



Reflections on Galatians

Don Merritt

Introduction

I'm really not sure what to call this; is it a book, a Bible study, a devotional, a small group study, a commentary? To be honest, it isn't quite any of those things, yet it has aspects of all three. It's hardly long enough to be a book; it isn't complete enough to be a commentary. It's not quite a devotional, but it could be used for devotions. It's not quite a Bible study, but it could easily be used for that, too. If you're creative, it could also be used to teach a class, but it isn't in a proper format to be curriculum.

One thing differs here from the first two collections I have released. For this collection, I have not included discussion questions, but anyone could make up their own for use in a discussion or class setting.

This little "document" is freely given to you. By all means, feel free to share it with others for free. Please do not use any of this for commercial purposes! Make use of whatever helps you grow in your relationship with our Lord and anything here that isn't helpful, by all means set it aside. Helping other believers in their walk with Christ is my only purpose here!

All blessings to you in Christ!

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All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version

1 Who do we Serve?

Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— and all the brothers and sisters with me,

To the churches in Galatia:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!

Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Galatians 1:1-10

This is how Paul begins his letter to the Galatian churches, and I don't know about you, but I find it quite interesting. Notice how short his introduction is with its lack of a thanksgiving prayer and many of the usual formalities. In this letter, Paul is coming straight to the point, and he isn't amused by what he has heard. It would seem that there are people in Galatia who are teaching a different gospel than Paul taught, a gospel that adds something to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As we shall see, they have added a requirement that the Gentile Galatians must first become circumcised Jews. Aside from the obvious problems that this would cause, adding circumcision to the gospel has a greater theological implication; one that remains with us to this day, for circumcision is not only a requirement of the Jewish Law, it is the sign of God's covenant with Abraham, a covenant which Paul insists time and time again to have already been fulfilled in Christ.

Beginning in verse 6, Paul expresses his "astonishment" that the Galatians are listening to those who would "pervert" the Gospel, and tells them that such a gospel is "really no gospel at all." Strong words. Then he tells them that even if Paul himself or an angel gave them a different gospel than the one he originally preached, they should not listen. His thought is that any such person should be "eternally condemned" and says so not once, but twice. Paul's meaning?

Nobody can mess with the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

He winds up this section by pointing out that he isn't interested in pleasing people here, for if he wanted to please men, he wouldn't be a servant of Christ. Doesn't that remind you of the time that the disciples asked Jesus why more people didn't respond to His message, and Jesus answered by saying that they prefer "the praise of men"?

You may disagree with me, but to me, this is a really important point for us to grasp. We may do certain things to accommodate our culture in the area of style or presentation so that we might be understood more easily by those who need to hear, but under no circumstance may we ever compromise on the message of the gospel or the truth of Scripture. If there are some who don't like us for that, I'm really sorry, but that's too bad, for I serve Jesus Christ, not men. How about you?

2 Paul Shares His Story

Today's Text: Galatians 1:11-24

Here in the second part of Galatians 1, Paul shares his personal story, and in doing so, I see a twofold purpose. First, he wants to make it clear to the Galatians that he is a reliable teacher; that he knows what he is talking about. Second, he is weaving his personal testimony into the letter as a means of adding persuasive impact to his point about the false teaching they have embraced, so that they might be edified and lifted up in their Christian walk, and I hope you will pay special attention to that as his story continues into the next chapter.

Notice how he begins his testimony by pointing out that the Gospel he preached to them was not made up by any man, but that it was revealed directly to him by none other than Jesus Christ Himself. He goes on to remind them of the fact that he was a Jew among Jews, a Pharisee further advanced than his age would normally allow, and that he wanted nothing more than to advance the traditions of Judaism. He sought to do this by persecuting most fervently the church, and was well-known for his efforts as he moved beyond Judea in pursuit of Christians to torment. Then, he recounts his experiences after his encounter with Christ on that famous road trip.

Finally, he sets the stage for his discussion of the interaction between Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ in the next chapter by reminding them of how everyone celebrated his conversion and praised God for it.

Here's what I'd like for all of us to consider: We all have a story, even though it probably isn't a well-known one. How can we help others by sharing our story with them? You know, there isn't anything quite as potent as a personal testimony, an experience, a personal recollection, when helping someone else with their walk. Often, just the fact that you have encountered a similar challenge and gotten through it will inspire someone to keep trying. You might be talking with a person who is struggling to understand, and when you share your experience at a similar stage in your growth it will really resonate with them.

If you are speaking with a non-Christian who is searching for truth, you will most likely have something to share about your experience in a similar position. Understand that when we share our story, we are not the "hero" of the story; Jesus is. Frank admission of how far we might have once strayed is powerful, and you will note that Paul didn't hesitate to share this.

Can you see how honestly sharing from our hearts about our own experiences with others can help their journey? Good. Can you see how this differs from making speeches or some kind of canned presentation? Can you see how much more powerful this is?

So, who will we share with today?

