

Overview of the Book of Galatians

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Democracy is a good thing to order human relations, but the idea of equality which is basic to it cannot be applied to the relation between God and man, so as to call to account God the Creator as one calls to account the president or the prime minister. The end of true reverence is the end of true relation. So far as the reproach of intolerance and arrogance is concerned, there is a misunderstanding. He who has been given grace as a sinful man and now wants to share this grace with his fellow-man—that grace which he receives undeservedly—cannot be intolerant or arrogant. He will be tolerant and humble as long as he does not forget that the truth which he has is not his but God's, and that it is meant not for him only, but for all mankind. . . . In fact, we may say, love as grounded in Jesus Christ is the only sure antidote against arrogance and intolerance.¹

This Chapter is designed to assist individuals in recapturing the very heart of the Gospel of Christ. Within the Churches of Christ, there is controversy over grace versus works. Many within this movement are trying to swing back to a more biblical stance concerning justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ. Just a casual look at the various journals from a number of camps within this once united movement reveals the turmoil that exists. In spite of Christ's prayer for unity, this fragmented movement is divided into at least twenty-five feuding splinter groups. There are many leaders within the various shattered divisions that are reexamining the traditional interpretation handed down during the last two hundred years. Many within the Stone/Campbell Movement are trying to call individuals back to a proper understanding of the Gospel of Christ.

This study is not designed to castigate individuals within the Churches of Christ or Christian Churches, because many are seeking to correct the current mistreatment of Galatians 1:6-9, as well as many other abused Scriptures. The problems that presently exist within many Churches of Christ are a lack of understanding as to the truth of the Gospel of Christ. One of the most often cited Scriptures is Galatians 1:6-9. Many well-meaning leaders today give justification for their separation from other sincere believers by citing this Scripture. Yet, there are others within this movement who are trying to call attention to the context for a proper understanding of the Gospel. Just as Paul had to deal with specifics in his dealing with the Judaizers, so, I, too, must deal with the misapplication of certain Scriptures that Christians have taken out of context to justify their chastisement and separation from other Christians.

Since I have spent several years of my ministry in this movement, I am well qualified to write on this subject. I spent approximately seventeen years in the one-cup and non-Sunday

¹Emil Brunner, *The Scandal of Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1951), 27, 28.

school segment. After my excommunication for refusing to reject Christians who thought it was okay to have individual communion cups in the Lord's Supper and Bible study classes, I identified myself with another segment of the Stone/Campbell Movement. **I soon discovered that the movement started by Barton Stone and Thomas and Alexander Campbell was/is divided into twenty-five or more distinctive religious societies. Many within the various fellowships accused the others of preaching another gospel.**

This in-depth analysis is written primarily to assist Christians in the various subdivisions within the Churches of Christ to go back to the biblical text and to reexamine the context before building a theology on an isolated passage. Generally, the current interpretation of this now famous quotation promotes division and hatred among God's people. One of the greatest errors that Christians encounter today is the common practice of citing Scriptures in isolation from their context. This is commonly known as proof-texting. This chapter looks at Galatians 1:6-9 in order to determine what the Gospel of Christ is all about. This composition is also written to give assistance to those who are seeking to bring about a correct understanding of the Gospel who still stay put in one of the splintered groups, which he or she normally had nothing to do in the genesis, or origin, of its birth. In fact, most of us have inherited our heritage from our religious training. Even though I am dealing with individuals within the Stone/Campbell Movement, I am conscious that many leaders within this alliance are endeavoring to bring about a change, just as I am, in understanding concerning a proper comprehension of the Gospel of Christ and also to correct the current practice of dividing every time there is a difference of opinion.

ORTHODOXY VERSUS GOD'S GOSPEL

As we seek to understand the Book of Galatians, we must come to grips with our orthodoxy. Does our orthodoxy set aside God's grace? Many Christians will readily admit that we must not allow our orthodoxy to set aside God's grace, but, at the same time, we quickly discover that this is the case among many Christians. The Judaizers had a different set of agendas from the modern church today. The religious leaders added circumcision and the keeping of the Law as prerequisites to salvation. On the other hand, numerous Christians, today, have added their own orthodoxy to faith in order for one to inherit eternal life. Christians, as a whole, can understand Paul's reaction to circumcision as a condition of salvation. For the religious leaders, it was faith plus works.

Today, it is faith plus our own interpretation of the Scriptures. For some, it is faith plus a cappella singing—instrumental music is sinful. For others, it is faith plus one-cup in the distribution of the fruit of the vine in the Lord's Supper—individual cups are condemned. For a few, it is faith plus pinching the bread in the observance of the Lord's Supper—one cannot break the bread. For another segment within the Churches of Christ, it is faith plus no kitchens in the church building. For a small majority, it is faith plus the King James Version only—other translations are anathema; still for others, it is faith plus grape juice in the Lord's Supper—wine cannot be used. For a smaller number, it is faith plus the head covering for women. And even for a smaller number, it is faith plus long hair on women—women cannot even cut the dead ends off their hair. For a few, it is faith plus a refusal to assist from the church treasury the

support of an evangelist through another local church—support must be given directly to the minister, and so on.

All of the above opinions advanced by many Christians are associated with the Gospel. The Gospel, for many Christians, is identified as the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Then, this concept of the Gospel boils down to individual interpretation of the twenty-seven books. If one differs from a particular warring faction within the splintered Churches of Christ, then each isolated group accuses the other of preaching another Gospel. Just a perusal of some of the religious journals within the Churches of Christ reveals that the Churches of Christ as a whole are preaching another Gospel. For many Christians, the Gospel is defined as faith plus my interpretation of the Scriptures.

If Christians are to avoid nullifying God's grace, we must understand what the Gospel of God is all about. In order for us to preach the Gospel, we must first understand what the Gospel is. This analysis of the Book of Galatians is designed to explore Paul's own definition of the Gospel. What is the Gospel? The answer to this question is found in Galatians 1:4. In 1:11, Paul labors the point as to what the Gospel is not. It is not something that we have made up. Paul, in the First Chapter of Galatians, states clearly that the Gospel he preached had to do with God's Son (1:16). Paul objects to man's substitution of tradition plus the Gospel for salvation (2:3; 2:6). As we seek to understand Galatians, we need to compare the tradition of circumcision to the traditions found within many Churches of Christ. Numerous Christians have substituted their oddities in pattern theology in place of circumcision. Churches today are adding to God's plan of salvation by faith in the same sense that the Judaizers did concerning circumcision. Just as Peter's withdrawal from table fellowship from the Gentiles prevented Peter from walking in harmony with the truth of the Gospel, so today, our withdrawal from table fellowship from other Christians who do not subscribe to our brand of orthodoxy also fail to walk in harmony with the truth of the Gospel.

BACKGROUND OF GALATIANS

The churches to which Paul wrote this Epistle were founded during his first missionary journey (see Acts 13 and 14). This Epistle to the churches in the province of Galatia was probably written about AD 48, the earliest of Paul's letters. This letter reveals that certain Jewish Christians, who wanted to bind certain Old Testament rites as essential to salvation, especially circumcision, had infiltrated the churches in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Paul's adversaries had perverted the Gospel of Christ by adding additional requirements for justification. As a result of the actions of certain men, Paul sets forth a vigorous apologetic for justification by faith in Jesus alone, that is to say, nothing less and nothing more.

Countless Christians today read this Epistle without any consciousness that they too violate the Gospel of Christ just as the Judaizers did in Paul's day. Just a few years ago, several preachers tried to get me thrown out of a Christian university for my stance that the Gospel of Christ is not twenty-seven books called the New Testament. In fact, these men were, in essence, preaching another gospel, that is, another way of justification other than by faith. When I began my ministry back in January 1951, I, too, taught another way of salvation, namely, salvation by works. Essentially then, according to my insight, the Gospel of Christ had to do with crossing

every “t” and dotting every “i” according to the party creed, otherwise one was preaching another gospel. In the first fifteen years of my ministry, I don’t ever recall having heard a message on grace or justification by faith, which included my own preaching.

If one employed instrumental music in the praise service, then that fellowship was preaching another gospel. If one used individual communion cups in the Lord’s Supper, then this one was preaching another gospel. If anyone taught anything that my meticulous fellowship disagreed with, then the others were preaching another gospel. But after my excommunication from this fellowship, I identified with a congregation that employed individual communion cups and Sunday school. What I soon discovered was that they too utilized Galatians 1:6-9 to clobber everyone who refused to obey the rules according to their particular brand of orthodoxy. They just had a different set of agendas. Today, the narrow fellowship that I labored with in the beginning of my ministry (1951) is divided into several offshoots. This same mentality, as a whole, is also true within the other fellowships. Why so many splinter groups among these believers? None can agree on what is the Gospel of Christ.

