

**Know the Word**  
**Galatians (Chapters 1 – 4)**  
**(6<sup>th</sup> November 2011)**

**CHAPTER 1**

**Chapter 1:1-5**

Greetings:

Paul greets the churches of Galatia, emphasizing the divine source of his apostolic mission and message.

v1 “Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— “

– “apostle” – one sent on a mission with full authority of representation: an ambassador.

– “sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ *and God the Father*” – his commission was received directly, without mediation, from Jesus Christ and God the Father.

The occasion of his receiving it was his Damascus-road experience (Acts 9:15, 16).

– “*who raised him from the dead*” – God the Father is the One who raised Christ from the dead (Rom 4:17; 2 Cor 1:9). Christ is resurrected.

v3 “*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,*”

– “*grace and peace*” – “grace” is God’s unmerited favour, decisively expressed in the saving work of Christ; “peace” is the state of life – peace with God (Rom 5:1) and peace with one another (Eph 2:14-18) – enjoyed by those who have effectively experienced the divine grace (5:22).

v4 “*who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,*”

– The saving work of Christ on the cross is central to the gospel Paul is preaching and therefore shows up here at the very beginning of the letter.

– *who gave Himself for our sins*” – the death of Jesus Christ was a sacrifice for sins. He bore in His righteous person the curse or judgment which our sins deserve.

– “*according to the will of our God and Father*” – it is God the Father who sent His Son to redeem us (4:4-5) who raised Him from the dead (1:1) and whose will has been fulfilled through all that has been done for our redemption (1:4).

- “*from the present evil age*” – Paul reminds his readers that Christ’s redemption brings in a new age as the fulfillment of God’s promises.

Paul draws a sharp distinction between the times before and after the coming of Christ – Appendix I.

### Chapter 1:6-10

Paul expresses his astonishment (v6) at how quickly the Galatian believers are turning away from the gospel they received from him and turning to a different gospel.

He calls on a solemn curse on any one who brings a counterfeit gospel.

v6 *“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—”*

In describing the Galatians’ lapse, Paul is red hot over the situation and uses the language of military desertion and political strife (v7).

v7 *“Evidently, some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.”*

**Qn:** Who are these “some” people throwing the Galatians into confusion and trying to pervert the gospel of Christ?

In 5:12, Paul calls them “agitators” – people who subvert the Galatians, undermining their faith in Christ, but their identity is not immediately apparent. Paul always refers to them in the third person.

Other details:-

- Jews (5:2-12; 6:12-13), generally referred to by scholars as the “Judaizers” – Jews who believe conversion to Christ also involve a further conversion to their form of Judaism.
- Jews who claim to believe in the gospel (2:4-5).
- Claim that what Paul taught the Galatians was inadequate and offer the “complete gospel” – a different gospel which is really no gospel at all (1:6, 7).
- Paul calls them the “*circumcision group*” (2:12) because of their demand on the Gentile believers to add circumcision and the observances of the Jewish law to the cross of Christ in order to become full members in the new covenant community.
- Paul also calls them “false brothers” (2:4) because they oppose the “truth of the gospel” (2:5), confuse the Galatian converts (1:5, 7, 10), “pervert the gospel of Christ” (1:7), and “bewitch” them (3:1).
- Discredit Paul’s calling and cast doubt on his apostolic credentials.

- In 6:12, 13, Paul highlights 4 problems with them:-

- |       |        |   |                             |
|-------|--------|---|-----------------------------|
| (i)   | v12(a) | <i>“trying to compel you to be circumcised”</i>                                       | their method is force       |
| (ii)  | v12(b) | <i>“the only reason they do is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ”</i> | their motive is fear        |
| (iii) | v13(a) | <i>“Not even those who are circumcised obey the law...”</i>                           | their consistency is flawed |
| (iv)  | v13(b) | <i>“they may boast about your flesh”</i>  | their goal is to flaunt     |

v6/7 The Galatians are deserting the One *“who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel ... which is no gospel at all”*

**Qn:** What is this different gospel?

The Judaizers claim that what Paul taught the Galatians was inadequate and offer the *“complete gospel”*, they oppose Paul’s gospel as antinomian (“against law”), believing that in addition to God’s work in Christ, gentile Christians needed to observe the Mosaic law, particularly circumcision (2:3; 5:2-3; 5:6-8; 6:12) and Jewish food laws regulating not only what was kosher but apparently also with whom one was permitted to eat (2:11-14) and other Mosaic ceremonies eg Jewish holidays.

v7 *“Some people are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.”*

**Qn:** What does Paul mean by the *“gospel of Christ”*?

- A gospel of grace (v6, 2:21); not by works (2:16).
- A gospel inextricably connected with Jesus’ death for our sins ie for the forgiveness of our sins (1:4) and His resurrection (v1). The gospel is Christ crucified – His finished work on the cross (3:1).
- A gospel announcing that Jesus is Lord of all (v3).
- A gospel appropriated by faith in Jesus Christ – justification by faith alone (2:16, 21; 3:11).
- Origin: Not something that man made up, rather Paul received it by revelation from Jesus Christ (1:11-17).
- A gospel that is open as much to Gentiles as it is to Jews (3:7, 8, 14).

v8, 9 *“... let him be eternally condemned”*

Paul invokes a curse on anyone (including himself) who distorts the gospel.