3 Paul's Story Continues

Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain. Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

Galatians 2:1-5

And so Paul continues with his story, a story of his own Christian experience that he is sharing with the Galatians so that they will understand that those who were among them at the time teaching that a Gentile must become a Jew and be circumcised, before they can receive Christ, were wrong. In this little chunk of his text, Paul recounts his visit to Jerusalem to consult with the other Apostles on this very subject. Quite clearly, they all understood that the only way to salvation, for either Jew or Gentile, was faith in Jesus Christ. Circumcision was useless in matters pertaining to salvation, and was not to be taught. There is an even larger principle in play here, and that is that we cannot add anything to the gospel. Thus, when people today want to add to the gospel, whatever they are pushing is invalid. Salvation is by faith alone.

As for those who were held in high esteem—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism—they added nothing to my message. On the contrary, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised. For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles. James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.

Galatians 2:6-10

This is a really interesting little paragraph. Paul is really driving home the point that the leaders in Jerusalem were having no part in this business of requiring Gentiles to become Jews to receive Christ. It is conjecture on my part, for the text doesn't actually say it, but it appears to me that the false teachers among the Galatians must have been claiming that they had been sent from Jerusalem to teach "correctly." This would certainly explain why Paul opened his letter without the usual formalities, and went directly to a condemnation of the false teachers.

This also brings up another interesting point for us to ponder. When is it OK for us to condemn someone? You may recall that in our study of Peter's letters, we saw that he did not advocate condemnation being heaped upon those who opposed the truth...

Recall that Peter was talking about those who denied the truth, and brought ridiculous accusations and ridicule against the truth. They were non-believers. Paul is dealing with false teachers who were perverting the Gospel of Jesus Christ: See the difference? Those who scoff

at the gospel are different from those who pervert it, for a scoffer is easy to recognize, and one can simply consider the source and disregard their rantings. A false teacher, on the other hand can cause tremendous damage not only to an individual believer, but the entire Body of Christ. You might consider our recent three-part series called "Based on a True Story" in which false teachings not only caused divisions, but turned brothers against one another. These guys are supposed to be followers of Christ, the scoffing unbeliever just doesn't understand... yet. That is a huge difference!

Finally, note also that Paul didn't just open fire at the false teachers; he went all the way to Jerusalem, not by catching a quick flight, to make absolutely certain of his position before condemning anyone. If Paul had to be certain, I would suggest that might go double for you and I, and I'm confident that you'd agree,

4 Paul and Peter

When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

Galatians 2:11-13

Oh, my! What a text, quite unique in the New Testament, for this one text gives us a view into the interaction among the Apostles, a view that shows one apostle (Paul) bringing another Apostle (Peter) up short in front of witnesses. This may dispel the notions of some that everything in the early church was wonderful and harmonious, it wasn't, and it also shows us a much deeper view that I would call "covenant priorities."

Imagine Peter in harmony with and among the Gentiles, and then drawing away from them when a high-level group of Jewish Christians come from Jerusalem. Remember that under the Law of Moses, Jews did not eat with Gentiles, so in front of these Jewish brothers, Peter now treats Gentile brothers as mere Gentiles with all of the disdain of the Law, with the result that the New Covenant is not given priority over the Old... even Barnabas was "led astray."

When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

Galatians 2:14

The confrontation begins; Paul threw down the gauntlet in verse 14. You don't live like a Jew, and then when your Jewish friends come by, you revert to Jewish customs wanting to force Gentiles to follow them too. In the New Covenant, those "customs" are over.

"We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

Galatians 2:15-16

Consider this statement of Paul's for a moment: He is making the assertion that the New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant. Even a Jew must be justified by faith in Christ, for the Old Covenant *could never bring about forgiveness of sins*. Under the old system, being born a Jew meant that you had been born as one of God's chosen... the dirty nasty Gentiles were the sinners, the Jew was God's own, but the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ had changed the entire dynamic of relations between Man and God.

“But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners; doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.

Galatians 2:17-18

Anticipating an obvious question, Paul provides the answer. For most of us, this question and answer might be a bit of a puzzle, so let's look more closely. When Paul said "...we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners..." he means that if a Jew goes from God's chosen to being just another saved sinner by their faith in Christ. This whole concept of the New vs. the Old Covenant was earth shattering for the Jewish psyche of the time. The very idea of equality with Gentile dogs was unthinkable for them; it ran against everything they had ever been taught or believed. Even now, it surprises not only Jews, but also many Christians, who still seek to hold onto certain aspects of the Law of Moses. Paul, being the most educated of the Apostles was able to grasp the one fact that most others, then and now miss... There is no concept of eternal life in the Old Covenant. It isn't mentioned, it isn't promised. Forgiveness and justification are also not present, for the Law could only promise atonement; never forgiveness or justification. These require that sin be entirely "taken away" and atonement neither does that, nor does it promise that. Therefore, Paul makes his answer: *If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.* In other words, if he were to rebuild the Old Covenant Law, after having torn it down in favor of New Covenant justification, he would be a serious lawbreaker indeed!

“For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!

