

## Galatians: A Defense of Christian Freedom in the Spirit

*“The Magna Carta of spiritual freedom for the whole world and for all time” – Charles Erdman*

- The epistle to the Galatians was written by Paul to a community of believers in Asia Minor who had come under the influence of false teachers (“Judaizers”; Jewish converts to Christianity who taught that Gentile believers must adopt Jewish customs and laws as a condition for salvation) who sought to bring them back under the Law of Moses. They also tried to turn the Galatians away from Paul, saying he was not a true apostle of the Lord. Paul consistently opposed their teaching, insisting that only faith in Christ was necessary for salvation.

Chapters 1-2: Personal: Paul defends his authority

Chapters 3-5: Doctrinal: Justification by Faith

Chapters 5-6: Practical: Paul defends Christian Freedom in the Spirit

Chapters 1-2: Paul is an apostle of Christ

“Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead), and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia” Gal. 1:1-2

- Although Paul was not one of the original twelve, his call was as real as theirs- directly from Christ.

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.” Gal. 1:3-4-2

- Paul will be emphasizing grace throughout the epistle. Once grace is experienced, peace follows.

The problem: “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ” Gal. 1:6-7

- The Judaizers based their “gospel” on the works of the Law, and it required Gentile believers to abide by the Old Covenant standards and ceremonies (circumcision, allowed and forbidden foods, ritualistic washings, etc). Paul was amazed that they had gone back to the Law from being under grace and walking in the Spirit.

Paul defends his authority: he knows more about the Mosaic Law and Judaism than any of the Gentile converts:

“But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught *it*, but *it came*

through the revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and *tried to* destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.” Gal. 1:11-14

- These verses emphasize Paul’s works of the flesh; the next verses emphasizes God’s work in him:

“But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called *me* through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus” Gal. 1:15-17

- The message to Paul had a divine origin; he did not sit under other apostles at Jerusalem after his conversion:

“But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man—for those who seemed *to be something* added nothing to me. But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as *the gospel* for the circumcised *was* to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we *should go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.” Gal. 2:6-9

- The confrontation of Peter: a pivotal event in the early church

“Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before *them* all, “If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? *We who are* Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” Gal. 2:11-16

- Observing OT laws could not justify a person; therefore, Gentile believers should not be required to keep such laws (Acts 15). The law shows us that we cannot solve the problem of sin; it commands us, “Do! Try! Behave!” The gospel of Christ provides the solution; it comforts us, declaring “Done! Trust! Believe!”

“For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in

the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness *comes* through the law, then Christ died in vain.” Gal. 2:19-21. *Matthew 26:36-46*

- The Confrontation: rhetorical questions

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?” Gal. 3:1-3

- Justified: they had received the Holy Spirit because of their faith in Christ, who through His crucifixion had put to death the works of the flesh. Now they are willingly abandoning the Spirit and coming under the yoke of the Law for sanctification.

“Perfect” means mature, and spiritual maturity starts from the same point as salvation: faith in Christ. Faith changes our motivation from seeking to be acceptable to God through our own efforts (the works of the flesh; the works of the law) to wanting to live for Him (thankful living).

- The curse of the Law:

“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed *is* everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God *is* evident, for “the just shall live by faith.” Yet the law is not of faith, but “the man who does them shall live by them.” Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree”), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” Galatians 3: 10-12

- Abraham was blessed because of his faith in God, since the Law did not come until 430 years after his death.

- The Judaizers could not live up to God’s law, yet they would not submit to His Grace. While the Jews boasted of being the descendents of Abraham in the flesh, all who put their faith in Christ receive the promise of the Spirit and become spiritual sons and daughters of Abraham. God wanted to reach the whole world, not through human descent but through Jesus Christ, God and Man.

- The purpose of the Law: a “tutor” to bring us to Christ

“*Is* the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor *to*

*bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.” Gal. 3:21-25*

- The Law does not make us sinners but reveals that we already are sinners. The Law shows us how crooked we are and to showcase our need for a Savior.

“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you *are* Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” Gal. 3:26-29.

- In Christ, all racial, social, and gender barriers to salvation are abolished. The heirs of the promise of Abraham are all those who belong to Christ by faith.

“Now I say *that* the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.” Gal. 4:1-7

- Paul’s fear:

“But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how *is it that* you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain. Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I *became* like you” Gal. 4: 8-11

- Paul is shocked that the Galatians would turn again to legalism “the weak and beggarly elements”, going back into the bondage which Christ freed them from. He urges them to be like him– free from the rites, rituals, regulations and rules of the Law. The Judaizers were trying to subject the Galatians to the laws that Paul had abandoned in order to win them to Christ. Paul also knew from personal experience the misery of being in bondage to Jewish legalism.

“My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you, I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.” Gal. 4:19

“formed” is not merely the outward shape, but an inward essence. The image of Christ is produced in the lives of His followers. The change begins on the inside first.

## Christian Liberty:

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love” Gal. 5: 1-6

- Our default position is to try to work our way to salvation, expecting reward for being good and doing good. No matter how many laws we keep, we will still fall short (Romans 3:23; James 2:10). Salvation is a gift— by grace alone.

“For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Gal. 5:13-14

- Love summarizes and fulfills the entire moral law of God!

“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law” Gal. 5:16-18

- “Walk”: a way of life, a daily habit: we are challenged to keep moving in the enabling power and work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enables us to defeat the power of the flesh more and more so we can walk in the way of freedom and righteousness.

“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those *who are* Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.” Gal. 5:19-26.

- Note that fruit is produced naturally and inevitably by the branches that abide in the vine. Contrast: “works” of the flesh – produced by human energy. Garden vs. factory. Most of the “works of the flesh” are social sins in nature, which can be overcome by love: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”  
Fruit=Christlikeness. Every one of the virtues listed is characteristic of Christ (1 Corinthians 13), but foreign to the human heart.

How is the fruit produced? By abiding in the True Vine, Christ. Stay connected to Jesus; abide in His Word.

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Gal 6:7-10

•Basic agricultural principles:

You reap if you sow;

you reap what you sow;

you reap more than you sow;

you reap later than you sow.

Sow to the flesh: to coddle it, pander to it, stroke it instead of crucifying it.

In difficult times we must concentrate on sowing the seed – doing good, even when no harvest seems imminent. The harvest belongs to God.

“As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these *would* compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.”

•The legalists boast about what they have done for God, instead of what Christ has done for them.

“Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” 2 Corinthians 5:17

“Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, “Sit here while I go and pray over there.” And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.” He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You *will*.” Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak.” Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.” And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then He came to His disciples and said to them, “Are *you* still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand.” *Matthew 26:36-46*