

48_Galatians_Bible_Arg_Hawkins

INTRODUCTION TO GALATIANS

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Author

The authorship by Paul the Apostle has seldom been called into question because the elements of Paul's personal character accord perfectly with what we know of the Apostle from other sources. Ancient testimony is quite clear. It is mentioned as being authentic by Marcion, the heretic, around 140 A.D. and is included in the "Muratorian Fragment" about the end of the second century (Hogg and Vine, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 5).

Date

If the South Galatian view is accepted, the epistle is dated in the Fall of 49 A.D. It is thus the earliest of Paul's writings. Those who hold to the North Galatian view date it before 57 A.D. It **seems best to go with** the early date.

Destination

Though clearly addressed to the "churches in Galatia," there are two opinions as to the specific geographical location of the "Galatia" to which Paul refers. Galatia might mean North Galatia, the territory in North Central Asia Minor where three tribes of Gauls (of Celtic origin) finally settled shortly after 279 B.C. They settled around the three centers of Ancyra (modern Ankara), Pessinus and Tavium. On the other hand, Galatia might refer to the whole province of Galatia, which included the South Galatian cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, which Paul evangelized on his first missionary journey and visited on his second. This arose out of the fact that the entire area was constituted a Roman province in 25 B.C. named Galatia.

The older North Galatian view was ably defended by Lightfoot and still held predominantly by German scholars. The primary arguments in favor of this view are as follows:

1. Luke's apparent use of territorial language in describing Paul's work was thus referring to "Galatia" after Paul left the area in the South where he founded the churches on his first journey. (See Acts 16:16 and 18:23.)
2. The grammar of Acts 16:6 may mean that Paul went into Galatia only after completing his visit to the southern cities of Derbe and Lystra. Adherents of this view argue that Acts 18:23 implies a tour through North Galatia before beginning the ministry in Ephesus.

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3. Luke recorded nothing about the sickness of Galatians 4:13 in Paul's visit to the South Galatian cities.
4. Luke recorded the persecution of stoning in Lystra, but Paul omitted it in his letter to the Galatians, implying the letter is to churches of the Northern region.
5. Those in the South did not consider themselves "Galatians" and would be offended at Paul's calling them such (Gal. 3:1). Residence in Galatia would not make them ethnically Galatians. (E.F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 258)

The South Galatian view has been championed by Sir William Ramsey. It has recently gained in popularity, especially by English speaking commentators, and has the advantage of allowing for an earlier date to the book. Support for the South Galatia view is as follows:

1. Galatians 16:6 refers to the portion of Phrygia included in the Roman province of Galatia. In similar fashion Acts 18:23 implies a trip in the same region.
2. It is more likely that Luke's report (Acts) of 62 A.D. would cover the ministry in areas to which Paul had earlier written letters (i.e. South Galatia).
3. Acts 18:23 and 16:6 say nothing about the founding of churches in North Galatia.
4. The Galatian churches did share in the collection for the saints in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1). Though not decisive, no men from North Galatia are mentioned as accompanying Paul to Jerusalem, but Gaius of Derbe and Timothy (both from South Galatia) are named.
5. The South Galatian churches were more accessible to the Judaizing propagandists, against which Paul wrote.
6. Barnabas, Paul's companion in South Galatia (but not in the North if Acts 16:6 and 18:23 refer to North Galatia) is mentioned in Galatians 2:13. "Even Barnabas" implies they would be surprised at his being led astray because they knew him personally.
7. 1 Peter 1:1 may imply evangelization in geographical order by someone who took ship to Pontus and proceeded overland in a southerly direction (this at a later time). (E.F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 258-9)

The two views have received a great deal of scholarly attention. Not all of the considerations in support of the different interpretations are of equal weight. One cannot be dogmatic but this writer has chosen the South Galatian view because Luke's later summary of Paul's missionary activity included the founding of those churches. There is no historical record of Paul's founding any churches in North Galatia.

It must be a case of choosing the North Galatian view or the South Galatian view as the choice of one excludes the other (Burton, *ICC*, p. xxii). The South Galatian theory allows for an earlier dating of Galatians and for a better explanation of its historical setting. If Paul wrote Galatians early (49 A.D.), it is easier to understand why he omitted reference to the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 (Merril C. Tenney, *New Testament Survey*, p. 267). In addition, Acts 16:4 records that Paul delivered the Acts 15 decree to the churches in South Galatia. Surely he would have made reference to the delivering of this decree had he written Galatians after the Jerusalem Council and the second missionary journey (April 50 to Sept. 52). Thus, it **seems to fit all the facts best** for Paul to have written Galatians to the churches he had already founded just before the official

Jerusalem decree but after a preliminary meeting described in Galatians 2:1-10 (making Paul's conversion about 35 A.D.)