Galatians 2:19-21

And with these memorable and often quoted words, Paul closes his case... and his story. Christ's death on the cross was the fulfillment of the Law, and we also, by our faith in Christ died with Him on the cross. We are dead to sin, dead to the Law and alive in Christ, by the power of His resurrection from the dead. Never again will we place our trust in our ability to follow the law or the old traditions, for if they could save anybody, then Jesus died for nothing. We know from having read and studied so recently Peter's letters, that this made an impression on him. In chapter 3, we will see how Paul uses this story to teach the Galatians.

5 Paul Applies his Story

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain? So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

Galatians 3:1-6

This is the beginning of Paul's explanation of the story he related in chapter 2. Notice his tone; he still isn't happy with the Galatians! I must admit that I feel his frustration! No, I'm not quite old enough to have met those first century Galatians, but I have met hundreds of Christians who make the same kinds of mistakes today, in fact, a great many do because they adhere to theological systems that make a very similar error, which involves the mixing of the two covenants. To go slightly academic on you, Paul is teaching what is referred to as the Apostolic Doctrine of Two Covenants. It means that the Old Covenant law of Moses is over; it will never again come back... that is why Jesus, in His only prophetic passage (prophetic in form and structure) told of how Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed. It was, and there hasn't been Old Covenant worship since then. Yes, dear reader, this is a big deal!

Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Galatians 3:7-9

In 3:1-6, Paul demonstrated that the Law of Moses was over. Now, he is taking on the Abrahamic Covenant. When God made His covenant with Abraham, He established a people. These were His chosen people, the Hebrews, also known as the Israelites. When God made His covenant with Moses, he established Israel as a Nation and gave it Law. Not only is the Law gone, but now, in Christ, God has a *new people*. The Hebrews were the physical descendants of Abraham. This is how you became one of God's chosen; it was by birth. Simple, right? The Gentiles had different parentage; they would never be Hebrews, they would never be God's chosen, except by a process that took four generations to complete. Jesus changed all that. Now, anybody could become God's chosen by faith in Jesus Christ... see it in the text? *Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham.* The old way was over, for just as God promised to Abraham, now all Nations would be blessed. Should I be really direct? Normally I try to be diplomatic, but what the heck, Paul is being really direct...

So Christians, stop telling people that God's plan is to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem so that the Law can be put back in force before Jesus can return; that stuff is OVER! Jews, like Gentiles, are saved by faith in Christ: Period.

OK, cool and calm, back to a state of decorum...

For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because "the righteous will live by faith." The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, "The person who does these things will live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole." He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

Galatians 3:10-14

As you can see, Paul is still making the point that the Old Covenant is over. We live by grace, and we will continue to live by grace right up to the day that Jesus returns. You see, dear reader, this is only complicated when someone tries to force it into a theology that doesn't work. If we simply go with Paul's simple and clear teaching, there is little to be confused about. Again, remember why he is writing to the Galatian churches; they had listened to false teaching... If we also listen to false teaching, this stuff will confuse us too.

OK, OK, I know what you want to say: "What Paul really meant to say was...." or "Well, this is really a very difficult passage because we know that..."

No, dear reader, this is a very simple passage because Paul did a great job of speaking the truth clearly and unambiguously.

6 An Everyday Example

Brothers and sisters, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ. What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

Galatians 3:15-18

Paul continues his discussion of covenants; I'm sure that you will recall that misunderstanding covenants was at the heart of the issue Paul is writing this letter to correct.

Paul's "everyday" example is that of a covenant. When two or more parties enter into a covenant, you can't just ignore it or make unilateral changes, once it is in effect. Now, he zeros in on the Abrahamic Covenant, pointing out that the parties are God and Abraham and Abraham's "seed." What was the promise? There were two actually, the land promise and the promise of descendants, through whom the entire world would be blessed, and that was fulfilled in Christ. It is not to be fulfilled by Israel, and it is not affected by the Law...

Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one.

Galatians 3:19-20

So, the Law was given because of the transgressions of the people; easy enough. Now Paul throws us a curve... this mediator business. The Law came through angels, OK, that isn't hard to follow, angels are the messengers of God. A mediator is a go-between; who was the go-between in the Law? A priest is a mediator between Man and God, and the Law established a priesthood, the Levites. The Levitical priesthood, with its system of sacrifices and atonement served as the mediators of the Old Covenant (Law).

SIDEBAR: OK dear reader, this is a little bit tricky; hang with me and you'll see in a minute.

OK, *A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one.* That's the curve! Paul isn't referring to the Law, he's referring to God's Covenant with Abraham; the Abrahamic Covenant and the Law of Moses are *two different covenants*. The context for this passage is set in 3:15-16, and it's Abraham, not Moses under discussion. Thus, in verse 20 just repeated, Paul is making reference to Abraham's covenant, and pointing out there aren't multiple parties because God is one. This refers back to Jesus being the promise, and Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant, having brought a better sacrifice, His own blood as opposed to the blood of animals, and is thus the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant *and* the Law of Moses. (see Hebrews 4-8) Now, if you see that, then you can also see that this is simple! Jesus is the fulfillment of both covenants by having established the New Covenant, thus we go back to

Paul's original purpose for this letter: No, you cannot force someone to be circumcised a Jew before they can have faith in Christ. The old ways are over and done with!

Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

Galatians 3:21-22

Now, a little 'housecleaning.' Keep in mind that when he says "promises of God" Paul is talking about the promises God gave to Abraham. Look at what Paul says about this: The Law is not in opposition to God's earlier promises because the Law cannot bring about either life or righteousness. Those things, promised through Abraham's "seed" came only through Christ, and God's promise was kept by Christ, and since the Father and the Son are one, the promise was kept by God.

Some people might be confused at this point and asking "What about the promises God gave to Moses?" God's promises to Moses were fairly simple: If you keep the Law, you will have long life, many children, good crops and you'll live in the Land God gave to Abraham. If you break the Law, you will lose all of that and be cursed. Obviously, God kept His end of the deal. Israel on the other hand, struggled, but even though their compliance record wasn't the best, they are blessed in Christ also, for they can have faith in Him just as the Gentiles can.

We've reached the end of this passage. If you've followed it, pat yourself on the back; this is graduate level theology. If you haven't quite gotten it, don't worry! Paul isn't done just yet, and I'm quite certain that you will have it completely before we are finished; this stuff is much easier to grasp than most people think it is!

7 "Abraham's Seed"

Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

Galatians 3:22-25

Having stated his case, Paul is now moving to the climax of his letter in this section that begins with 3:22 and continues through 4:7. You'll see his tone change from frustration to concern as we go, but first, you'll see the grandeur of what it means to be in Christ.

In these three verses; note that Paul is giving an explanation of the role that the Law played as a "guardian." That's an interesting way to explain it, don't you think? A "guardian" isn't a permanent arrangement, for when the 'child' is grown, he or she moves into a new time in their lives. When the time came, God sent Jesus to His people, and Jesus changed everything; their older "arrangement" was ended and a new one began in the form of a new covenant.

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:26-29

Look at the result of this New Covenant! Wow, how many old traditionalist teachings can you slay in one little passage!!

Oh, sorry about that last bit...

Everything is new in Christ! All of us are now children of God, not just the physical relations of Abraham. Now that we have been baptized into Christ, we have been clothed with Christ. We have been baptized into Christ, haven't we...? There is neither Jew nor Gentile... for the former "arrangements" that created the separation is gone. There is neither slave nor free, for that was also a huge divider of people; we are now one no matter what our station in earthly life might be. Ready for this next one? Are you sure about that...?

There is now no male and female, and don't waste a moment of your time listening to the old-fashioned culture taught as though it was from the Bible, for it is not from the Bible. In God's eyes, there is no particular distinction between the sexes, because we are one in Christ. "If you belong to Christ" comes next and is a conditional statement. That is where the new dividing line is; some are "in Christ" and some are not. That's why we are called to reach out to those who are not, so that they can receive these awesome blessings... and reaching out is an act of amazing love. If we belong to Christ, then we are Abraham's seed for the purpose of his Covenant promises.

Funny isn't it, that some who belong to Christ still want to run back to the Law?

Let's see where Paul takes it from here next time...

8 Sonship!

What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

Galatians 4:1-7

Sonship! I'm not really sure that is a proper English word, spell check doesn't like it, that's for sure, but I must admit that it works for Paul's message to the Galatians. These seven verses sum up his argument in a way that is so simple and so uncomplicated that anyone who gets lost in discussions of covenants and laws and patriarchs can't miss. For once, I really like the "new" NIV rendering; man, they nailed it!

Check out Paul's use of metaphors here; a son who is destined to inherit the entire estate of his fathers. For us in the US, leave it at that, but those of you in the UK have an advantage, because you can think in terms of the 'nobility.' An heir not only to a great estate and great wealth, but heir to a great title, yet the son is not of age. His life is privileged, yes, but he must follow the orders of everyone from his parents, to the "upper servants." In a way, he is like a slave, for even though he holds within himself the potential of command and power, he is still subject to those around him, and his father isn't putting up with any nonsense. Yes, I've read too much British literature over the years, but that's for another time...

Before Jesus came, "we" lived according to the "elemental spiritual forces of this world," sin, death, form, ritual, lusts and law that produces condemnation. Then Jesus came. By the time He had completed His work on this earth, everything had changed. We had been redeemed from "slavery" to those elemental forces and were set free, as though an earthly heir had reached the age of majority. Now, we have achieved "sonship" as God's children, co-heirs with the Son to everything. We are the children of God, and as such we have inherited eternal life and co-dominion with Christ, and all of this is made possible by the fact that the old ways are now gone for good. Yes, we are used to thinking about this in terms of our sins and guilt, but there is another dimension to it that Paul has been addressing for three chapters now that we, like some of the Galatians, often forget or overlook. The very Law is also gone, for it has been made obsolete and useless, its time has passed.

Now, as you think about these things, it would be very easy to think of them in Jewish terms, for they were God's chosen ones under the Law, but if you are thinking in Jewish terms, you've missed something profoundly important. Paul isn't writing to Jews in this letter, he is writing to the Galatians, and they were never Jewish, they were Gentiles. Think about that for a while; consider the theological ramifications of that fact... There is no Jew, there is no Gentile...