**Qn:** For Paul, the conflict between the gospel which he preaches and the teaching of the Judaizers is a life-and-death struggle. Why?

- There is a 'different gospel' which is really no gospel at all (v7) and does not bring one into right relationship with God (2:16; 3:3) but put the souls of men and women in jeopardy – "*alienated from Christ*" (5:4), to rejection of God's grace (2:21), to a life of legalistic bondage (4:9, 5:1), to the curse of death (3:10-13).

Paul says anyone who does this – let him "*be eternally condemned*" – cursed (anathema). Paul is invoking God's final damnation and wrath on those who distort the gospel of grace in Christ. This shows how serious the matter was.

v10 "*Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.*"

Apparently, Paul's opponents are accusing him of adapting his practice and preaching to please his audience from one time or place to another.

Paul insists that his concern is to please God, otherwise, he could no longer be regarded as Christ's servant. In any case, the very fact that he has pronounced a curse on anyone who perverts the gospel of Christ shows that his actions are hardly driven by a desire to please men.

### Chapter 1:11-24

Paul begins an autobiographical sketch of himself, reviewing his early training in Judaism (v13, 14), his persecution of the church (v13), the radical change wrought in him through his personal encounter (v16) with Christ (on the Damascus road) and his immediate obedience to the commission then laid on him to preach Christ among the Gentiles (v16/17).

This first section is Paul's vindication of his gospel and its origins, and Paul's apostolic authority.

v11-12 "*... the gospel I preached is not something that man made up.*" "*I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it*" - clearly the gospel he preaches does not have a human origin. Rather, Paul received it "*by revelation from Jesus Christ*" which may mean Christ was the source of the revelation or, Christ Himself was revealed to him (see v16).

v13-2:1-10 Paul argues that the gospel which he preaches, together with his commission to preach it, was received by him directly from the risen Christ (v11, 12) without any intermediary:-

- (i) v13-16 he is independent of human teaching
- (ii) v21-24 he is independent of the major churches in Judea
- (iii) 1:17-20, he is independent from the leading authorities in  
2:1-10 Jerusalem itself, the so-called “*pillar apostles*” (2:9) and Peter himself (2:11-21).

(i) He is independent of human teaching (v13-16)

v13-14 *“<sup>13</sup> For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. <sup>14</sup> I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.”*

Paul begins his argument with an autobiographical sketch of himself – his former way of life in Judaism about which the Galatians “*have heard*” (v13). He emphasizes his “*advancing*” (his progress) in Judaism “*beyond many Jews of my own age*” (v14) and how zealous he was “*for the traditions of my fathers*” (v14).

*“traditions of my fathers” – “traditions orally transmitted from previous generations and contrasted with the written law of Moses” – TNIV Study Bible.*

The consequence of that progress and zeal, however was his persecution of the church of God and his efforts to destroy it (v13).

v15-16a *“But when God who set me apart from birth and called me... was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach him among the gentiles, ...”*

- This strong emphasis on God’s sovereign and gracious initiative is meant to leave no doubt whatever about the divine origin of the gospel Paul preaches.
- The preposition “in” him emphasizes that:
  - the revelation is not just given to Paul but found in him;
  - this means Paul’s life and work are a revelation of who God is.
  - Paul’s transformed life bears testimony to God’s grace.

v16b *“I did not consult any man”* – independent of human teaching.

(ii) He is independent of the major churches of Judea (v21-24)

v21 to 24 *“Later I went to Syria and Cilicia... I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea...”*

- Paul was unknown to them
- But they heard good reports about his conversion and good works.  
“The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith...”
- They praised God because of Paul

(iii) He is independent of the leading authorities in Jerusalem (v17-20; 2:1-10)

(a) 1:17-20

“nor did I go to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles”(v17) “Then after 3 years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted...”(v18) “I saw none of the apostles – only James...”(v19)

Here he is claiming that the Jerusalem leaders had not instructed him because:-

- He had already begun to preach the gospel before even he met the leaders (v16b; v17).
- His only meeting was a private one 3 years after the start of his ministry (1:18, 19) when he stayed with Peter for 15 days, seeing only James – too short a time for them to impart much in the way of instruction.
- Many years elapsed before he had an opportunity of setting his gospel before them (2:2) and when he did so, they acknowledged it to be the valid gospel for the Gentiles, to whom God had sent him to preach (1:16; 2:2-10).
- In v20, Paul goes so far as to give an oath that what he is writing is true.

**The point made:**

The gospel Paul preached is the true gospel because it did not originate with man. It was the risen Christ who gave it to Paul to preach.