Occasion

Assuming the South Galatia theory, Paul wrote soon after the founding of these churches on the first missionary journey (48-49 A.D.). The letter was occasioned by doctrinal problems within the church. The Pharisaic Judaizers were attacking Paul's authority as a wedge to pervert his doctrine. The main question was the doctrine of sanctification or how to live a Christian life pleasing to God. Thus, Paul's purpose was to defend his Apostolic authority and thereby defend the truth of the gospel he preached.

SIMPLIFIED OUTLINE OF GALATIANS

I. The true gospel	1-2
A. Its origin	1
B. Its authority	2
II. The superior gospel	3-4
A. In sanctification	3
B. In sonship	4
III. The liberty gospel	5-6
A. From law	5a
B. From flesh	5b-6

OUTLINE OF GALATIANS

I. Jesus Christ--the source of the gospel preached by Paul	1:1-2:14
A. Introduction	1:1-5
1. Greeting	1:1-3
2. The gospel defined	1:4-5
a. Justification by faith	
b. Sanctification by faith	
B. The Galatians in danger of moving from the true gospel to a false gospel	1:6-9
C. The true gospel received by direct revelation from Jesus Christ	1:10-17
D. Paul's authority as independent of the other Apostles but his gospel in perfect agreement	1:17-2:14
1. Paul's one time visit to Jerusalem	1:18-24
2. Paul's participation in the planning for the Jerusalem Council as equal with the Apostles	2:1-10
a. Paul's stand for liberty	2:1-5
a. Paul's apostleship to the Gentiles	2:6-10
3. Paul's authority recognized	2:11-14
II. New Testament sanctification by faith apart from Law	2:15-3:25
A. Life in Christ based on death to the Law	2:15-21
B. Sanctification also by faith	3:1-18
1. Beginning by faith demanding continuing by faith	3:1-5
2. The faith principle illustrated from Abraham	3:6-9
3. Legalists under the curse of Law	3:10-12
4. Christ's death redeeming us from the curse	3:13-14
5. Our position in Christ assuring us of the promise of Abraham	3:15-16
6. Our position in Christ based on promise not Law	3:17-18
C. The seven-fold purpose of the Law	3:19-25
1. Magnified sin	3:19a
2. Temporary	3:19b
3. Inferior to promise	3:19c-20
4. Different purpose than promise	3:21
5. Condemned all men	3:22
6. Confines men to faith as the escape from condemnation	3:23
7. Brings us to Christ	3:24-25

III. The New Testament believer's position under grace in sonship being superior to servanthood under Law	3:26-5:12
A. A son by faith	3:26-29
B. Redeemed from childhood slavery under Law	4:1-5
C. Sustaining a new relationship to God as a son	4:6-7
D. A return to legalism being a return to bondage	4:8-11
E. Paul's personal appeal to stand in liberty	4:12-5:1
1. Based on Paul's past reception	4:12-14
2. Based on the Galatians' past blessing	4:15-18
3. Based on Paul's doubt concerning his children	4:19-20
4. Based on the Law itself--the Old Testament allegory	4:21-31
F. The danger of attempting sanctification by mixing Law and grace--nullifies grace	5:2-11
1. Makes Christ's work of no benefit	5:2
2. Obligates the legalist to keep the whole Law	5:3
3. Legalists having nothing more to do with Christ	5:4a
4. Those seeking justification (before men) by Law having fallen from the grace principle	5:4b
5. Faith working by love to produce sanctification	5:5-6
6. Attempting to mix Law and grace not being from God	5:7-11
IV. The liberty of grace not being a pretext for serving the flesh	5:13-6:10
A. Liberty providing opportunity for reciprocal love	5:13-14
B. Serving the flesh not being compatible with walking in the Spirit	5:15-21
1. "Christian cannibalism" not edifying	5:15
2. Walking in the Spirit preventing fulfilling the lusts of the flesh	5:16
3. The reality of the spiritual battle	5:17
4. Those led by the Spirit not being under Law	5:18
5. The works of the flesh demonstrating the condemnation of those under Law	5:19-21
a. Sins of sensual passion	5:19
1) Fornication--pornea-immorality in general	
2) Uncleanliness--moral filth or impurity	
3) Lasciviousness--sensuality; open defiance of public decency	
b. Sins of selfish religion--idolatry associated with drugs	5:20a
c. Sins of breakdown of personal relationships	5:20-21a
1) Hatred--inner personal hostility	