That can only be true if the Law was buried with Christ in death's tomb.

9 Paul's Loving Concern

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

Galatians 4:8-11

The section we'll be looking at here is a section or transition that reflects Paul's concern for the Galatian churches. Paul is writing this letter to correct an error encouraged in Galatia by those who sought to require them to first come under Jewish law before they could become followers of Jesus Christ, and so after having demonstrated that Jewish law is no longer in force and effect, Paul comes down to the root of the problem; Do you, after having been set free, desire to return to bondage? I don't know about you, but there have been times in my life where that was the central question for me!

You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! Note Paul's tone... and that's all I'm going to say about this for now...

I plead with you, brothers and sisters, become like me, for I became like you. You did me no wrong. As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you, and even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. Where, then, is your blessing of me now? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?

Galatians 4:12-16

In recounting their earlier relationship, Paul is reminding them of their experiences together, and of all that they had in common. You might also notice that he mentioned that he became like them and shared the Gospel with them. Isn't it ironic that they have now become like Paul used to be, Jewish in their outlook. It would seem that this irony wasn't lost on Paul who is writing to bring them back to where they were before he left them.

Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may have zeal for them. It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always, not just when I am with you. My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!

Galatians 4:17-20

So far in this letter, Paul has spoken sharply to its recipients; he wasn't pleased to hear what they've been up to. In these verses, however you see that he is really speaking to them like a father who is correcting a naughty child. The message is clear, but the motivation for the correction is pure love. Paul isn't upset because they have listened to another teacher, Paul is

upset because the other teacher has led the people to a place where they will be harmed, and Paul is having a tough time with that thought. It isn't difficult to feel his emotions at being separated from those who need his guidance now.

That brings something to mind. Have you ever been chided by someone for not agreeing with them on some point? Did they have Paul's motivation, or were they just insisting that everybody do things their way? If you answered that question, I'm willing to bet that you've been "corrected" in both ways, right? There's a big difference between the two, isn't there?

There is a time and place to correct a fellow Christian who has taken the wrong turn. The question is, why do we seek to correct them, and how do we go about doing it?

Yes, there is a lesson for us in this text, isn't there? Oh, and it really isn't in speculating about what Paul's illness was, is it?

10 Paul Goes Radical

Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise.

These things are being taken figuratively: The women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written:

*“Be glad, barren woman,
you who never bore a child;
shout for joy and cry aloud,
you who were never in labor;
because more are the children of the desolate woman
than of her who has a husband.”*

Galatians 4:21-27

It's funny, every time I read this I'm surprised; even though I know what's coming. This was radical in Paul's day, and for some reason it's still radical in our day. It flies in the face of the teaching of many Christians concerning Israel, and yet there it is...

The really radical part begins with verse 24: "These things are taken figuratively" Well now my literalist friends, how does that strike you? Yeah, I know, "Well what he *meant* to say was..." Then, "The women represent two covenants..." Those who won't listen to the teaching about two covenants, what did Paul really *mean to say*? Sorry, I don't mean to be unkind, but there it is, and yes, the covenant thing really is a big deal, and I'm sorry Mr. Calvin missed it. In his analysis, taken under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul is stating quite clearly that Hagar and Ishmael represent the Old Covenant (the Law of Moses) and that Sarah and Isaac represent the New Covenant.. But wait, there's more...!

Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. But what does Scripture say? “Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman’s son.” Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

Galatians 4:28-31

We are children of the promise as Isaac was the son of promise. This is the promise that God made to Abraham, the promise that his descendants would be more numerous than the stars in the heavens or the grains of sand on the shore, and that all of the nations of the earth would be blessed through them. Earlier in this letter, Paul indicated that Jesus was that descendant, the seed. Here, through Christ, Paul is telling us that we carry this forward as descendants of

Abraham not according to the flesh, but according to the promise of God. Yes, just as Isaac was persecuted by Ishmael, so the church was persecuted by the Jews in Paul's day, but as Hagar and Ishmael were driven out by Abraham, so now those who persecuted the church would be driven out, for they would *not* inherit the promise.

Honestly, I'm not sure how much clearer it could be, and there is still more to come in the next chapter...

11 Freedom in Christ

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

Galatians 5:1-6

Paul continues into the fifth chapter making his case for two distinct covenants. He opens with the statement that Christ has set us free and then moves into an exhortation for us to remain free in Christ, and never to go back again to slavery under the Law. He states it so very clearly in verse 2: "mark my words..." Entering into the Law will do no good, carrying the sign of an already fulfilled covenant will do no good. Stronger still, he tells us that if we seek to reenter the Law, we will be "alienated from Christ" and "fallen away from grace." Quite frankly, it seems incomprehensible to me that anyone can read these words and be confused about their meaning.

In the final line, he comes to the crux: *The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*

You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion, whoever that may be, will have to pay the penalty. Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

Galatians 5:7-12

The Galatians had gotten off to a good start, but somewhere along the path, somebody "cut in" to divert them to a different path; this kind of teaching is not from God. Paul's reference to yeast goes back to the Old Testament imagery of yeast as sin, thus a little sin makes its way through the entire group. Then, Paul seems to be saying that he is confident that the Galatians will not listen to them anymore, yet he still isn't quite finished with his rant...