(b) **Chapter 2:1-10**

Paul recounts his second visit to Jerusalem 14 years later. Although independent even of the leaders in Jerusalem, his gospel is no different from theirs.

v1-3 Titus – Paul’s second travel companion. “Yet not even Titus, who was with me, ... was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek.”

**Qn:** (2:1-3) What is the thrust of Paul’s argument here?

If God had chosen and was using Titus – an uncircumcised Gentile, then certainly no circumcision was required for Gentile converts to join the people of God, especially since the “pillars” of Jerusalem did not demand Titus’s circumcision.

v4 “to make us slaves” – Paul regards the imposition of circumcision on gentile Christians as a slavery in denial of the freedom Christ has given.

v6-10 How did the Jerusalem pillars (James, Peter and John) respond to Paul’s gospel?

- v6 “those men added nothing new to my message”
- v7 “On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted” – far from adding anything to Paul’s gospel, they acknowledged it as the gospel for the Gentiles for which Paul had been entrusted.
- v8-9 they officially recognize Paul’s special calling. “The right hand of fellowship” v9 – they officially agreed with Paul’s message. “For God was at work in the ministry of Peter... was also at work in my ministry” – a remarkable parallel is drawn between Paul’s divinely empowered mission to the Gentiles and Peter’s to the Jews – a parallel discerned not only by Paul but also (it appears) by the leaders.

“The grace” given to Paul is his apostleship to the Gentiles (1:16; 2:7).

- v10 they simply asked Paul to remember his roots by working strenuously for the relief of the poor.

**The points made (2:1-10):** Paul’s second visit to Jerusalem was to ensure that there were no misrepresentations among the Jerusalem leaders as to what he is preaching. He is taking steps to ensure that he is not running his race in vain (2:2); his opponents are trying to undo his work.

## Chapter 2:11-14

Paul rebuked Peter at Antioch – this event which Paul musters for his case is one of the strongest confrontations in the Bible.

v11-12 “Before certain men came from James, he (Peter) used to eat with the Gentiles”, but now he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles.

**Qn:** Why did Paul rebuke Peter for drawing back and separate himself from the Gentiles?

- v11 Because “he (Peter) was clearly in the wrong” – by the inconsistency of his (Peter’s) own conduct – a virtual denial of the gospel which

both he and Paul preached; the gospel which makes no distinction between believers in Christ, whether Jews or Gentiles (3:28).

- v12 Because “*he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group*” – Peter acted out of fear, not of inner conviction.
- v13 Because “*The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy... even Barnabas was led astray*”
  - “hypocrisy” – play acting
  - that Barnabas should have been “led astray” with the others to join this charade of separate tables was for Paul the last straw.
- v14 Because “*they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel*”.

What is at stake was “*the truth of the gospel*”. For Paul, freedom of the Gentile believers was endangered by Peter’s action which implicitly lent support to the opponents’ case that faith in Christ alone was insufficient and must be supplemented by something else – a measure of conformity to Jewish law or custom and thereby effectively demonstrating a different gospel by his behaviour.

**The points made (2:11-14):**

This incident illustrates Paul’s authority as an apostle because he could rebuke Peter, a recognized apostle and one of the Jerusalem pillars (2:9). Paul’s concern is the advance of the gospel, not his own public vindication.

## Chapter 2:15-21

Paul now goes on to explain that Peter’s conduct was inconsistent with his principles. He demonstrates that the gospel of Christ is a gospel in which both Jews and Gentiles are justified by grace through faith alone in the finished work of Christ on the cross. (Some debate however whether this segment (2:15-21) is a summary of Paul’s words to Peter or whether the apostle has begun to address the Galatians directly.)

- v15/16 “*we who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners know that a man is not justified by observing the law...*”. Paul points out that he and Peter, along with other believers of Jewish birth, by placing their faith in Jesus Christ, had acknowledged that the law was unable to make them right with God.
- v16 The threefold occurrences of “*justified by faith in Jesus Christ and not by observing the law*” is striking.
- “*justified by faith*” – justification is central to the Christian faith. To be “justified” is to be declared not guilty ie to be declared innocent or righteous.

It refers to God's grace by which He puts a sinner right with Himself, not only acquitting him but accepting him as righteous.

*"By faith"* – intellectual conviction plus personal commitment to Christ. From ch 5:13-6:10 (and from Rom 6-8 etc), it is clear that Paul regards an obedient life (faithfulness) as inseparable from the faith that justifies.

*"Faith is complete trust and complete surrender to Jesus Christ. It is the total acceptance of all that He said, of all that He offered, and of all that He is"*

*William Barclay*

*"not by observing the law"* *"Observing the law"* – acts done in obedience to the Mosaic law (eg circumcision) and include any human effort to be justified by God by obeying a moral law.

v17 *"If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not!"*

**Qn:** "Does Christ promote sin"?

Paul denies that the abandonment of Jewish observances makes the gospel of Christ an instrument of sin. His opponents appear to argue that if one can be accepted through trusting in Christ without any necessity to observe the law, then Paul is actually encouraging the people to break the law.