2) Strife--discord, vocal contention	
3) Jealousy--eager desire to tear another down arising from hostility	
4) Wrath--outbursts of passion	
5) Factions--selfish ambition resulting in empire building	
6) Seditions--dissension, collecting a party of like-minded followers	
7) Heresies--heretical sects, a full blown movement	
8) Envyings--disintegration from root rottenness of ill will	
d. Sins of lack of self-control--personality breakdown	5:21b
1) Murder	
2) Drunkenness	
3) Revelings (carousing around)	
4) And such like things	
5) Those who do such things not inheriting the kingdom of God	5:21c
C. The characteristics of a Spirit-led walk	5:22-23
1. Love--sustained resolve to set the interests of the other person above your own	
2. Joy--contented delight regardless of circumstance	
3. Peace--tranquility of mind based on the consciousness of right relationship to God	
4. Longsuffering--patient endurance of what is wrong without anger or hostile desire to retaliate	
5. Gentleness--kindness	
6. Goodness--positive attitude toward what is good	
7. Faith--faithfulness or reliability	
8. Meekness--God-controlled person, angry at the right time, never the wrong time	
9. Self-control--discipline of mind and body	
D. The basis of the Spirit-led walk--our crucifixion with Christ	5:24-25
E. A test of the Spirit-led person--a proper self-image	5:26
1. Not challenging to combat	
2. No envy	
F. Only those walking in the Spirit being able to restore believers who fall in sin	6:1
G. The law of love applied to burden bearing	6:2-5
H. Application of the principle concerning sowing and reaping	6:6-10

1. Application to the ministry	6:6
2. The principle stated	6:7
3. Application to Christian character	6:8
4. Application to Christian living	6:9-10
V. Summary argument--living by faith superior to either legalism or license	6:11-18
A. Paul's concern over self-centered legalism	6:11-13
B. Paul's concern over the centrality of the Cross	6:14-15
C. Paul's closing appeal to those who walk by faith	6:16-18

ARGUMENT OF GALATIANS

Paul introduced himself as an Apostle. Although this was his usual method of introduction, it was especially significant in Galatians because there was a group of Judaizers in the Galatian province that professed to accept salvation (justification) by faith, but they taught that to live the Christian life pleasing to God (sanctification), one must keep the Old Testament Mosaic Law. To discredit Paul's teaching of sanctification by grace (not Law), the Judaizers chose to discredit Paul's authority. They tried to show he got his teaching from men (ch. 1) and that he was inferior to the other Apostles (ch. 2).

Therefore, Paul began by stating that he was an Apostle, equating himself with the eleven disciples of Christ. Paul had not been chosen by men; he had been chosen directly by Christ on the Damascus road (Acts 9). Paul had not even been chosen through the agency of man (as had Matthias in Acts 1:23-26). His choosing had been directly from Jesus Christ, the same Jesus Christ raised from the dead by God the Father. Paul's authority was not independent for in verse 2 he wrote "and all the brethren with him." He was writing a circular letter that was to be circulated among a number of churches in Galatia (Adapted from class notes, J.D. Pentecost, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1968).

Paul concluded his salutation (1:1-5) by his usual expression of grace and peace to his readers from God the Father and Jesus Christ, who not only saved us (justification) but also delivers us from this present evil world (sanctification). Positionally (past tense) we have been delivered, but experientially (present tense) we need deliverance from this present evil world, which is both the sphere we now live in and the source of our present temptation.

In verses 6-9 Paul **got to the occasion** of his writing this letter. The problem was that these Galatians were quickly (willingly) being easily persuaded to leave the truth of the gospel. They had accepted Christ by faith for justification, but by denying the sufficiency of the faith principle for sanctification they were removing themselves from the one gospel of the grace of Christ. (The gospel includes both justification and sanctification.) They were substituting another gospel, but it was a gospel of another kind, i.e. not even a true gospel. The gospel was being distorted and changed to a "no gospel" by men who had no right or authority to do so because the gospel is rightly and

only the property of Jesus Christ. Not even an angel from heaven has the right or authority to change the gospel belonging to Christ. Even if an angel should try to change it (only a hypothetical case) to say nothing of mere man, they are accursed said Paul. How are men to know the gospel?