He points out that these false teachers will pay the price for their actions, and lest anyone should think that Paul was behind these teachings, he reminds them that if he were teaching circumcision, the Jewish authorities wouldn't still be persecuting him. Finally, he makes one more statement. It seems to me that Paul has tried several methods to make his case against the teaching of first becoming a Jew, and then and only then receiving Christ. He has chided,

reasoned, encouraged and exhorted. In case anyone hadn't gotten the point yet he has one more thing to say, this time of a rather personal nature!

You might ask how is it that Paul is so passionate about this issue. Why did he go to such lengths and give the Galatians such a chewing out?

You're free to disagree with me of course, but I think that the answer is really simple. When someone adds to, or subtracts from the Gospel, that person is perverting the Gospel. Since the Gospel is the "power of God to salvation," this kind of perversion undermines the very eternal purpose of God. As a consequence, it is not merely a different interpretation or a differing opinion; it is rebellion against God all over again. Its source, as Paul has clearly stated, is not God. With that in mind, let's ask ourselves what the source might be, if it isn't God. Could it be a simple misunderstanding, or would it really come from a more sinister origin?

I'll let you be the judge of that one, but I would add one more question: Who stands to gain by perverting the "power of God to salvation"?

12 Love is the Answer

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

Galatians 5:13-15

At this point in the letter, we see a more conventional Paul than we have thus far. He points out, as if summing up the previous discussion that our calling as followers of Jesus Christ is a calling of freedom, but there is a warning. When Paul says "the flesh" in his writings, he is talking about a life that is centered around the needs of the body, things like food, possessions, luxuries, desires, lusts and self-centered wants. He is not talking about the human body itself, the human body is fearfully and wonderfully made in God's image, it is not in and of itself evil or bad.

If we should live our lives as others do, simply filling our days by attending to selfish desires and physical sensations, we are not living in freedom despite what many would suggest. Freedom in Christ means that we can move far beyond such an empty and shallow existence so that we can do something meaningful and eternally significant, which is to serve one another in love.

Again, he refers to the Law, but this time he does so in the positive, reminding his readers that the entire Law is fulfilled in one command, to love our neighbor as ourselves. Thus, the requirements of the Law can actually be kept without its condemnation entering into our lives: Love is the answer.

On the other hand, if we fight and squabble amongst ourselves, we will all be devoured.

I am always struck by the fact that for so long we have taken the whole "love" angle as a sort of academic, theoretical, abstract concept, rather than simply putting it into practice. What is so hard to understand here; 'love' is simplicity itself! Yet, at the same time that we have complicated "love your neighbor," we have spent the greater portion of our time pointing fingers of condemnation at one another. To what purpose, I'd like to know! Has anyone's life been made better? Has anyone received blessing and reward for their efforts? Not according to Paul!

Love your neighbor as yourself; serve one another in love. Everybody benefits, the Kingdom is built up, and we can live free of chains. I don't know about you, but that's the path I'm choosing!

13 Flesh, Life and Spirit

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Galatians 5:16-18

Paul is taking another swing at the Law, but then that's the whole point of his letter. He does so here in an interesting way. He points out something so fundamentally obvious to even a brand new Christian that it should be impossible to argue with.

Living by the flesh is in conflict with living by the Spirit.

Anybody surprised by this revelation? I didn't think so. Some time back, I called living by the Spirit "counter-intuitive" and so it is.

I come from a doctrinal background that has traditionally relegated the Holy Spirit to theoretical status. "The Holy Spirit speaks to us in God's Word" is the policy. Of course, I would never deny that the Holy Spirit speaks to us through the Word, after all, the Word is the mind of the Spirit, as they say. But is that it? Doesn't the Spirit lead us in other ways too? I'm thinking that it does, since Paul just said so. Oh, wait, what's that? That's the Word that's saying that?

OK, maybe you got me on that point, but... when Paul wrote that, he couldn't possibly have intended it to be taken that way, since there was no New Testament at that time. Did something change?

Yes, dear reader, these are the words that begin the debate... My doctrinal background, the one that relegated following the Spirit's leading to an academic exercise ended up debating itself to death, and split up over the style of music more than a hundred years ago; can you imagine anything so stupid? I highly doubt that the Spirit was leading anybody to that end, either in or out of the Word!

You might well know some other past errors that you could bring up here. What I think is important for us to understand is that we can overcome all this foolishness fairly easily. First, love your neighbor as yourself. Second, live by the Spirit, follow His leading, yearn for His presence and ask Him to help you discern. He will not let you down!

14 Rebellion

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:19-21

Paul has been telling his readers about this whole concept of life in the flesh as contrasted with life in the Spirit, and as we saw yesterday, life in the flesh is what Paul says to refer to a life that is centered on the physical needs and impulses of the body, of the physical. Here, he gives us a list of things that would be a part of this kind of living. It is not an exhaustive list. We know that because he adds "and the like" after it. Thus this is a listing of the *kinds of things* that show what he is referring to.