Paul's answer – *"Absolutely not!"*

v18 *"If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a law breaker"* – this has been differently understood. Could refer to one of several specific situations:

- (i) It could refer to Peter rebuilding the social partitions between Jews and gentiles when he withdrew from open table fellowship, even though he had previously destroyed it when he turned away from Judaism to Christ;
- (ii) It could refer to Paul preaching the gospel which he had once tried to destroy (1:23);

v19 *"For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God"* – Paul asserts that it is the law itself, paradoxically that led him to this course of action of living for God. This means that the law itself points to its own obsolescence and that the gospel is anticipated by the law.

v20 *“have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*

The radical nature of the transformation is such that Paul can say that his former existence came to an end with the crucifixion of Christ. (See also 5:24; 6:14). In fact, this new life in Christ is nothing less than the risen Christ living His life in the believer. The dying and the rising to life again take place through union with Christ.

v21 *“I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”*

If the Judaizers were right – if we could be righteous in God’s sight by observing the law – there would be no need for grace, and the death of Christ as a sacrifice for our sins would be totally unnecessary.

**The points made (2:15-21):**

- Law – no one is justified by observing the law.
- Christ – Jews and gentiles are justified by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ (who brought law observance to an end).
- A believer’s new life in Christ is nothing less than the risen Christ living His life in the believer.

**Chapter 3:1-29**

The agitators are Jewish. Paul needs to deal with Scripture and prove that the gospel Paul preached is anticipated in Scripture. His theological defence of the gospel is found in chs 3 and 4 in which he asserts that being justified, receiving the Spirit and becoming children of Abraham and of God are the blessings given to those who have faith in Christ. Christ’s role is central – having brought the time of the law to an end, He has ushered in the time of faith.

Ch 3 may be divided into:

- (a) Ch 3:1-5 – The Galatians’ own experience of the Holy Spirit;
- (b) Ch 3:6-9 – The Abrahamic promise;
- (c) Ch 3:10-25 – The relationship between the promise and the law:
  - (i) the curse of the law (3:10-14)
  - (ii) the priority and permanence of the promise (3:15-18)
  - (iii) the purpose of the law (3:19-20)
  - (iv) the law is not opposed to the promise (3:21-22)
  - (v) liberation from the law (3:23-25)
- (d) Ch 3:26-29 (4:1-7) – Through faith in Christ, believers, whether Jews or gentiles, are God’s sons and being sons, they have the Holy Spirit.

## Chapter 3:1-5

### The Galatians' own experience of the Holy Spirit

v1 “*You foolish Galatians!*” – Their turning away from the gospel was not only a kind of spiritual treason (1:6), but the height of folly being illogical in succumbing to the Judaizers' teachings.

“*Who has bewitched you?*” – i.e. Who has cast a spell over you?

“*Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified*” – the proclamation of Jesus Christ and Him crucified – Christ's death “*who gave Himself for our sins*” (1:3) is central to Paul's gospel.

v2 “*I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?*”

- Paul is not asking whether they have received the Holy Spirit – he assumes they have received; here he is asking how they received the Spirit – whether by observing the law or by faith. This is the critical issue – the “one thing” Paul would like to learn.

**Qn:** For Paul, why is the Galatians' experience of receiving the Holy Spirit so critical to his argument?

- Receiving the Spirit is the identifying characteristic of those who through faith truly belong to Jesus. To be a believer is to be indwelt by the Spirit, and those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God (Rom 8:9-17). If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ (Rom 8:9).
- The Spirit is the promise of the new covenant that the law looked forward to (cf Eze 36:24-30; Jer 31:31-34).
- Faith brings the blessing of Abraham, and this blessing is the “*promise of the Spirit*” (3:14). Later Paul would say that “*Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out “Abba Father”*” (4:6).
- He reminded them that the receiving of the Holy Spirit was irrefutable proof that they were already members of God's people and needed no additional qualification.

v3 “*After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort*” – both salvation and sanctification are the work of the Holy Spirit. “*Human effort*” or “*flesh*” (in other translation) – human nature in its unregenerate weakness.

- v4 the question on persecution “*Have you suffered so much for nothing...*” ie had they converted to Judaism immediately, they would not have experienced the persecution they had for converting to Christ.
- v5 “*Does God give you His Spirit and work miracles...*” – Paul is appealing to the Galatians’ experience: their acceptance of the gospel as Paul preached it was in fact followed by miraculous signs, whereas presumably nothing of that sort accompanied the activity of the agitators.

**The point made: (3:1-5)**

Paul points to the Galatians’ own experience of receiving the Holy Spirit because of their faith in Christ and contends that if this is the “one thing”, all else becomes unimportant by comparison.