This the Galatians should easily know since Paul had preached it to them. Any so-called gospel that changed the doctrine either of justification or sanctification is really no gospel at all (for strong emphasis Paul repeated it twice), **and such persons are to be accursed by God (devoted to destruction because abhorrent or hateful to God)**. Paul could do this because of his Apostolic authority. On this point Paul was dogmatic and positive because the content of his gospel was not something he imperfectly learned from men; he got it straight from the One (Jesus Christ) who made salvation possible.

Paul began his defense of his gospel (the only true gospel) by showing that his gospel was from divine revelation (1:10-12). He did not please men. The Judaizers in Galatia were pleasing men by telling them what they wanted to hear, i.e. that men can sanctify themselves by self-effort in keeping the Law. If Paul had just been a people-pleaser, he would not have become the bond servant of Christ. His previous background in Judaism was not the source of his gospel message for his gospel was not received from man. In fact, Paul was not even taught the gospel by human agency. Paul was unique among all the Apostles for he got his gospel by special divine revelation, directly from the resurrected Jesus Christ.

Previously Paul had been the persecutor (1:13) of the church. The Galatians all knew his story--how he had been trying to destroy the church of God.

Paul's personal privilege (1:14) had been to advance in Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries. A brilliant pupil under Gamaliel, Paul had been "more exceedingly a zealot" above or beyond his fellow students in Judaism. All of this self-effort was only for the ancestral traditions of Pharisaism.

But God's grace intervened and his self-effort was brought to a halt. The divine call (1:15-17) had brought about a violent change in Paul's life. There was never any doubt about his divine call because God had sovereignly set him apart even from his mother's womb. By God's grace the Lord Jesus Christ saved Paul and called him to preach the gospel. No man told Paul what he was to preach for Paul left Damascus (Acts 9 does not record this) and did not even go to Jerusalem, the Apostolic center of the early church. Not even the Apostles themselves had any influence upon Paul's message for he went to the deserts of Arabia, where for two years the resurrected Christ personally taught Paul the truth of the gospel.

Three years after Paul left Jerusalem to persecute the church in Damascus (Acts 9), he returned to Jerusalem for a short visit of two weeks. Other than James, Paul visited only with Peter. In this period of time it would have been impossible for Paul to have learned his gospel from Peter. The implication is that Paul talked to Peter in order to confirm that he and Peter were in essential agreement of doctrine. However, Paul had learned his doctrine directly from Christ in the two years in Arabia. Thus, Paul was accepted as having Apostolic authority even in Jerusalem where the other Apostles ministered (1:18-24).

Then, after fourteen years Paul again went up to Jerusalem at the council described in Acts 15. There he was presented to the leaders (2:1-2) and even Titus, a Greek, was not compelled to conform to the Mosaic Law (2:3-5). The Jerusalem Council had met to determine who could be saved and determined that the distinction between Jew and Gentile was broken down. Gentiles did not have to become Jews in order to be fit for justification (salvation).

The conclusion of the Jerusalem Council was that they approved both Paul's doctrine and his practice. In fact, Paul considered himself as equal with the twelve. He learned nothing from the Jerusalem church that would change either his practice or his doctrine (2:6-10).

In order to prove to the Galatians that his position as an Apostle was equal with that of the twelve, Paul cited a rather painful incident. Paul had previously recognized the important place of Peter, but one time when Peter came to Antioch, Paul had to condemn the "fisherman" Apostle for his inconsistency in practice. No one else in the early church had dared to question Peter's authority (Cf. Acts 8:14-24). That Paul could do so successfully meant that he had equal or superior authority. The fact that Peter submitted to Paul's authority was final proof that Paul had Apostolic authority.

Peter had come to Antioch and there he practiced his Christian liberty of Acts 10 by entering unclean (according to Mosaic Law) Gentile homes, fellowshipping with unclean Gentile people and even eating unclean Gentile food. Peter was doing all right until he saw some Jews from Jerusalem. He then refused to eat with Gentiles not because they were weaker brethren (Rom. 14-15 and 1 Cor. 8-10) but rather because he feared the circumcised Jews. The result was that the rest of the Christian Jews joined Peter in his hypocrisy, and the entire church was thrown into confusion. By renouncing the faith principle, Antioch had become confused about doctrine. Things got so confused that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy (2:13).

Paul concluded the incident with Peter by a pronouncement which he related to the Galatians and their changing of Paul's doctrine. He saw that Peter's practice had contradicted the faith principle. The Law had never even been given to Gentiles, and if Jews had been liberated from the Law through faith in Christ, how much more the Gentiles! The principle is that since a man is justified by faith (and this practically all recognized), then it was also true that man must walk by the same principle by which he was justified (i.e. sanctification is also by faith) (2:16).