Take a careful look at these things, think about them. Don't think about them in a "legal" sense, look more deeply at them and consider what they tell you about a person who gives these sorts of things a priority in their life. Take a minute or two to reflect...

OK, if you did this little exercise, you must have noticed that these are things that have something in common; they are all self-centered. Did you see that? They are all about ME!

I can do what I want, I can do whatever feels good and I can use or abuse others to do it. Now, let's think some more. More often than not for most of these, a person doing any one of them will not want to admit to just anyone that they did it... at least at first, for they feel a sense of shame. This may change over time for some, but even so, these aren't the kinds of things most people would want their grandmother to know about. Why? Is it because of the oppression of the capitalist classes or the military-industrial complex? No. It's because deep down, in their heart of hearts, most people know they shouldn't act this way, yet they do it anyway.

Why do they do it anyway, even though they know they shouldn't, and they know that these kinds of behaviors cause no end of trouble? It's simple really, because they want to be like the Most High God, knowing both good and evil. Yes, that sounds familiar, it's the lie the serpent told Eve way back in the Garden of Eden; it is the original sin. Of course the serpent had done the same thing, for before Eden, Lucifer, the most powerful, brilliant and beautiful of all the angels decided one day that he wanted to be like the Most High God. That, dear reader, is the basic and primary impulse of rebellion against God Himself, it is the Fall of Man all over again, and it is why Paul says that "those who live like that will not inherit the kingdom of God."

15 Redeemed

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Galatians 5:22-26

Earlier we saw rebellion: The results of living by the flesh and its desires. Now we see redeemed: The fruit the Spirit. Earlier we saw that all of the actions that people engage in that result from this life by the "flesh" are acts that are self-centered and in rebellion against God. Now we see the opposite; the results of a life lived for God in humble service to His purpose.

Living our lives in relationship with Jesus are not lives lived in a legalistic quagmire of "do's and don'ts." It isn't a life of "obligation" either holy or otherwise; it is a life of victorious freedom! It is a life of purpose, a purpose greater than any one of us... the greatest purpose in the entire universe, for it is the very Eternal Purpose of God Himself. No, it isn't the kind of a purpose that will make you a big shot who will be remembered in the annals of human history. It isn't the kind of purpose that will have streets named after you all over the country. No, it is a purpose that will take you back to the Garden of Eden with a chance to do it all over again, only this time you'll get it right.

OK, fine, maybe you're wondering what the heck I mean by that!

You know the story: God created Adam and Eve for fellowship with Him. They had direct access to God, they spoke with Him and walked through the garden, so we would say there was relationship between Man and God. God also gave them some things to do for Him. They tended the garden and had "dominion" over the earth. This "dominion" was a "God" function, kind of like a "mission" to run things as His stewards. Thus we say that God gave them a purpose. Relationship with purpose is fellowship, God's reason for creating humans. You also know that Adam and Eve rebelled against God when they listened to the serpent's lie that eating the forbidden fruit would make them just like God.

Now, through Jesus Christ, this fellowship has been restored. First, he took away the sin problem by His death on the cross. Since sin was out of the way, it became possible to restore relationship between humans and God, and direct access was restored through the indwelling Holy Spirit, so once again we can speak directly with God. Jesus also gave us a purpose when He gave His commission to the church to "make disciples". Relationship and purpose are fellowship, and thus through Christ, God's original purpose for making humanity in the first place is restored. This is what Paul is talking about when he refers to life by the Spirit, and the fruits of that life are what he listed in this text.

Think about how amazing this is! Why wouldn't we be filled with joy and peace and all the rest, when we are restored back to the original state for which we were created? Now, when you reflect on this, it is so much easier to understand why Paul reacted the way he did when he heard what was going on in the Galatian churches.

16 Live by the Spirit

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load. Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor.

Galatians 6:1-6

Love is at the very core of this paragraph. No longer is Paul giving the Galatians "what for." Now, he is telling them more about this life in the Spirit. Notice that he begins addressing what should be done if someone sins; they should be restored *gently*. How this contrasts with the impulse of some to finish the person off with condemnation and abuse! He also mentioned that we should be careful in doing this, lest we too should fall into sin. I think it is interesting that Paul dropped that in where he did. Consider the picture of the one who is helping his brother or sister back into line. I suppose it might be human nature, but how easy it would be to adopt an air of superiority when working with one who had stumbled, when we ourselves might not have fallen into the trap. Maybe that is the kind of temptation Paul had in mind!

The next sentence is a great one, too. "Carry each other's burdens..." sounds to me like the opposite of "not getting involved." Help each other out in any circumstance that arises is Paul's loving message here. Then he follows up with another injunction that if we think we are something we're not, we're self-deceived. It strikes me how important it is to keep in mind who and what we are in Christ, rather than letting ourselves get carried away with our own good deeds, our own righteousness and our own importance. No, we are Christ's humble servants who rejoice in putting the other person ahead of ourselves; we are His disciples who love our brothers and sisters in the Lord. That's it. Any glory this might generate is the sole property of God.