There is little difference today within many congregations from the Judaizers in Paul’s day. Christians today, as well as then, are divided over how a person is put in a right relationship with God—by works or by faith. A part of the confusion has come about as a result of the piece-meal hermeneutics that is so prevalent among numerous Christians. In other words, scores of Christians practice proof-texting instead of reading the book as a book for its flow of thoughts and teachings. The Gospel of Christ is as much an enigma today as it was to the Christian Judaizers. This confusion is as a result of numerous leaders within the Christian community who refuse to go back to the drawing board, so to speak, and to reexamine the traditions handed down by the forefathers within their distinctive society.

Some within the Churches of Christ have gone back to the text, but they have received tremendous opposition. There are scores of preachers and elders in my own hometown (Montgomery, AL.) who have suffered attacks for their stand on grace and fellowship with other believers. This castigation is generated within the various fellowships of the splinter groups that are also associated with the denominational Churches of Christ. This change of mind is true throughout numerous Churches of Christ, not just in Montgomery, AL. Hopefully, this brief overview of the Book of Galatians will assist every individual in his or her understanding more clearly what the Gospel of Christ is all about.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE GOSPEL

The Gospel Is Not Rituals

If we are going to define the word *Gospel* in the Book of Galatians, we must look to the book itself in order to arrive at a clear and precise definition. In order for us to read things out of the Book of Galatians and not read one’s own agenda into it, we must always examine context. To illustrate how I, in my earlier ministry, read into the text instead of out of the text, I will examine Galatians 1:6-9 in light of its immediate context. This one unit of Scripture is one that I memorized as a boy preacher. In my ignorance of this pericope (division or section of

Scripture), I, in actuality, zeroed in on preaching another gospel. The same is still true today in almost every exclusive body of believers. **Even today, many devout Christians invariably substitute one law for another law.** For many Christians, Christianity is based upon a correct application of the so-called new law or “regulative principle” of worship, that is to say, five so-called acts of worship, which is also called “pattern theology.” Within some movements associated with the Stone/Campbell Movement, we observe that their law on the so-called five acts of worship is more stringent than the Law of Moses. This action is necessary according to the interpretation of some expositors.

The so-called “law of Christ” in Galatians 6:2 is generally identified, at least with some Christians, with one’s own brand of orthodoxy, that is to say, one’s interpretation of the Scriptures regarding the so-called five acts of worship, not the law of love. Galatians 6:2, like Galatians 1:6-9, is interpreted by many sincere Christians with smuggled prejudices from inherited traditions. As a result of this looseness of interpretation, the flames of prejudice have burned into the hearts of men and women for the last two hundred years beginning with the Stone/Campbell Movement. Out of the Stone/Campbell Movement originated three separate religious bodies: Churches of Christ, Christian Churches, and the Disciples of Christ. From the Churches of Christ came another twenty-five or more idiosyncratic or unique fellowships.

Almost everyone within the various religious bodies that grew out of this particular movement that had its original focus on uniting Christians in all the assorted sects in Christendom have heard these verses (1:6-9) cited to give credence to the rejection of other believers on the pretense that they were preaching another gospel if they violated the traditional understanding of the so-called five acts of worship. Again, the problem of how to be faithful to the Gospel arose over the correct interpretation of the five acts of worship, which, supposedly, God prescribed. Churches divided over numerous issues and each eccentric fellowship accused the other exclusive society of preaching another gospel. To some believers, the five acts is in essence the same as the gospel that Paul writes about in Galatians 1:6-9. Why am I concerned about what is going on within the various divisions within the Churches of Christ? I am dealing with the Gospel. When we pervert the Gospel of Christ, we are treading on dangerous ground. The nature of the Gospel was of such importance in the scheme of redemption that Paul even warned the Galatians that even if an angel preached another gospel than the one he preached, they should let even the angel be accursed. Listen to Paul as he writes:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— ⁷ which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! ⁹ As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! (Galatians 1:6-9)

If we wish to grasp the Gospel that Paul preached, we should consult the entire Book of Galatians in order to get a feel for the authentic nature of the Gospel of Christ. If something does not make sense, one should immediately consult the context. The context actually defines Galatians 1:6-9. We should, without delay, check with the words of Paul in 1:4 if we wish to understand what the Gospel is that Paul proclaimed. In this verse, he goes right to the very heart

of the Gospel. He takes the time to explain what the Gospel is all about before he warns the Galatians about the danger of preaching another gospel. Paul starts this Epistle with a ready definition of the Gospel. We should concentrate vigilantly on his explanation as he seeks to capture the very essence of the Gospel:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵ to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Galatians 1:3-5)

As we cautiously read verse four, we must ask certain questions: (1) what is the Gospel? and (2) what is the Gospel of God about? In response to the first question, we can quickly say that the answer is Jesus. In reply to the second question, we can say that the Gospel deals with God's methodology of redemption, namely, Jesus. Yes, the Gospel is about the One who gave Himself for the sins of sinful humanity in order to rescue the fallen race from damnation. It is about what Jesus did in His Atonement, not what individuals do. We can also say that this Gospel details that our justification before God can only be through faith in His Son, not works.

GALATIANS: CHAPTER ONE

The Gospel Is Jesus

Immediately following his explanation of the Gospel (1:4), he then warns the Galatians that if any man proclaims another way of salvation other than through faith in Jesus, one should let that individual be "eternally condemned" (1:8). After that, in the next pericope (1:11-24), he informs the Galatians that the Gospel he proclaimed did not come from man.

I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. ¹² I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. (1:11-12)

Paul introduces his proclamation as something that did not originate with man, but rather with Jesus Christ. Identification of the Gospel that Paul preached (1:11) is essential to a correct understanding of the Gospel that he speaks of in 1:6-9. What did he preach? He preached Jesus. Listen to him as he reveals the substance of his preaching:

But when God, who set me apart from birth ^a and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me so that I might **preach him** among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man. (1:15-16)

The Gospel that Paul speaks of in 1:6-9 has to do with the preaching of Jesus, not man-made rituals, rituals of the Law of Moses, or even the Law itself. The Gospel has to do with preaching Jesus as God's way of salvation. Even today, many Christians still do not understand the Gospel that Paul preached. It is not uncommon, as stated above, for certain Christians to identify the Gospel with their particular brand of orthodoxy. To add something to the Gospel as

a condition of salvation is to destroy the very idea of grace. For one to add to the Gospel of God's grace is to nullify grace.

Many Christians, unknowingly, have nullified God's grace through their philosophy of "pattern theology," that is, five prescribed rituals to be performed on Sunday morning between the hours of 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. It is not just five prescribed rituals that nullify the Gospel, but the insistence that these five rituals must be performed in a prescribed way in order for us to have salvation. Thus, the Gospel of Christ is turned into another law that is more stringent than even the Law of Moses. For example, the Gospel, at least to some Christians, is reflected in the following beliefs:

- Acappella singing versus instrumental accompaniment
- Church name (Church of Christ)
- One cup in the distribution of the Lord's Supper (The one-cup movement will not fellowship Christians who employ individual cups in the Lord's Supper.)
- No Sunday school (This movement advances the idea that one cannot teach the Bible in classes on Sunday morning—must be taught in one assembly on Sunday morning.)
- Bible colleges (supported by congregations)
- Grape juice or wine in the Lord's Supper
- Break bread or pinch bread in the Lord's Supper
- Kitchen in the church building
- Orphan homes (supported by congregations)
- Church contributions (cannot be distributed to individuals that are not members of the church)

Unfortunately, as a young preacher boy, I was taught to memorize Galatians 1:6-9 and then apply these verses to many of the above items. The one who taught me was sincere in his understanding. In my judgment, his misapplication was not rebellion against God, but rather an honest mistake of the heart. Nevertheless, if one participated in Sunday school (Bible study) on Sunday morning, then this fellowship was preaching "another gospel." If one used an instrument in the congregational singing, then one was preaching "another gospel." If one broke the bread in the Lord's Supper rather than pinch the bread (the bread had to remain one piece—no fragments), then one was accused of preaching "another gospel." On and on this kind of analysis flowed/flows until the body of Christ was/is ripped apart into various warring factions, none could/can agree on what the Gospel was/is about. In the early 70s, I was accused of preaching another gospel when I refused to reject fellowship with other Christians who employed individual communion cups and who participated in Sunday school. Thus, this strange fellowship threw me out of the synagogue for so-called unfaithfulness—that is, in the words of Paul, preaching another gospel.