This liberation from the Law did not equal sin (2:17) because Christ had told Peter to eat Gentile food and Christ could not tell Peter to sin (Acts 10). Paul's argument was that in repudiating the Law (i.e. to accept Christ by faith) he had destroyed the Law. Then to rebuild the Law again as a means of sanctification would only show that he had violated the Law in repudiating it to accept salvation by faith (2:18).

The Law condemned men to death. Christ had died in Paul's place and thus Paul himself died to the Law (2:19). His crucifixion with Christ brought about an end to the Law principle and in his Christian life he must live by the same principle by which he was justified. In other words, he lived by the faith principle in Christ's imputed righteousness for his sanctification as well as his justification (2:20). Any other

interpretation of Christ's death meant that Christ had died needlessly (2:21). Living by the faith principle, by the life of Christ, meant that Paul's life (or that of any believer) would conform to the holy character of a holy God. Paul in no way abdicated the necessity of being conformed to the character of God.

Next Paul turned from his statement to Peter and directed his attention to the Galatians, whom he called foolish because they failed to have or use perception. Paul's enemies, the Judaizers, had envied the Galatians for their freedom from Mosaic Law. Thus, they had perverted and confused (or bewitched) the Galatians so that from failure to use their knowledge, they had denied Jesus Christ, whom Paul had publicly portrayed before them as crucified (3:10).

Paul's question was: By what means had they received the Holy Spirit—from the Law principle or from the grace principle? Now all the Galatians would probably admit that justification was only from the grace principle. The evidence of one's being justified is reception of the Holy Spirit (3:2). Now the obvious implication was—how could anyone be so foolish as to believe that salvation (justification) would have to be effected by the Holy Spirit and then believe that the same Holy Spirit would not be effective in sanctification. These Galatians were saved and growing in the Lord before the Judaizers came along. The believers had been persecuted for holding to the faith principle. Now they were being told they did not need the faith principle (sort of like changing horses in midstream). The proof and authentication of the message Paul preached had been from the Holy Spirit received by faith and not by the works of the Law (3:5).

Now the Judaizers claimed Abraham and Moses as the epitome of revelation. Their authority was even superior (so they said) to the Apostle. So Paul began by building a syllogism, even allowing for sake of argument the supreme importance of Abraham. The Scriptures said that even Abraham received righteousness by exercising faith. God reckoned righteousness to Abraham on the basis of faith. There are two ways of being connected with Abraham: (1) to be a fleshly descendent of Abraham, which was no guarantee of eternal life; or (2) to be related to Abraham by exercising faith (as he did), which made them recipients of eternal life (3:7).

Even the Abrahamic covenant had made it clear that the faith principle was the means by which the Gentiles would be justified. Paul argued on the basis of the universal aspects of the Abrahamic covenant (3:8-9).

Those arguing with Paul were not being consistent in their insistence upon obeying the Law. The gospel that Paul preached delivered men from the Law, for an essential part of the Law was cursing for those who broke it. All those who wanted to keep the Law were also under the curse of the Law. The Judaizers supposed that by circumcision Old Testament Gentiles became righteous descendants of Abraham, but the Old Testament made it very clear that the righteous were made alive on the basis of faith not Law, flesh or works (3:11-12). If there was no justification in the Old Testament by Law, then it ought to be obvious that there is no sanctification in the New Testament by Law. The Law only condemned those who tried to live by it. The slightest infraction of the Law brought condemnation not justification. An essential part of the death of Christ was his becoming a curse for us (3:13). Thus, Jesus Christ became a curse, redeeming us

from the Law's curse so that by faith we might share in the universal and permanent indwelling Holy Spirit (Cf. Jer. 31:31-34).

The basis, then, of Paul's gospel was that it went back to Abraham. That covenant, as is true of even a human covenant, cannot be changed once it has been signed and ratified or put into force. No conditions can be added to it (3:15). Now the promise (Abrahamic covenant) was made with Abraham and his one descendent (seed), even the Lord Jesus Christ himself. In other words, Christ is the object and culmination of the promises to Abraham. Thus, any promises to Abraham and thus to Christ (and those related to Christ by faith) are superior to and cannot be nullified by a later covenant. So it is clear that any promises to Abraham were by faith not Law (3:15- 18).

