exist; the Law must disappear before the Gospel. It is scarcely possible to estimate the strength of conviction and depth of prophetic insight which this declaration implies.” *Galatians*, p. 184.

(3) The Christian's identification with the free woman, v. 31.

“So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.” Here Paul addresses every authentic Christian in Galatia; let him come to a fresh realization of his real status in Christ. You are by nature according to your birth, so that those born of Sarah, of Isaac, of Christ, are children of the “free woman.” In other words, such origination, such existence is one of pure grace and not human ingenuity. Therefore don't “be subject again to a yoke of slavery,” 5:1. Our economy is “the Jerusalem above,” v. 26, the holy kingdom of Messiah, and his righteousness.

If as an Australian in America, I exhorted you here to drive on the left hand side of the road, the result would be conflict and disaster; if I suggested voting in federal elections should be mandatory in America because it is so in Australia, you would rightly respond, “But in America we are under a different law, the Constitution, the American Code;” that foreign law of yours does not apply, even though it comes from a common source, England. So we are as Christians, free *under* the reign of Christ alone; free *under* His righteousness, free *under* His moral law, free *under* sovereign grace and truth, free *under* the law of the gospel, free *under* the sermon on the mount, free *under* His earthly agency which is the church, free *under* the dominion of the Holy Spirit, free *under* His New Covenant administration.

But best of all, we are free from the tyranny of human performance, the religion of Ishmael, and free under grace that both Abraham and Sarah formerly laughed at; it seemed impossible humanly speaking; but it proved to be true, that God really does, freely, through faith alone, “justify the ungodly” (Rom. 4:5; cf. 3:24). The only way you can walk in such truth is freely, under Christ, who loved you and gave himself for you. There is no place for ambivalence with Moses and Christ and a consequent bigamous relationship. There is no place for being double-minded (double-souled) Jas. 1:8. There is no place for straddling two worlds, God and mammon! The Christian has only one Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, and His reign is the only administration that has his allegiance.