As we reflect back upon 1:11—"the gospel I preached"—can one honestly identify the above list of ten items as "the gospel" that Paul preached? Again, what was the "revelation" (1:12) he received? Once more, the context is the deciding factor in understanding 1:11-12. Pay attention once more to Paul in 1:16 as he explains what it was that he preached: "to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles." Again, we can hardly read 1:16 without a consciousness of 1:4: "Who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age."

GALATIANS: CHAPTER TWO

PAUL OPPOSES PETER FOR HYPOCRISY

The Truth of the Gospel

When we add another condition to salvation other than faith in Jesus, we preach another gospel. Prior to Paul's confrontation with Peter over how an individual is put in a right relationship with God, he states that three years after his conversion he went to Jerusalem to see Peter (1:18). It was fourteen years later that he and Barnabas went to Jerusalem (2:1). This time he went in response to a revelation that he received in order to "set before them the gospel" that "he preached among the Gentiles" (2:2). The question of circumcision and the keeping of the Law had infiltrated the fellowship of believers. Paul, along with Barnabas and Titus, went privately to the leaders in order to try to prevent this trip from ending in confusion as to the true nature of the Gospel that Paul preached to the Gentiles and that Peter preached to the Jews (2:2-4). Paul states emphatically that the leaders did not compel Titus to be circumcised (2:3). Yet, there were certain brothers who wanted to insist upon circumcision as a condition of salvation (2:4; see also Acts 15:1-2).

Paul refused to back down on the issue of adding another condition to salvation other than faith in the Son of God: "We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you" (Galatians 2:5). The leaders saw that the Gospel had been entrusted to Paul to preach to the Gentiles and that the Gospel had been entrusted to Peter to preach to the Jews (2:7). When we add something to faith in Christ as a condition of salvation, then we must stand up for the "mystery" of God that had been hidden from ages past in order that "the truth of the gospel" might not be nullified. Later, Paul confronted Peter for his actions in withdrawing from eating with the Gentiles when certain men came from James (2:11-12). This withdrawal from the Gentiles created such confusion that "even Barnabas was led astray" (2:13). How did Paul react under such circumstances when "the truth of the gospel" was at stake? Paul expresses his reaction this way:

When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter 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?" (2:14)

A brief summary of what has been pointed out thus far is necessary in order for us not to forget the thrust of Paul's arguments concerning the true nature of the Gospel of Christ. In 1:4, Paul gives the essence of the Gospel—"Who gave himself for our sins." Then in 2:11, he reveals his desire to make known the Gospel he preached. But in 2:16, he reveals the Gospel as Jesus. In 2:2, he sets before the leaders the Gospel that he preached among the Gentiles. After his encounter with certain men who came from James who wanted to add circumcision as a condition of salvation, he objected in order that "the truth of the gospel might remain" (2:4-5). Then later Paul had to rebuke Peter, along with others, for their adulterating the "truth of the

gospel” with their withdrawal from the Gentiles (2:12-13). Once more, he captures their departure as not in harmony with the “truth of the gospel” (2:14). Paul did not rebuke Peter for preaching another gospel, but rather he rebuked him for his actions that were not in harmony with the very nature of the Good News concerning God’s way of salvation—faith in Jesus.

The Truth of the Gospel Equals Justification by Faith

Just as Paul sets forth the nature of the Gospel in 1:4, he now goes right to the very heart of the Gospel in 2:15-16:

We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’¹⁶ know that a man is not justified by observing 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 observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

Just as the word *mystery* filled the Book of Ephesians, so the word *faith* flashes like neon lights across the Book of Galatians. The word *faith* is the key to grasping what the Gospel of God is all about. It is about God’s way of redeeming sinful humanity—through faith in His Son Jesus. God only has one way of salvation—faith in Jesus. The words “faith in Jesus Christ” and “justified by faith in Christ” set the tone for the rest of the Book as Paul seeks to explain the nature of the Gospel of Christ, that is to say, God’s way of justification. We can never be justified through observing law, or law keeping.

Paul drives home this point throughout this short Epistle. No one, writes Paul, can be justified through observing the Law (2:16). Again, the question that confronts everyone is: How does one live? Paul explains his own life by saying, “I live by faith in the Son of God” (2:20). Justification is “by faith.” But faith has for its object, Jesus. It is “by faith in Jesus Christ” and “justified by faith in Christ.” Galatians 2:20 should call forth Paul’s words in Ephesians 4:5: “one Lord, one faith.” The Gospel justifies those whom the Law condemns. Faith attributes salvation entirely to Christ, which eliminates works—works of any kind.

If righteousness could be obtained through law keeping, then Christ, according to Paul, “died for nothing” (Galatians 2:21b). When we seek justification through rituals and regulations, regardless as to how good and beneficial, we set aside the grace of God (2:21a). Having said this, Paul discusses the Spirit that God gave to the ones who responded to Jesus through faith. Leon Morris makes the point, and correctly so, that “no ritual act availed before God was central to the gospel he (Paul) preached and by which he lived. He preached Christ crucified, not circumcision.”²

Once more, Morris cuts away all the underbrush that men have added to salvation: “The Message about the cross means that people can do nothing to bring about their salvation, nothing at all. It insists that Christ has done all that is necessary by laying down his life in place of sinners.”³ It is not uncommon for numerous Christians within the Churches of Christ to pass

²Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul’s Charter of Christians Freedom* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1996), 161.

³Ibid., 161, 162.

off the religious customs (traditions) from the church fathers as the Gospel of God. In other words, many Christians still confuse ritual prescriptions and religious requirements of oral tradition as the Gospel of Christ, that is to say, the Gospel that Paul preached. Christians must abandon their so-called five acts of worship as a prerequisite to salvation. It is not uncommon for many—not all—within the Churches of Christ to advance a notion of salvation through perfect obedience to the so-called new law concerning a worship service. Around this worship service, the five acts must be performed in a prescribed manner; otherwise, one is on his or her way to hell. For many, the right performance plus faith merits salvation, not faith alone.

When Peter and the others were not walking in line with the “truth of the Gospel” (2:14), Paul stepped in to stop the movement away from the very heart of the Gospel he preached. What is the “truth of the gospel”? It is justification by faith in Christ (2:16), pure and simple. Unless one grasps this concept, there can never be unity among God’s divided people, not just Church of Christ folk. As Ronald Y. K. Fung expresses it: “The truth of the gospel was none other than justification by faith in Christ alone and not by works of the law—a principle which applied to Jew and Gentile alike and hence was the basis of the Church’s unity.”⁴

GALATIANS: CHAPTER THREE

Receiving the Holy Spirit

Paul questions the Galatians about how they received the Holy Spirit. He asked: “Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?” (3:2). How did they receive the Holy Spirit? It is obvious that they received the Holy Spirit after they believed the message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Salvation can never be through human efforts. Paul cuts away all underbrush concerning salvation when he writes: “Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?” (3:3).

Paul employs repetition as a means of calling attention to the very heart of the Gospel. In verse 3, he informed the Galatians that they received the Spirit by believing what they heard (3:2-3). Now, once more, he calls attention to the Holy Spirit as a gift: “Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?” (3:5). Again, it is Law versus faith. In order to reinforce his arguments, he introduces Abraham and his faith. Again, we observe the word *believed* as Paul develops the means of receiving the righteousness that belongs to God. He writes:

Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”⁷ Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.⁸ The 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.”⁹ So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (3:6-9)

⁴Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 126.

We can hardly read this pericope (unit or section) without cognition of the word *faith* as employed by Paul. The following expressions utilized by Paul stands out, as it were, in bold neon lights: “**He believed,**” “**those who believe,**” “justify the Gentiles by faith,” “those who have faith,” and “Abraham, the man of faith.” Since “The Scriptures foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith,” Paul writes that God “announced the gospel in advance to Abraham.” The context lays emphasis, not on Abraham’s faithfulness, but on Abraham’s faith. The Gospel announced in advance to Abraham is the Gospel that Paul announces in 1:4 and, at the same time, cautions one about preaching another way of salvation other than that which Jesus offers to anyone who believes in Him (see also John 3:14-18, 36; 5:24; 6:29, 40, 47).

Paul places a curse upon anyone who preaches another way of justification before God other than “faith” in Jesus the Son of God” (1:6-9). Paul stresses that salvation can never be through “human effort,” but only through faith in Jesus the Savior of the world (3:3, 11, 14). We must question the substance of what was announced to Abraham in advance in order to clearly see the positive aspects of the Gospel of Christ. What was announced to Abraham in advance? Yes, the Gospel was announced in advance. What is the Gospel? As stated above, many identify the Gospel with their particular brand of orthodoxy. In other words, the various denominational Churches of Christ determine their own “human effort” as the means of obtaining salvation, not faith in Jesus. It is always “faith” plus their “interpretation” of isolated Scriptures from their contexts. Why is the Gospel so difficult for some Christians to understand? The answer lies in the hermeneutics (science of interpretation). For example, the hermeneutical method utilized by the various theological factions today determines what Galatians 1:6-9 should say beforehand in order to support their theological system of aloofness.