**3:6-9 – The Abrahamic Promise**

Paul’s argument from experience (3:1-5) now gives way to his arguments from Scripture. He refers to Abraham (his opponents looked to Moses) and contends that Abraham’s true heirs are those, who like Abraham, have faith in Christ Jesus.

- v6 “*Consider Abraham: “he believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness”*”. Paul quotes Gen 15:6 and argues that Abraham received a righteous standing before God – not by observing the law but by faith (“He believed”). He was not justified because he had been circumcised, or because he had kept the law (for neither circumcision nor the law had yet been given), but simply because he believed God regarding God’s promise that he would be a father of many nations (Gen 15:6; Roms 4:18-22).
- v7, 9 “*Those who believe are the children of Abraham*” – both verses 7 and 9 affirm that the true children of Abraham (who inherit the blessing promised to his seed ie Christ (v16)) are not his descendents by physical descent, ie the Jews, but his spiritual progeny, ie believers (Jews and gentiles) who share his faith.
- v8/9 “*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. Those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham.”*”
- Scripture records the promise of God, which conveyed to Abraham the good news that all nations (gentiles) would be blessed through him (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18).
  - All who have faith are justified as Abraham was. They are Abraham’s children and blessed along with him.
  - It was God’s intention all along to include the gentiles.

**The point made (3:6-9):**

- If Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness, then the true children of Abraham would also be those who believe God.
- It was God's intention all along to include the gentiles.

**Chapter 3:10-25 The relationship between the law and the promise**

**Chapter 3:10-14 – The curse of the law**

Having identified the nature of God's relationship to Abraham (v6-9), Paul now goes on to establish that righteousness must come through faith in Christ, not by observing the law. The law is not based on faith, but on doing, which is also a curse because it excludes people from living by faith.

v10-11      *"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." – those who refuse God's offer of grace and insist on pursuing righteousness through legal works.*

**Qn:** Why is the curse incurred by all who rely on observing the law – ie those who rely on legal works for justification.

- v10      *"... cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written...in the Book of the Law"*
  - Because no one under the law perfectly keeps the law. The obligation is nothing less than keeping the whole law (5:3).
  - Paul might also be saying that even for someone who does persevere in doing all things written in the Book of law, justification is not thereby assured.

*"Here pre-eminently, Paul's thinking is dominated by the logic of his own conversion experience. In the attempt to establish his own righteousness (Rom 10:3), Paul's achievement was greater than that of many. "As for legalistic righteousness, faultless" (Phil 3:6b). "Faultless" meaning "blameless", yet it was not on this ground that he was justified before God, but justified because of the righteousness "that comes from God and is by faith in Christ" (Phil 3:9)".*

FF Bruce

- v11      *"Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because the righteous will live by faith" (Hab 2:4)*

Paul argues that one cannot in any case be justified by the law. The law was never given to impart life or to give salvation nor could it do so (v21). *"The*

*righteous will live by faith*” – it is the one who is righteous by faith (not the one who perseveres in doing the whole law) that will find life.

v12 “*The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, “The person who does these things will live by them.”*”

The law, Paul argues, is not of faith but by doing; the law demands “performance”. He quotes Lev 18:5 “*The man who does these things (ie the law) will live by them*”. “Faith” and “does” are contrasted to show the law is not a system of faith. It is a system of “doing” which excludes people from living by faith.

*“Those who opt for the law are cursed because they are choosing to omit the salvation that can come only through faith in Christ.”*

Scot McKnight

v13-14a “*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”*” Paul’s argument is further refined by this quotation from Deu 21:23. His point is that Christ, by His death, redeemed us from the curse. He died the death of a transgressor (this is the point of quoting Deu 21:23) and in so doing He becomes the transgressor. The curse was transferred from us to Him.

The word “redeemed” is drawn from the commercial world and describes “*purchasing things*”, “*buying back a captive*”, “*liberating a slave through a ransom payment*”.

v14 “*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 substance of the “blessing given to Abraham” is the gift of the Spirit to those who are justified through faith in Jesus Christ.

**The points made (3:10-14):**

- All who rely on observing the law are under a curse.
- Christ was cursed through being crucified. That lifted the curse.
- Christ redeemed us from the curse. This is appropriated by faith.
- The substance of the “*blessing given to Abraham*” is the gift of the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ.
- This is appropriated by faith, not by doing the law.

**Chapter 3:15-18**

The priority and permanence of the promise (3:15-18).

v15 *“Brothers and sisters, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case.”*

- A human covenant cannot be set aside arbitrarily.

v16 *“The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed... meaning one person, who is Christ”* – the seed of Abraham does not refer to the Israelites, Abraham’s physical descendants but to Christ. In Him, the promise is fulfilled. (In v29, Paul would clarify that all those who are in Christ are also Abraham’s seed.)

v17 *“What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise”*

The law introduced 430 years later (this refers not to the time between Abraham and Moses, but to the duration of their stay in Egypt) does not annul or weaken the promise

v18 *“For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.”*

The promise is not dependent on the law. It was given by God out of His grace. An “inheritance” by definition is something granted, not worked for, as proven in Abraham’s case.