Paul says that we should also test our own actions to ensure that we remain on the right path, that we should avoid making comparisons with others. I think this might be his advice for two reasons. First, so that we avoid the temptation to think we are better than someone else, and second, to avoid our thinking that we are less than someone else. There is no favoritism in Christ! Of course if there is no favoritism in Christ, it would also be correct to say that there is also no free lunch; we can carry our own loads, which I think is to say that we can all serve Him to the best of our abilities.

Finally, Paul has a rather cryptic comment: *Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor.* What an odd thing to say right there! After saying we all should carry our own loads, he throws in "nevertheless" and talks about sharing "all good things" with our instructor if we receive instruction in the word. I guess you might be able to come to more than one opinion about what he is talking about here, but my take is that Paul is reminding the people that the elder who also teaches is to receive "double honor," which is to say that they should be paid. Yes, believe it or not, that is the general view of most scholars on this verse. I have spent almost 20 years as an elder who did the teaching,

sometimes exclusively. I never received a dime, but there was also a ministerial staff that cited this as reason they were paid...

Happily, I'm OK with carrying my own load!

17 God Cannot be Mocked

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Galatians 6:7-10

Paul is moving to the thrill-packed conclusion of his letter, pointing out that God cannot be mocked. In saying this, it is important for us to note that he is speaking in a specific context of flesh vs. Spirit. His major point then, is that we cannot follow Jesus by living a life dedicated to ourselves, our wants, likes, preferences and desires.

I'm, writing this and trying to think of an example of this "mocking" scenario, and the first thing that pops into my head is an example I hesitate to use, not wanting to appear to be too harsh... but consider this one: People who are always late for church. Yes, I've heard the excuses, they forgot to set the alarm... 10 weeks in a row. The wife takes forever to get ready, can't get the kids going that early, blah blah blah! Funny thing: They get the kids to school on time, they get to work on time, but on Sunday it simply isn't possible... and church is later than work or school. Now, let's be candid, these good folks aren't fooling me, so they aren't fooling God either. They just don't care very much about worshiping God; they can do it on their own terms, when they want. This is "flesh" speaking, and if this sounds wrong to you, please reread "Rebellion."

There are plenty of other examples, and you may think this one is cutting too fine a line; maybe you're right! Yet Paul is talking about priorities here, where do our priorities lie? Are they on the things of God, or are they on the things of the earthly life? Yes, I agree that timeliness may be a small matter, but it does reveal our priority systems. How much more serious would it be if these priorities extend into other areas? Something to think about...

In any case, Paul's point is crystal clear, if we are focused on the flesh, things won't always turn out so well. If we are focused on the Spirit, the rewards more than cover any inconvenience we might endure. Therefore, as much as is possible, we should "do good" for others, for this is pleasing in God's sight, because it is an active expression of God's love in our lives.

18 The Closing

See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!

Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. Not even those who are circumcised keep the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh. May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule—to the Israel of God.

From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.

Galatians 6:11-18

The end of the letter, and Paul takes up the pen himself. Up to this point, he has been dictating to a scribe, but now, Paul seeks to remove all doubt about the authorship of this letter. I'm guessing that it has occurred to him that when the letter is read in the Galatian churches, considering the subject matter of the letter, some smart alack is likely to jump up and say that it's a forgery! Paul is having none of that and takes the pen himself, and in his own handwriting finishes off the closing here.

He points out the large letters he uses. Paul can't see very well, as we know. He writes in large letter so he can see his own writing. I can empathize with him! If I am writing a note to myself, I too use big letters. If I write a note to someone else, I don't, and I can't read what I've written, which is really irritating if I'm distracted while writing because I can't tell where to start again!

Notice what Paul has written in his own hand: He has restated the entire argument that he has made in this letter so that nobody can say that he was fooled by a scribe who wrote his own letter and not Paul's dictation. No dummy old Paul! In this section he actually implies that those who were teaching circumcision were cowards, fearing persecution. They think they can avoid persecution by telling other Jews that they are making Jews out the Gentiles, and they don't even keep the Law themselves! After that charge, Paul gets right in their faces with: *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.* No sir, Paul isn't fooling around on this issue...

It might seem that Paul has been about as strident as he can be, and then he cranks it up another few notches. Circumcision means nothing. The only thing that counts for anything in this life is "the new creation" which of course is what we are in Christ. Now he moves to the final greeting... oh wait, there's another shot: *Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule—to the Israel of God.*

Did you catch that last part? "The Israel of God." To whom was he referring? This is not only really irritating for our Premillennial friends, it underscores the message Paul has been trying to

teach the Galatians: The Law is over. The old ways are over. Everything is New. The "Israel of God" is the body of believers that comprise the Church.

This letter began without the usual greetings and prayer of thanksgiving, and ends without the usual final greetings. Now, in the second to last line, Paul again fires a shot across the bow of the false teachers. Having insinuated that they are afraid of persecution he reminds them that he has been persecuted many times: *From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.* Only after that one last remark does he close this energetic little epistle.