Almost any interpretation can be placed upon a verse(s) if the context is ignored. We must first determine the context before application. If we expect to interpret the word *Gospel* in Galatians, we must first learn to pay attention to the context—the Book of Galatians. It is not uncommon for the Book of Galatians to be read through the lens of one’s own particular warring splinter group. When we encounter an interpretation that does not make sense, then we must go digging for answers to solve the hermeneutical dilemma. In response to the question above: What was announced in advance to Abraham? If we say that the Gospel is twenty-seven books called the New Testament, then we are confronted with a correct interpretation of this so-called new law book in order for us not to preach “another gospel,” for each of the twenty-five or more divisions within the Stone/Campbell Movement asserts that it, and it alone, is preaching the true Gospel. Ultimately, the Gospel of Christ boils down to one’s unusual interpretation of certain isolated texts from its context.

When we assign an interpretation of the Gospel announced to Abraham with the so-called prescribed five acts of worship, one immediately sees the folly of such an interpretation. Did God announce in advance that the singing in the Christians’ community must be a cappella rather than instrumental? Did God announce in advance that the Lord’s Supper must be observed with one cup upon the table rather than each person having his or her own cup in the drinking of the Cup of Blessing? Did God announce in advance that in the Lord’s Supper one must “pinch” the bread rather than “break” the bread? Did God announce to Abraham that in the time of Christ (2000 years in the future), Christians could not have a kitchen in the church

building? Did God announce in advance to Abraham that in the Lord's Supper one must use grape juice rather than wine? This list is almost *ad infinitum*. The various oddities depend on which of the several of militaristic groups with which we engage. Each distinctive society of believers has its own agenda as to what the Gospel of Christ is all about.

Again, we must ask the question: What was announced in advance to Abraham almost two thousand years before the Word became flesh (John 1:14)? The answer is that God announced to Abraham His means of justifying sinful humanity, that is to say, faith in Jesus. Jesus is the object of our faith. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in the finished work of Christ. Paul states the record very clearly on this point:

Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, “The righteous will live by faith.”^{d 12} The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, “The man who does these things will live by them.”^{e 13} 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 tree.”^{f 14} 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 3:11-14)

Once more, we discover that the word *faith* flashes like neon lights in these words of Paul as he seeks to set forth the very heart of the Gospel announced in advance to Abraham two thousand years earlier. The blessing given to Abraham is available to everyone through Christ Jesus. Thus, it is through faith that one receives the promise of the Spirit (3:2-3, 14), not human effort (3:3). In order for Paul to nail down his arguments, he says,

Brothers, 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.¹⁶ The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,”^a meaning one person, who is Christ. (3:15-16)

He did not say as to SEEDS as of many, but rather to SEED, meaning one person, who is Christ. This is the Gospel. The Gospel is the Good News of God's way of salvation by faith. This same thought is presented in Paul's words to the Ephesians: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). When we say by “faith alone,” we are not falsifying Paul's words to the Ephesians. This phrase only clarifies and emphasizes what Paul clearly says. On the other hand, the Judaizers wanted to make human efforts, in addition to faith in Jesus, the means of salvation, but Paul says NO! Paul, as he concludes his arguments about the Law, writes: “But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe” (Galatians 3:22).

Paul drives home the point that one's right standing with God is not based upon human efforts, but rather one's standing before God is based upon “faith.” Take note once more to Paul as he seeks to nail the coffin shut concerning the place of law in the life of the believer: “Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.²⁴ So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.²⁵ Now that

faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law” (3:23-25). The following chart sets forth the thrust of the entire Book of Galatians:

Galatians 2:15-16

We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’¹⁶ know that a man is not justified by observing 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 observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

Galatians 3:23-25

Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.²⁴ So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ^b that we might be justified by faith.²⁵ Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

Justification by faith in Christ is the Gospel announced in advance to Abraham. Before “the faith” came, the Law held individuals prisoners. The Law was designed to lead us to Christ in order that we might be justified by faith. Paul expresses this same thought in his letter to the Romans:

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. (Romans 3:19-20)

When we look at the Law of God, we cannot open our mouth in our defense. The Law of God shuts every person’s mouth. It is not until we are consciously black-and-blue from the demands of the Law and, at the same time, smitten by the Law of God to the very core of our soul that we will turn to the Gospel for the healing of our wounds. Until we are seized by and jailed by the Law of God, we will not change direction to Christ for freedom from guilt. Until we are condemned and killed by the Law, we will not call upon Christ for justification.⁵

The Gospel of Christ is the Good News of justification by grace through faith in His Son Jesus Christ. God accomplished redemption for sinful humanity through the cross of Christ. The Book of Galatians is full of the cross of Christ. Without the Cross of Christ, we can say that justification of the *unjust* would be *unjustified*. It is through the Cross that God rescues humanity from condemnation. God’s answer to sin is the Cross. What did Christ do upon the Cross? Listen to Paul as he details this information to the Galatians:

⁵See John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1968), 93, for an excellent treatment of the giving of God’s Law to Moses. I am indebted to Stott for his insightful comments about the Law’s purpose.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ **who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age,** according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵ to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, **who loved me and gave himself for me.** ²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!

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 tree.”^f ¹⁴ 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.**

The only reason that God can justify sinful humanity is that Christ died for the ungodly upon the cruel cross of Calvary. **The Book of Galatians sets forth, in clear terms, God’s means of justification, which is by faith in Jesus.** As Chapter 3 concludes, Paul again calls attention to how individuals become children of God: “You are all sons of God **through faith in Christ Jesus**” (Galatians 3:26). In verse twenty-four of this same Chapter, he writes: “So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be **justified by faith.**” Then in verse twenty-two, Paul pens: “But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, **being given through faith in Jesus Christ,** might be given to those **who believe.**” Again, as we, once more, examine Chapter 3, we observe that the word *faith* fills this chapter. Listen to Paul as he expresses how we receive the promise of the Spirit: “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” (3:14).

In 3:26-29, Paul sets forth “faith” in Christ as that which levels all humanity. The Judaizers could not accept this principle of faith. Even today, many Christians cannot accept the finished work of Christ on Calvary. Nevertheless, Paul drove home the point that Christ secured salvation for all who would put their faith in Him. In other words, Christ has accomplished it all in His curse-bearing death upon the Cross (3:13). Salvation is through faith in Him. Salvation rests upon the finished work of Christ through His sin-bearing Death and His curse-bearing Death, which is embraced by faith. We must bear in mind that the source of our salvation is God; the ground of our justification is Jesus, and the means of our justification is by faith. Paul in his Roman epistle sets forth this same understanding. In Chapter 3, Paul writes:

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:25-26)

We should remember that justification is by grace alone, in Christ alone, and through faith alone; it can be no other way. This is what Paul stresses from beginning to end in the Book of Galatians. Biblical faith has Jesus for its object. John R.W. Stott expresses this truth with care and eloquence when he writes: “The value of faith is not to be found in itself, but entirely and exclusively in its object, namely Jesus Christ and him crucified.”⁶ In the first three chapters, Paul covers a period of two thousand years of history. He began with God’s promise to Abraham (born: 2166 BC) concerning his SEED, which is Christ (3:6-25). In Romans 4, Paul develops this subject in greater detail. In Chapter 3 of Galatians, he writes concerning Abraham’s faith: “He believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness” (3:6).

GALATIANS: CHAPTER FOUR

Bondage versus Freedom

4:1-11

In Chapter 4, Paul continues to develop the subject of salvation through faith. In order for one to receive the “full rights of sons” (4:5), Jesus came to redeem individuals from the Law (4:4). We can only receive the “full rights of sons” through the finished work of Christ upon the cross. We can only appropriate this freedom through faith in Jesus. When we are redeemed from Law, God sends forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. Paul stresses that this giving of the Spirit did not come through Law keeping, but rather through faith (3:2-5; 4:4-6). As stated above, in Chapter 3, Paul covers two thousand years of Old Testament history beginning with God’s call of Abraham out of Ur of Chaldea. In the third chapter, he analyzed three great figures—Abraham, Moses, and Christ.