**The points made (3:15-18):**

God’s promise to Abraham cannot be set aside by the law:-

- A covenant cannot be revised or annulled (v15)
- The promise is made to Abraham and to his seed, meaning one person, who is Christ. In Christ is the promise fulfilled. (v16)
- The promise is not dependent on the law (v18)
- God gave the promise out of His grace (v18).

**Chapter 3:19-20 – The purpose of the law**

Having argued negatively about the law, Paul must now explain how the law fits into God’s purpose.

v19 *“What, then, was the purpose of the law?” Paul’s answer – “It was added because of transgression until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.”*

- *“it was added”* – not the original covenant.
- *“because of transgression”* – the law was intended to restrain sin, or more probably, to bring transgressions to light ie to reveal sin.

- “until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come” – the law was to remain in force until the coming of Christ. Here is Paul’s most radical statement: that the law was given to govern God’s people for only a certain number of years. (This is repeated in greater detail in v23-25).

v19(d)/20 Paul speaks about the circumstances of the giving of the law. The law had a dual mediation: angels stood between the people and God and so did Moses – the “mediator”. But in making His promise to Abraham, God acted unilaterally without any human intervention nor human mediation.

*“The apostle is probably emphasizing the inferiority of the law to the gospel”*  
John Stott.

*“God is One”* – the One God is God of Jews and Gentiles (Rom 3:29). It is fitting that He should provide one way of salvation for both – the way of faith.

**The points made (3:19-20):**

The Law’s purpose:-

- *“It was added”* – not the original covenant.
- *“Because of transgression”* – to restrain sin or to bring transgressions to light.
- *“Until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come”* – the law was given for a period, until the coming of the Seed, Christ.

**Chapter 3:21-22 – Is the law opposed to the promise?**

v21

Having established that the law was given to reveal sin and only for a limited time, he must now ask another question: “Is the law therefore opposed to the promises of God?”

His answer: “Absolutely not!”:-

- v21 *“For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.”*

The inability of the law to impart life. In itself, the law cannot save.

- v22 *“But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin”* – the law declares we are all the prisoners of sin, it holds every sinner in prison for his sins, in order *“that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe”*

**The points made (3:21-22):**

- The law is not opposed to the promise.
- The law declares us as prisoners of sin.
- If there were a human way to righteousness, it would be through the law but this is impossible .

**Chapter 3:23-25 – Liberation from the law**

Paul uses 2 images in which the law is likened first to a prison, in which we were held captive, and then to a tutor, whose discipline was harsh and severe. The law is meant to lead us to Christ for deliverance.

v23/24      “... *we were held prisoners by the law*” – to be a prisoner of sin (v22) and a prisoner of law (v23) amounts to much the same, because law reveals and stimulates sin.

“*locked up until faith should be revealed*” – the words “locked up” means to be kept under restraint, to “hem in” or “confine”.

“*So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ*”. Rather than contradicting the promise, the law served God’s purposes. The law is a disciplinarian (a “pedagogue”) who was put in charge to lead us to Christ.

v25      “*Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law*” – now that Christ has come, this supervisory function of the law is no longer needed.

**The points made (3:23-25):**

- The law’s interim role is largely negative as it relates to sin (v23).
  - Declaring us sinners
  - Holding us as prisoners of sin
- The law as our disciplinarian was put in charge to lead us to Christ for deliverance (v24).
- Now that Christ has come, this supervisory function of the law is over (v25).

**Chapter 3:26-29 – Sons of God**

Jews and Gentiles are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Here, Paul stresses the believers’ oneness in Christ and their union with Christ (3:26-29). The theme of sonship is further expanded in 4:1-7.

Essentially, Paul’s argument from sonship runs as follows:-

- v3:26; 4:6 – Faith in Christ makes a person, Jew or gentile, a “*son of God*” (3:26; 4:6).

- v27 – “... for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ”. Faith secures the union; and baptism sacramentally seals it. Thus in Christ, by faith inwardly (v26) and baptism outwardly, believers are all sons of God.
- v28 – “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

There is no “difference” – all distinctions of race, social position and gender are rendered irrelevant (Rom 10:5). Faith in Christ obliterates the distinction and puts every believer on the one and the same footing before God. All are “one” in Christ.

- v29 – “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs...” – Paul concludes with an implication of being a son of God. Since believers are “in Christ” and since Christ is the Seed of Abraham (v19), then it follows that believers are also Abraham’s seed. And if they are Abraham’s seed, then they also heirs – inheriting the promise made to Abraham – a relationship with God that entails His blessing.

**The points made (3:26-29):**

Sons of God:

- Through faith in Christ Jesus
- Distinctions eradicated for the one qualifying factor in God’s family is through faith in Christ.