He calls forth Abraham to show that God promised to bless all nations through his seed. Then he calls attention to the giving of the Law to Moses, which, in and of itself, did not annul the promise God made to Abraham, but, on the other hand, made the coming of Christ more imperative. For Paul, the Law acted as a means of driving men and women to Him for release from their burdens of sin and guilt. Now, in the fourth chapter of Galatians, Paul covers once more the past that he dealt with in chapter 3. In verses 1-3, he discusses the condition of men and women under the Law—slavery. Next, in verses 4-8, he talks about the situation of men and women in Christ—sons of God. Then, in verses 9-11, he bemoans the fact that many were turning back to slavery—enslaved all over again. Stott summarizes these eleven verses by

⁶John Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Illinois: InterVarsity, 1994), 117.

saying, “Once we were slaves. Now we are sons. How, then, can we turn back to the old slavery?”⁷

Many Christians today are exchanging the Gospel of God’s grace for good works. Within many churches, the good works are related to the so-called five-step plan of salvation and the so-called five-acts of worship performed on Sunday morning in a prescribed manner, which usually rules out mechanical instruments in praise to God. The Book of Galatians is as timely today as it was almost two thousand years ago. The orthodoxy of many churches completely obscures the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When we add our own brand of orthodoxy as a condition of salvation, we connect other conditions to salvation in the same way as the Judaizers did that Paul confronted in his Galatian letter. In the biographical information about Paul (Philippians 3:1-11), we quickly discover that Paul was converted from one understanding of righteousness to another—from his own righteousness of works to God’s righteousness by faith (see also Romans 9:30—10:21)

Paul, in the Book of Galatians, labors the point that there is a difference between a religion of works and a religion of grace. For Paul, there is only one Gospel—justification by faith through the finished work of Christ upon Calvary. Many, especially those within the various factions of the Churches of Christ, have added their own requirements to the Gospel message. Many believers see religion as keeping certain rules and regulations, not justification by faith in Jesus Christ. When we add something to the Gospel of Christ as a condition of salvation, we then destroy the Gospel of grace. The central truth of the Gospel, as pointed out earlier, concerns the One who gave Himself for our sins (see Galatians 1:4).

The essential message of the Gospel is Christ crucified for the sins of humanity. Salvation is available through God’s grace alone, and anyone who obscures salvation by faith alone must be opposed. What God has accomplished through the Atonement of Christ is the Gospel message of salvation. When we insert our beliefs concerning the use of one-cup in the Lord’s Supper, a cappella music only, no kitchens in the church building, no Sunday schools, and so on, we actually nullify the Gospel of God’s grace. When we affix, or attach, these additions to the Gospel of God’s grace, we are preaching another gospel. The essence of the Gospel is the risen Jesus.

Paul’s Concern for the Galatians

4:12-20

Paul expresses his deep concern for the Galatians lack of concern for the freedom they experienced in Jesus Christ through the Gospel. Many were “turning back to those weak and miserable principles” that had previously enslaved them (4:9). Some of the believers desired to reinstate the ceremonial aspects of the Law as well as the keeping of the Law itself as a condition of salvation (4:10; see also Acts 15:1-5). Paul objected to the Judaizers’ emphasis upon circumcision and the keeping of the Law as a condition of salvation. Consequently, Paul

⁷Ibid., 103, 104.

became an enemy of some within the congregations scattered throughout the province of Galatia because he told them the truth about God’s way of salvation—by grace alone and through faith alone in the finished work of Christ upon the cross. In fact, he writes: “Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?” (Galatians 4:16).

Many Christians today are receiving the brunt of ostracism by many other sincere zealous individuals who have never allowed Christ to be formed in them (see also 4:19). I talked at length with one of my second cousins (7-30-02) about his having received chastisement from his own mainstream fellowship for daring to preach on God’s grace as the way of salvation. His own fleshly brother who is a deacon in this same fellowship of Christians also came under the wrath of the powers that be. Also, in this same congregation in Texas, another brother (no fleshly relationship) was called on the carpet for preaching too much about Jesus. He, too, was told to preach on the issues, that is to say, one-cup, no Sunday school, no instrumental music, and so on.

Again, we witness many individuals within the one-cup movement that are seeking to recapture the very heart of the Gospel. This effort is quite wide in almost every segment within the Churches of Christ. Many preachers and elders are having great success. Presently, I study with several preachers within the Churches of Christ as well as some Baptist ministers. Fortunately, everyone that I presently study with is preaching God’s grace with emphasis upon justification by faith. I continue to work with Church of Christ ministers in order to bring about unity among all God’s people. Thankfully, today, there are many within the Churches of Christ who are seeking to draw people back to a true understanding of the Gospel.

These three episodes are not isolated events within this very narrow, sectarian group. What were these three men accused of? They were accused of being “grace preachers.” In fact, one of these men was called a “false teacher” for preaching on grace. Hopefully, one can understand why the Book of Galatians is as relevant today as it was when Paul wrote this forceful letter against legalism. When congregations do not like the message of grace, the preachers of grace become the enemies of these individuals, or other congregations who do not preach grace as God’s way of salvation. Those individuals and congregations who preach grace are blackballed from the so-called loyal churches—party loyalty must be maintained at all cost. This mindset is not just true within this distinctive fellowship, but it is true among other churches out of the Stone/Campbell Movement. In other words, the private theological whims of some preachers become the Gospel of Christ, that is to say, their own subjective doctrinal fancies.

Hagar and Sarah

4:21-31

Paul continues his arguments against the Judaizers in order to try to convince those reverting back to Judaism to think about what they are doing. Paul discusses Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, Isaac, Mount Sinai, and Jerusalem in order to drive home his message of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ (see also 2:16; 3:11). This pericope is addressed to those “who

want to be under the law” (4:21). The Judaizers wanted to turn the Gospel of God’s grace into law. They, like so many Christians today, advanced the notion that strict adherence to regulations, to traditions, and to ceremonies is what puts one in a right relationship with God. In other words, salvation is not based on faith alone in Jesus, but rather upon one’s correctly adhering to the proper performance of certain works as defined by the religious leaders. For Paul, anyone who lives under law is under condemnation—and I might add that this is true of any law, not just the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses pointed individuals to the One who would bring salvation.

The Historical Abraham

4:22-23

In this section of Scripture (4:21-31), Paul calls forth the historical (4:22-23), the allegorical/typological (4:24-27), and the personal (4:28-31) to illustrate beyond doubt the true nature of the Gospel he originally set forth on his first missionary tour (see also 4:13; Acts 13:1—14:28). Paul, like John the Baptist (Matthew 3:7-12), calls attention to the fact that true descent from Abraham is not physical but spiritual (Galatians 3:26-29; Romans 4:16). The following chart sets forth in parallel columns the misunderstanding of the religious leaders’ perception of salvation as well as the correct interpretation of the data in the Book of Genesis and Galatians concerning Abraham as the father of the faithful:

Matthew 3:9

Galatians 3:29

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.</p> | <p>If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.</p> |
|--|--|

Both John the Baptist and Paul zero in on the true seed of Abraham. The historical element of Chapter Four (vv. 22-23) is also illustrated in Chapter 3. One should read these two verses with the comprehension that Paul is endeavoring to bolster his claim that justification is by faith alone. Earlier, in Chapter 3, Paul elaborates on what John the Baptist implied in his message about the true nature of Abraham’s seed and what Jesus specifically asserted in His confrontation with the Jews (John 8:31-34). Paul puts forth the point that the blessing God promised to Abraham comes not upon the Jews through natural descent, but upon all who believe—whether Jews or Gentiles. Paul writes: “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” (3:14). In Paul’s letter to Rome, he writes about one who is and who is not a true Jew:

A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical.
²⁹ No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God. (Romans 3:28-29)

Paul illustrates his argument about the true seed of Abraham by calling attention to two of Abraham's sons. He writes:

For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. ²³ His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. (4:22-23)

Paul draws two important distinctions between these two brothers—Ishmael and Isaac. Even though both boys had the same father, they did not have the same mother. The boys took after their mothers. Since Hagar was a slave, Ishmael was born into slavery. On the other hand, Sara was free. Therefore, Isaac was born into freedom. Stott correctly says that "Isaac was not born according to nature, but rather against nature. . . . Ishmael was born according to nature, but Isaac against nature, supernaturally, through an exceptional promise of God."⁸

Thus, Paul emphasizes that everyone is either slave or free. If we are in Christ, we are no longer a slave to sin but free to serve Christ. God's grace sets us free without the deeds of the Law. If we are Christians, we have been born not of natural means, but rather we are born again through supernatural means. We can hardly reflect upon Paul's argument concerning justification without recalling what he said earlier in this same epistle: "The 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.' ⁹ So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith" (3:8-9).

The Allegory (Figurative/Typological): Hagar and Sarah

4: 24-27

Just as Ishmael and Isaac represent spiritual truth concerning slavery and freedom, so also Hagar and Sarah stand for two covenants. Hagar represents the Old Covenant, whereas Sarah represents the New Covenant. Yet, in the allegory/typology, we discover that Paul paints another picture. These two women not only represent two covenants, but they also represent two Jerusalems, the earthly and the heavenly. Again, one should turn to Paul's arguments and listen attentively to him as he develops his arguments to uphold his thesis that one is justified by faith, not by the deeds of the Law. Again, his arguments go back to Abraham, the one justified through faith:

These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. ²⁵ Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with

⁸Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, 123-124.

her children. ²⁶ But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. ²⁷ For it is written: “Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband.” (4:24-27)

Hagar, according to Paul’s arguments, represents “Mount Sinai,” and Sara represents the new “Jerusalem that is above.” This New Jerusalem is our mother, not Mount Sinai, which represents slavery. This section by Paul is written in order to give historical testimony to his principle of justification by faith. Thus, he goes back two thousand years to God’s covenant with Abraham to give greater force to his arguments concerning justification by faith. Paul is not advancing a new theology, but rather he is setting forth Abraham as one who was justified by faith alone, without circumcision or works of the Law. Stott captures the very essence of Paul’s position when he writes:

This, then, is the allegory. Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, born of two mothers, Hagar and Sarah, who represent two covenants and two Jerusalems. Hagar the slave stands for the old covenant, and her son Ishmael symbolizes the church of the earthly Jerusalem. Sarah the free woman stands for the new covenant and her son Isaac symbolizes the church of the heavenly Jerusalem. Although superficially similar, because both were sons of Abraham, the two boys were fundamentally different. In the same way, Paul is arguing, it is not enough to claim Abraham as our father. The crucial question concerns who our mother is. If it is Hagar, we are like Ishmael, but if it is Sarah, we are like Isaac.⁹

Just as many Jews failed to understand that legal bondage and spiritual freedom cannot co-exist, one or the other must go. Thus, when Paul and others addressed the issue of freedom in Christ or freedom from the Law of Moses, this teaching created turmoil and resulted in the Jews waging a war against Christians. A religion of regulations, as existed among the Jews, could not continue to exist if the set of laws were not strictly enforced. Today, legalistic bondage, within many local congregations of the Churches of Christ, also persecutes those who dare to disagree with the status quo. The status quo must be maintained at all cost.

This mental concept of bondage is the very reason that so many churches are hopelessly divided into warring factions. What is the answer to our divisions? Until Christians understand that faith in Jesus is the unifying factor, there will never be unity within this Movement that started out as a movement to unite Christians in all the sects. If Christians want unity, then grace and love must permeate the lives of every believer. Morris has captured the very heart of grace: “When grace is central, the person has made love his dominant principle . . . it will be the power of that love and not the constraint of law that keeps us right, and love is always more powerful than law.”¹⁰

⁹Ibid., 126.

¹⁰Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul’s Charter of Christians Freedom*, 150.

Personal Application: Isaac versus Ishmael

4:28-31

Paul turns, as it were, from Sarah and Hagar to the two boys—Isaac and Ishmael. Even though both boys were born of natural birth, nevertheless, one of the boys (Isaac) was born by the “power of the Spirit,” not in the “ordinary way” (4:29). Sarah was ninety years old when she became pregnant (Genesis 17:17). If we wish to share in the inheritance, we can only share in this blessing through the “free woman” (4:30). Paul’s argument is that if we are Christians, then we are like Isaac, not Ishmael. In other words, Christians are sons through supernatural means, not natural means. To express this truth differently, the words of John are appropriate to express this same truth:

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. (John 1:10-13)

It is in this same vein that Paul in the Fourth Chapter of Romans also sets forth the means of Abraham’s justification before God. Paul says, “What does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” (4:3). Again, Paul writes: “The promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all” (4:16). Is it any wonder that Paul addresses the subject of faith in Galatians prior to his illustrations concerning Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Hagar, and Ishmael? Listen to Paul as he seeks to nail down the means of one’s justification:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:26-29)

Even before the foundation of the earth, it had always been God’s plan to justify His creatures through faith in His Son Jesus Christ (see Ephesians 1:3-14; Genesis 3:15), not works.

CHAPTER FIVE

Stand Firm in the Freedom of Christ

5:1-12

Paul wants the Galatians to stand firm in the freedom that Christ obtained for everyone who puts his or her trust in Him. It is not so much freedom from sin that Paul discusses, but rather it is freedom from the dominion of the Law that keeps us from bondage and condemnation. The freedom that Paul advances is gained only “in” and “through” Christ. Earlier, Paul writes:

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 tree.”¹⁴ 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. (3:13-14)

Stott, once more, focuses in on the very essence of Christianity when he cuts away all the underbrush by writing: “Christianity is freedom, not bondage. Christ has set us free; so we must stand firm in our freedom.”¹¹ The slogan of the Judaizers was: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” (Acts 15:2). The false teachers advanced the notion that faith in Christ was insufficient for salvation. The religious leaders (party of the Pharisees) from Jerusalem added to God’s scheme of justification: “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the Law of Moses” (15:5). In other words, the Pharisees were saying that Moses must finish what Christ set out to accomplish through His atonement. His death upon the cross was not sufficient for salvation. It could not possibly be by faith, so they thought.

Many Christians today read the Book of Galatians, but they cannot make the book relevant to today’s society. Instead of circumcision and observance of the Law of Moses, a number of factions within the Stone/Campbell Movement have developed their own category of laws that must be adhered to in order to obtain salvation. In other words, salvation is by faith plus their interpretation of the five acts of worship. Some say you cannot be saved unless you drink out of one cup in the observance of the Lord’s Supper. Yet, others advance the notion that one cannot be saved if he or she participates in the modern day Sunday school. Others make their oddities concerning kitchens in the church building and the dispensing of the monies collected on Sunday morning a condition of salvation. Some even go so far as to say that one cannot be saved if one uses an instrument in the singing in the assembly.

About six years ago (7-31-02), I talked with a brother from a non-institutional fellowship of believers (Church of Christ). He related to me that the preacher before him was fired for being a “grace preacher.” Another brother from the one cup and non-Sunday school fellowship informed me that he was called on the carpet for preaching too much about Jesus. In this same

¹¹John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way*, 233.

fellowship, a brother recently related to me that he was called a false teacher for preaching on grace. Another very devout Christian was also defrocked for not preaching on the issues. He was accused of not being balanced by preaching on grace. In almost all of these groups, salvation is presented as faith in Christ plus acceptance of their oddities in interpretation. For many Christians, faith in Christ is not sufficient to merit salvation—one must be correct on all doctrinal issues advanced by their own unique fellowship. But Paul reacts to this type of philosophy concerning salvation. What does he say? Listen to him as he zeros in on this sort of mindset:

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. ² Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. ³ Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. ⁴ You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵ But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. (5:1-5)

Christ has set us free who look to Him for redemption. Anyone who thinks that the finished work of Christ upon the Cross is not sufficient for salvation and seeks justification through law, this person, says Paul, has fallen from Grace. We do not work for salvation. Galatians 5:1-5 is quite clear as to how we receive righteousness. In this section of Scripture, Paul states two things about faith. First, he states that by faith we eagerly await the righteousness that is through the Spirit, and second, that what really matters is faith in Christ—a faith that expresses itself through love. In verse 6, Paul is not saying that “works” of love are added as a condition of salvation, but rather, the faith that saves is a faith that issues in love. Paul stresses in this section (5:1-5), as well as the Book as a whole, that salvation is in Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone.

In my fifty-seven years of ministry, I have discovered that the greatest enemies of the faith are not unbelievers, but believers. I still witness, almost daily, the persecution of Christians who are free by the people who desire to remain under bondage. Many within these distinctive churches are brutal in their attack against anyone who advances that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. Just as the religious people opposed Paul, so today, many religious leaders still persecute anyone who dares to teach what the Book of Galatians espouses—justification by faith. It is in Christ alone that one can inherit the promises. Many Christians still fail to understand that the salvation that Paul preached was a salvation by grace through faith. We must put our trust in God through Jesus Christ. For it is only in Him that we can inherit God’s promises and receive God’s grace and obtain freedom from God’s wrath. In the words of Morris, “justification can come about only because of what Christ has done. Therefore to seek it by *law* is to reject God’s way of justification.”¹²

¹²Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul’s Charter of Christian Freedom*, 156.