**Chapter 4:1-7**

This is part of the conclusion to Paul’s theological argument. It consists of an analogy that clarifies what was said earlier about the supervisory function of the law. The passage also serves to bring to a climax the doctrine of sonship – using the human institution of a minor who is no different from a slave, Paul argues that believers were once slaves. Through faith in Christ, they are sons.

- v1-2 Paul’s analogy – A child as minor is no better than a slave though he is destined to inherit an estate because he is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father to receive the inheritance has come.
- v3 When we were children, we “were in slavery under the basic principles of the world” – like the heir, so also when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. These “basic principles of the world” (variously defined) – for the gentiles would probably be the elementary principles of their pagan religions and for the Jews, the Mosaic law. (Some scholars believe the term to refer to angelic and demonic powers – Col 2:8, 18, 20).

- v4-5 As with the time set by the father for the maturation and inheritance for his son, so also with God:-
- When “*the time had fully come, God sent His Son*” – constitutes the divinely ordained era for the people of God to enter into their inheritance as His mature and responsible sons and daughters.
  - God sent His Son. He was “*born of a woman*” – He was human (as well as divine).
  - He was “*born under law*” – subject to the Jewish law of which He perfectly fulfilled its righteousness.
  - “*to redeem those under law*” – to redeem (or set free) those under the guardianship of the law.
  - “*That we might receive the full rights of sons*” – the imagery of adoption – adopted as sons in order to designate them as heirs to receive the rights of sons.

v6/7 “*Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out “Abba, Father”*”

The significance of the Spirit is tied directly to the doctrine of sonship.

Being sons means believers are no longer “slaves” – living in the old era of being imprisoned under law (or “*in slavery under the basic principles of the world*”). Instead they are “heirs” to receive the inheritance, beginning with the promised Spirit of God’s Son.

**The points made (4:1-7):**

- Although having the Abrahamic promise, during the period of the law, they were like minors (v1-3).
- At God’s appointed time, God sent His Son who was born of a woman and under the law, to set free those under the guardianship of the law (v4-5).
- That they may be adopted as sons (“full rights as sons”) (v5).
- Because they are sons, God gave them the Spirit (v6).
- Being sons means they are no longer slaves, it also mean they are heirs (v7).

**4:8-20** While Paul still has one more argument (4:21-31) to go through until he has presented his complete case, he nonetheless jumps into the significance of his arguments thus far. In v8-11, Paul applies the preceding argument to the Galatians’ specific situation. Since they are known by God as His children, why turn back to slavery? In v12-20 Paul would make a personal appeal to the Galatians to return to their earlier loyalty to him and devotion to Christ.

v8 *“Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods”.*

The “gods” which they had served in their pagan days (here Paul addresses his gentile converts) were at that time reckoned by them to be gods, but ‘who by nature are not gods’. Here, they were in bondage to counterfeit gods/evil spirits (1 Cor 8:4-5; 1 Cor10:20-22; Deu32:16-17) because of their ignorance of God – “*did not know God*”. But through Jesus, they are now sons of God. Sonship consists in the knowledge of God, knowing Him – being the essence of “*eternal life*” (John 17:3). Not only that, they are “*being known by God*”..

v9/10 *“But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?”*

The point of this paragraph is the fact that the Galatians who in effect have been brought into a relationship with God through Jesus, are going back to slavery. The contrast is made most striking by the concept of “knowing God”: their earlier practices can be explained that they did not know God, but such conduct is inconceivable now that they know Him and are known by Him.

They would be enslaved to the weak and miserable principles all over again if they revert not to their former paganism but to Jewish religious practices... special days and months and seasons and years.” (v10)

What is radical here is that Paul considers “*moving into Judaism*” as nothing other than a reversion to “paganism” – as both involve subjection to the same “*basic principles of the world*”.

v12-20 Paul’s personal and pastoral appeal

Here, Paul appeals to the Galatians with deep feeling and immense tenderness. First, he calls them “*brothers*” (v12), then at the end of the paragraph, “*my dear children*” (v19). He goes on to liken himself to their mother, who is “*in the pains of childbirth*” (v19). The basic thrust of the passage is that the Galatians’ attitude to Paul has changed markedly. He appeals to them to reconsider their present behavior.

v12 *“I plead with you, brothers, become like me”* – Paul longs for them to be like him in his Christian faith and life, to be delivered from the evil influence of the Judaizers, and to know the freedom with which Christ has set them free.

*“for I become like you”* – probably his visits to them in Galatia. Paul put himself in their place and identified himself with them.

v13/14 Paul's illness. What was it?

We do not know for sure what Paul's ailment was:-

- "a thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor 12:7)?
- "ophthalmia" or "eye trouble" (4:15)? (6:11)? (Acts23:1-5)?
- some temporary physical disfigurement due to his being stoned to death and being dragged out of the city of Lystra (Acts 14:19-20)?
- All this, Paul's infirmities and weakness, was a great trial to the Galatians (4:14) but "they did not treat him with contempt or scorn".

v15-16 The one they had received as "if I were Christ Jesus Himself" (v14) now they regard as their enemy. Why? Is it because Paul has been speaking the truth to them?

v17-20 The Galatians' present behavior is, in some way, the result of the Judaizers' influence. Paul warns them they were not sincere in their devotion to the Galatians. Their real motive is to "alienate" the Galatians from Christ and from the freedom that is in Christ.

Paul travails for them "until Christ is formed in you" (v19) – Paul longs to see Christ formed in them, to see them transformed into the image of Christ (Rom 8:29) which is their most basic need.

### **Chapter 4:21-31**

Paul's presents his final climactic argument by way of analogy for his case against the Judaizers: he argues that the stories of Abraham-Sarah-Isaac along with the stories of Abraham-Hagar-Ishmael teach the point he has been making – God's way is through the promise, not through the "flesh" (NIV "ordinary way" – v23). The background to this Sarah and Hagar stories is found in Gen 16, 17 and 21.

- (a) v21-26 Paul's allegorical interpretation of the Genesis story of Hagar and Sarah

LAW	Abraham	CHRIST
Hagar		Sarah
Ishmael		Isaac
Born in "the ordinary way"		Born as the result of a promise
Children – slaves		Children – free
Earthly Jerusalem		Heavenly Jerusalem
In slavery		In freedom
Old covenant		New covenant
Judaizers		Paul
Persecuting		Persecuted

- (b) Although both Ishmael and Isaac had the same father – Abraham, there were 2 important differences:-

<b>Abraham's 2 sons – 2 important differences</b>	
Ishmael <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Son of Hagar – slave woman (v22a)</li> <li>• Born in "<i>the ordinary way</i>" (v23a)</li> </ul> (representing human effort)	Isaac <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Son of Sarah – a free woman (v22b)</li> <li>• Born as the result of a promise (v23b)</li> </ul> (representing God's promise)

- (d) Although these are historical events, the circumstances of the births of Ishmael and Isaac also stand for a spiritual truth: Abraham's 2 women, Hagar and Sarah, represent 2 covenants (v24):-

<b>The Two Covenants</b>	
Old Covenant (of law) (Hagar) Mount Sinai in Arabia (law) (v24) Present city of Jerusalem (v25) Children as slaves	New Covenant (of promise) (Sarah) Jerusalem from above (v26) Free children (v26)

v27 Paul cites Isa 54:1 which speaks of the restoration of Jerusalem – which will take place via the Covenant of Promise (the New Covenant). Jerusalem, bereft of her children because of the exile, would be blessed with more children as promised.

v28-31 It is impossible for law and grace, the flesh and the Spirit, to compromise and stay together. For the Judaizers to impose the law upon the Galatian believers was to oppose the very plan of God.

Just as Isaac was persecuted by Ishmael, so believers in Christ are persecuted by the Judaizers. What is the solution? As Sarah expelled Hagar and Ishmael (Gen 21:10) so the Galatian believers ought to reject the teachings of the Judaizers and cast them out.

**The points made (4:21-31):**

- God's way is through the promise, not through the flesh.
- Believers are the children of the promise (like Isaac). They enjoy freedom not shared by those who are under the law.
- Jews, not gentiles, are described as the offspring of Hagar the slave.
- But just like the story of Hagar and Sarah:-
  - the sons of the promise will be persecuted by the sons of the flesh;
  - but just as Sarah expelled Hagar and Ishmael, so the sons of the flesh (Judaizers) are to be cast out.

**Questions for discussion next week**

- (1) There is no way that as believers, we can even begin to live the Christian life unless we do so in the power of the Holy Spirit.

How then can we “*live by the Spirit*” (5:16), “*led by the Spirit*” (5:18) and “*keep in step with the Spirit*” (5:25) and “*sow to please the Spirit*” (v6:8)?

- (2) Share with one another:-
- In what ways is the Holy Spirit presently working in your life?
  - Is anything happening in your life that could only be explained by the working of the Holy Spirit?

## Appendix I

The present evil age is contrasted with the age to come: Paul draws a sharp distinction between the times before and after the coming of Christ.		
Verses	Before Christ	After Christ
1:13-15; 2:20	Paul's previous way of life in Judaism	Paul's present way of life in Christ
3:8-9	The time when God did not yet justify the gentiles by faith	The present time when the gentiles are justified by faith
3:19, 20	The time before the coming of the promised Seed (Christ)	The present time when the promise is fulfilled
3:23,25	The time before faith came – we were held prisoners by the law	The present when faith has come – we are no longer under the supervision of the law
4:3-7	Formerly we were slaves to the basic principles of the world	Now we are God's children through Christ and indwelt with the Holy Spirit. God has made us also heirs
3:28; 4:3-9	Formerly distinctions of race, social position and gender divided the people	Now in Christ, all such distinctions are rendered inconsequential. All are "one" in Christ
4:8-9	Formerly the Galatians did not know God	The present time when they do and are known by God