Freedom from Christ: Not a License for Sinful Behavior

5:13-25

It is not works of law that counts with God, but rather a “faith that expresses itself through love” (5:6). Christians are not to use their freedom in Christ as justification for fulfilling the desires of the flesh (5:13). Our freedom in Christ should never be used as a pretext for self-indulgence. In the words of Stott: “Christian freedom is freedom *from* sin, not freedom *to* sin.”¹³ Paul, after listing numerous works of the flesh, reminds the believers in the various congregations in the province of Galatia: “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires” (5:24). In this section, Paul, instead of dealing with theology (justification by faith), focuses in on ethical behavior that results from obedience to the Gospel, that is to say, trust in Jesus as God’s way of salvation. William Barclay’s comments on Christian freedom and ethical behavior are to the point. He writes with conciseness in this regard:

His theology always ran one danger. When he declared that the end of the reign of law had come and that the reign of grace had arrived, it was always possible for someone to say, “That, then, means that I can do what I like; all the restraints are lifted and I can follow my inclinations wherever they lead me. Law is gone and grace ensures forgiveness anyway.” But to the end of the day there remained for Paul two obligations. (i) One he does not mention here but it is implicit in all his thinking. It is *the obligation to God*. If God loved us like that then the love of Christ constrains us. I cannot soil a life which God paid for with his own life. (ii) There is the *obligation to our fellow men*. We are free, but our freedom loves its neighbour as itself.¹⁴

Unfortunately, today many Christians still put forward the same questions to individuals that the religious leaders presented to Paul concerning grace and sin. Christians, nowadays, as well as in Paul’s day, still feel that salvation by grace alone will lead to a life that is totally void of good works. In other words, the doctrine of grace will open the floodgates to ungodly behavior. But is this so? Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, also calls attention to the same mental philosophy of fear concerning his teaching on grace that is so prevalent among Christians who want to deny salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Listen to him as he sets up a scenario that some seem to have fostered:

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. ⁵ If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the

¹³John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way*, 140.

¹⁴William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 45.

body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—⁷ because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. (Romans 6:1-7)

Paul stresses the fact that Christians are no longer “slaves to sin.” Believers have changed masters—from Satan to Christ. When one is in Christ, his or her freedom is a different type freedom; it is a freedom to serve Christ, not sin. Christians do not seek to gratify the desires of the sinful nature (5:16), but rather, every saint of God who seeks to be “led by the Spirit” (5:18) will deny himself or herself “the acts of the sinful nature” (5:19) It is in this same vein that Paul writes to the Romans:

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. (Romans 6:15-18)

The Christians at Rome obeyed wholeheartedly the teachings of Jesus. An example of the teachings of Jesus can be found in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5—7), as well as the Book of Romans. Many Christians refer to the “form of teaching” (Romans 6:17) to baptism, but the context seems to indicate that Paul is discussing ethical behavior, not baptism. Even when we abstain from the works of the flesh, we still do not merit salvation. Paul discusses this concept of grace versus merit also to the Ephesians:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Christians do “good works,” not to earn salvation, but they do “good works” out of gratitude for God’s gracious love. In Paul’s epistle to Titus, he calls attention to pre-conversion behavior among those who had previously responded to God’s grace. Prior to their conversion to Christ, he addresses their unscrupulous conduct as: “enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures” (Titus 3:3). But this kind of unethical behavior is no longer true with their having experienced conversion. Once more, we should read carefully the words of Paul as he captures the essence of the new behavior resulting from conversion:

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. ⁸ This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God

may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone (3:3-8).

Christians are called upon to “serve one another in love” (5:13). Brothers and sisters in Christ are to be long-suffering with one another, even when individuals get on one’s nerves and needle one to the point of fury. It is in this regard that many Christians would do well to heed the words of Paul: “If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other” (5:15). Today, many Christians are “biting and devouring” one another as so-called defenders of the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). This faith, according to many Christians, is not faith in Jesus, but the orthodoxy of a distinctive group. Since there are over twenty-five distinctive fellowships within the religious body that I grew up in, we should cautiously approach the traditional interpretations handed down from one generation to the next by each distinctive fellowship. In this same Chapter (5), Paul draws attention to the kind of behavior that God demands of His people:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. (5:22-26)

Freedom in Christ does not mean that we can refuse to comply with the Law of God (Romans 3:31). All Christians should, even as Paul, delight in the Law of God (7:22), because the Law of God is “holy, righteous, and good” (7:12). Freedom in Christ concerns one’s relationship with God. In the words of Stott: “It means that our acceptance depends not on our obedience to the law’s demands, but on faith in Jesus Christ who bore the curse of the law when He died.”¹⁵ Thus, for Paul, when individuals love one another, they can say, “The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (5:14). Morris makes the point that “Christians enjoy freedom indeed, but it is the freedom to serve other people in love.”¹⁶ We cannot read this section of Scripture about love without reflection upon the words of Jesus in Matthew 22:37-40. Once more, Morris draws attention to the usefulness of the Law in defining behavior that pleases God: “The rejection of law-keeping as the way of salvation does not alter the fact that the law gives us a useful guide to the way we should live.”¹⁷

JAMES VERSUS PAUL

Even though Christians are justified by grace alone, through faith alone in Jesus Christ, nevertheless, we must involve ourselves in good works, which God ordained that His people perform. We can hardly reflect upon the words of Paul about justification by faith without some reflection upon the words of James: “You see that a person is justified by what he does and not

¹⁵John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way*, 143.

¹⁶Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul’s Charter of Christian Freedom*, 165.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

by faith alone” (2:24). The following chart sets forth the two sections of Scripture that appear on the surface to be in opposition:

Galatians 3:6-12

Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”⁷ Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.⁸ The 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.”⁹ So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.¹⁰ All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.”¹¹ Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, “The righteous will live by faith.”¹² The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, “The man who does these things will live by them.”

James 2:14-25

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?¹⁵ Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.¹⁶ If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.²⁰ You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?²¹ Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?²² You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.²³ And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend.²⁴ You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.²⁵ In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off

in a different direction? ²⁶ As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

These two Scriptures (Galatians 3:6-12 and James 2:14-25), on surface reading, seemingly contradict each other. Needless to say, the contradiction is only apparent, not real. As we encounter the various distinctive fellowships within the Churches of Christ, we quickly observe that expositors of the Word of God often read the New Testament in light of their own cultural experience of salvation by works, not salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Many interpret James 2:14-25 in terms of their own odd fellowship or prevailing cultural religious background. It is not uncommon for believers to read the Holy Scriptures through a pair of spectacles created through the framework of their own thought patterns rather than reading the Scriptures inductively.

James 2:14-25 is cited by many well-meaning Christians in order to nullify Galatians 3:6-12. This remark is not intended to question the integrity of those who undermine the words of Paul in Galatians 2:16. Nevertheless, every believer in Christ must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to the church from the forefathers. Many still confuse a traditional reading of a text with the text itself. The traditional interpretation assigned to James 2:14-25, especially within many Churches of Christ, make it difficult, if not almost impossible, to read the text accurately. The influentially powerful, frequently, have a difficult time of hearing God's Word correctly. Whenever an interpretation of a certain passage becomes normative for a particular fellowship and is passed on as authoritative, we dare not question orthodoxy for fear of excommunication. Tradition frequently stands in the way of our listening anew to the biblical text.

JESUS VERSUS SATAN

Just a casual glance from Matthew's Gospel also reveals a scenario between Jesus and Satan in which a similar situation took place—the pitting of one Scripture against another Scripture. In this scene, which describes the temptation of Jesus, one observes Satan citing a Scripture to Jesus to give so-called validity to his request. Yes, Satan, too, sought to cancel out one Scripture with another Scripture. In the temptation of Jesus, as recorded by Matthew (4:1-11), we observe Satan's use of Psalm 91:11-12. But his application of this Scripture made the psalmist say something that he certainly did not say. Satan's handling of Psalm 91:11-12 contradicts Deuteronomy 6:16. Satan sets one Scripture against another, but Jesus corrected his misapplication. Even today, many churches practice this same strategy of invalidating one Scripture with another Scripture. But this practice of misapplication of biblical texts is on a much larger scale within the various churches scattered throughout the world, not just the fellowship that I grew up in. Scriptures are frequently cited in such a way that it makes the Bible say what it does not say. The traditional interpretation of James 2:14-25 can be clarified by comparing other pertinent passages. One should never press into a passage a thought that contradicts another passage.

Unraveling the Apparent Discrepancies Between James and Paul

As we seek to unravel the apparent contradiction between Paul and James, we must bear in mind that Paul and James do not stand face-to-face but rather back-to-back. In other words, they are fighting different enemies, not each other. Paul talks about the “root” of faith, but James, on the other hand, talks about the “fruit” of faith. One Scripture is dealing with legalism and the other Scripture is dealing with antinomianism (without law). When James writes about works, he writes about works of faith, not works of Law. The faith that saves is the faith that produces works. As we carefully read these two books—Romans and James—we quickly observe that both James and Paul stress that Christianity must be ethically demonstrated. Paul places emphasis upon grace and faith in the initial act of justification, but James, on the other hand, stresses action and works after our justification by grace alone through faith alone in the finished work of Christ upon the cross. We can summarize both Paul and James by saying that it is faith alone that justifies, but the faith that justifies is not alone. Dynamic faith involves the whole man. The faith that saves will produce good works.

In the words of William Barclay, “The fact is that no man can be saved by works; but equally no man can be saved without producing works.”¹⁸ Vernon McGee is also helpful in his comments: “James is not talking about the works of the Law. He simply says that the faith which saves you will produce works, works of faith. The faith that James is talking about here is professing faith, that which is phony and counterfeit.”¹⁹ On the one hand, Paul speaks of saving faith: “a man is not justified by observing 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 observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified” (Galatians 2:16). Yet, on the other hand, Paul writes about works, in this same epistle, in the life of one who is put right with God through faith in Jesus: “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (6:9). Earlier in Galatians, Paul also wrote about the works of the flesh and the consequences of such unethical behavior:

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions²¹ 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. (5:19-21)

Paul illustrates the positive aspects of good works in the life of every believer:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus

¹⁸William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, The Daily Study Bible Series, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 74.

¹⁹J. Vernon McGee, “James” in *Through the Bible: First Corinthians Through Revelation*, Volume 5 (Nashville: Nelson, 1983), 649.

have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. (5:22-25)

Both Paul and James taught that faith must be a working faith. Again, McGee correctly states: “Now James deals with the identification of faith. Saving faith can be recognized and identified by certain spiritual fingerprints.”²⁰ The following citation from Barclay is worth citing, which illustrates the preceding comments with pungent clarity:

What James is arguing against is the first kind of belief, the acceptance of a fact without allowing it to have any influence upon life. The devils are intellectually convinced of the existence of God; they, in fact, tremble before him; but their belief does not alter them in the slightest. What Paul held was the second kind of belief. For him to believe in Jesus meant to take that belief into every section of life and to live by it.

It is easy to pervert Paulinism and to emasculate *believe* of all effective meaning; and it is not really Paulinism but a misunderstood form of it that James condemns. He is condemning profession without practice and with that condemnation Paul would have entirely agreed.

(iii) Even allowing for that, there is still a difference between James and Paul—they *begin at different times in the Christian life*. Paul begins *at the very beginning*. He insists that no man can ever earn the forgiveness of God. The initial step must come from the free grace of God; a man can only accept the forgiveness which God offers him in Jesus Christ.

James begins much later *with the professing Christian*, the man who claims to be already forgiven and in a new relationship with God. Such a man, James rightly says, must live a new life for he is a new creature. He has been *justified*; he must now show that he is *sanctified*. With that Paul would have entirely agreed.

The fact is that no man can be saved by works; but equally no man can be saved without producing works. By far the best analogy is that of a great human love. He who is loved is certain that he does not deserve to be loved; but he is also certain that he must spend his life trying to be worthy of that love.

The difference between James and Paul is a difference of starting-point. Paul starts with the great basic fact of the forgiveness of God which no man can earn or deserve; James starts with the professing Christian and insists that a man must prove, his Christianity by his deeds. We are not saved by deeds; we are saved for deeds; these are the twin truths of the Christian life. Paul’s emphasis is on the first and James’ is on the second. In fact they do not contradict but complement each other; and the message of both is essential to the Christian faith in its fullest form.²¹

As we seek to unravel the common twisting of James 2:14-25, it is advantageous to add the thoughts of many others in analyzing this pericope that is so frequently misapplied in order to uphold a denial of Paul’s affirmation about salvation by faith apart from works of Law. Once more, Warren W. Wiersbe, another witness, is to the point when he writes: “Any declaration of faith that does not result in a changed life and good works is a false declaration. That kind of faith is dead.”²² Kent Hughes is also on target when he writes:

²⁰Ibid., 650.

²¹William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, 73, 74.

²²Warren W. Wiersbe, “James” in *The Bible Exposition Commentary: An Exposition of the New Testament Comprising the Entire “Be” Series* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1989), 354.

What about works? We may ask. The answer was given by Christ to some good-deeds Jews: “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent” (John 6:29). The unregenerate heart thinks of works first as it desires salvation. But Jesus says the first “work” is to believe. After this, a true faith works and works and works and works.”²³

Again, Hughes goes right to the heart of the matter when he writes: “Paul’s teaching about faith and works focuses on the time *before* conversion, and James’ focus is *after* conversion.”²⁴ As we reflect upon the entire Book of Galatians, we discover that it is not a case of either faith or works, but rather it is a case of both faith and works in the scheme of redemption. But, on the other hand, faith is the channel by which God imputes His righteousness. This righteousness is not received from God through works, but through faith. To rephrase the preceding thoughts again, we can say that we are not saved *by* works but *for* works. In the Book of Ephesians, Paul expresses this concept:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

As stated above, faith involves the whole man. Paul in writing to Titus also expresses this same truth about salvation and works. He writes about God’s grace and its implications in the lives of God’s people:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹² It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. ¹⁵ These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you. (Titus 2:9-15)

Paul immediately encourages Titus to remind the people to do what is good. But, at the same time, Paul was also careful to state how we are put in a right relationship with God. Listen once more to Paul as he develops his thoughts to Titus:

Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, ² to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men. ³ At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. ⁸ This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may

²³R. Kent Hughes, *James: Faith that Works* (Illinois: Crossway Books, 1991), 112.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 108.

be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. (3:1-8)

CHAPTER SIX

A Man Reaps What He Sows

6:7-10

As we reach the conclusion of Paul's letter to the Galatians, one observes that he stresses the ethical implications resulting from salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. In Chapter 5, he condemns the works of the flesh and advocates works of the Spirit if one wishes eternal life. In his final remarks (Chapter 6), he again issues a warning about ungodly behavior and, at the same time, encourages all believers to do good works:

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ⁸ The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. ⁹ Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. ¹⁰ 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)

CONCLUSION

The Book of Galatians is Christocentric, that is to say Christ centered. In this short Epistle, Paul answers the question: How can we be justified and acceptable before a holy God? Paul responds by saying that God accomplished this marvelous feat through the Cross of Christ. For Paul salvation is only possible through the Atoning Death of our Lord Jesus Christ. From beginning to end, this Epistle is full of the Cross of Christ. Christ has accomplished all that is necessary for our salvation. We are not justified by works, but rather through faith in Jesus (Galatians 2:16). Nothing can be added to the work of Christ. If we could be saved through our own merits (law keeping), then Christ died for nothing (2:21). Salvation is a free gift, and we can add nothing to it. Thus, Paul vehemently advances salvation by faith alone. Thus, for Paul, the Galatians belonged to the "family of believers" (6:10).

Paul refused to tolerate any system that undermines the "truth of the Gospel." Faith is the factor that unites us with God's community, not a perfect understanding of the Bible. In the final phase of this Book, Paul calls attention to how every individual becomes a child of God: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (3:26). Paul refuses to put up with any teaching that is contrary or inconsistent with faith as the means of justification. In another epistle (Romans), Paul tells the Romans that the Righteousness that comes from God begins with faith and ends with faith (Romans 1:16-17). Paul even took Peter to task when he withdrew table-fellowship from the uncircumcised Gentile believers.

It is not uncommon for Christians, even today, to withdraw fellowship from other believers over the manner of distribution of the bread in the Lord's Supper, the number of

containers used to distribute the fruit of the vine, the employment of the class method of conducting Bible studies, kitchens in church buildings, the distribution of funds collected on Sunday morning, the support of Bible colleges or universities from monies collected on Sunday morning, whether one can or cannot employ an instrument in praise to God during a so-called worship service, and so on. For many, within the Churches of Christ, it is faith plus the correct interpretation upon certain Scriptures that coincides with the status quo of a particular party.

Finally, Paul addresses the subject of holiness after justification by faith. Evidently, there were some who put forth the belief that if we are saved by grace then it does not matter how we live. But in response to this philosophy, Paul says that it does matter. Even though we have been freed from the Law as a means of justification, still we are not free to break the Law. Paul expresses it this way:

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. ¹⁴ The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵ If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. (Galatians 5:13-15)

God's people are to seek to "live by the Spirit" (5:16), and to be "led by the Spirit" (5:18). Paul encourages every believer to "keep in step with the Spirit" (5:25). God wants His children to bear fruit that is pleasing to Himself (5:22-25). Having said all this, nevertheless, he still closed this Epistle with reference to salvation that is made available in and through Jesus Christ by His Cross. The last words of this Epistle read: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen" (6:18). The answer to salvation can be nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.