One might reasonably ask, then, if the faith principle given by promise to Abraham is superior, why was the Law given? Paul answered that the ministry of the Law was to condemn any conduct not in keeping with its provisions (3:19). The Law was only temporary, until Christ came. The proof of this was that the Law was mediated to Moses through angels while the promise was given directly to Abraham. That which was given directly takes precedence over that which was given by mediation (3:19).

Then one might ask, "Is the Law in competition with the promises of God?" The answer is an unqualified "No!" They were given for entirely different purposes. The Law condemned; it could never impart life. Only by exercising faith in the promises of God had Abraham received life (3:21). The Law served its purpose, but it was never intended to be equal to or compete with the faith principle. The purpose of the Law was to shut men up to the only way of life, i.e. belief or faith in the promises of God. The Law condemned that men might believe and receive life. It could never bring life (3:22).

Before Christ came, the human race was considered to be an infant. In Roman times a son was considered an infant regardless of his age until he was officially "adopted" or placed as an adult son by the father. The human race was put under Law in order to drive men to faith, but the full content of faith as the Galatians knew it was not made known until Christ actually came. By condemning men, the Law showed men their need of a Savior. But now that the faith economy has come, men are no longer under Law. Men saved by faith are no longer even under the Law's condemnation.

Those who have come to Christ are free from the Law and the distinctions that held true in childhood. Jew, Greek, etc. are no longer signs of a man's acceptance before God; for if we belong to Christ, we are linked to Abraham through the same principle by which he received the righteousness of God, that is, by faith (3:25-29).

Now the principle was illustrated by the Roman custom of considering children (infants) as having no authority or rights until officially adopted to the position of adult sons. So also the world was under the tutorship of the Law until God sent forth his Son at the right time in human history, born of a woman, born under the Law (4:1-4). Christ came that he might redeem men from bondage to the Law and place them through adoption to the positions of adult sons. The proof of our divine position is the indwelling Holy Spirit, who enables us to address the Father as "Abba, Father," which we do not do in the old position of infancy under the Law (4:5-7).

Now that Paul had explained his gospel, he appealed to the Galatians to treat him again as the bearer of God's news in the light of their return to bondage, lest Paul had wasted his time by preaching freedom from the Law (4:8-11). Also he begged them to repent in the light of the way they had originally received Paul's message. Paul had become ill among them and they would have done anything for him, even plucking out their own eyes if that might have helped (4:12-20).

Finally, Paul appealed to them to get out from under the Law principle in the light of an Old Testament illustration. Here Paul showed that Abraham had two sons. One was by a slave and one was the rightful heir by his wife. The Judaizers were like the slave child (Ishmael), but Paul's message had brought men to freedom in Christ just like Isaac was the rightful, free heir of Abraham. The Old Testament said to cast out those slaves to the Law among them. They ought to keep standing firm and not be subject again to the yoke of slavery to the Law (4:21-5:1).

Paul had made his doctrine clear. Now he wanted to apply the truth of freedom from the Law in Christ to the actual practice of the Galatians. Those believers who wanted to show their submission to the rulership of the Law did so by submitting to Jewish circumcision. To depend upon circumcision or the Law for sanctification required that a person obey the total Law. A man who tried this had no need for Christ. Those who boasted of their Law-keeping before men were actually showing they did not hold to the grace principle in Christ. Rather, they had fallen from grace or abandoned the faith principle. The answer to an attempt at sanctification by legalism is the faith principle to bring the hope of righteousness or sanctification. Hope comes through the Holy Spirit by faith and not through the Law by flesh.

In Jesus Christ it makes no difference before God whether a man is circumcised by men or not; it is the grace (5:4) or faith principle (5:6) that works through love. The Galatians had been running well but the Judaizers had tripped them up (5:7). The Judaizers did not come from Jesus Christ (5:8). Their damaging influence was like yeast that soon permeates the loaf, and, if these legalists were not removed, the whole assembly would become legalists (5:9). Paul was confident that his suggestion of expelling the false teachers would be followed. The Judaizers wanted to remove the stigma of the Cross. They were zealous for their race and national pride. To allow circumcision allowed some ground for pride. But all reason for pride had been removed by the divine judgment of the Cross (v. 11). It is true that men need sanctification, but self-mutilation or Law-keeping is not God's means (5:12).

Properly understood, Paul's doctrine of freedom was not license but rather it provided an opportunity of being controlled by the Holy Spirit. The badge of Christ's followers was to be love. Such love for the brethren is protection against the misuse of a Christian's liberty. (See Rom. 14 and 1 Cor. 8-10.) Instead of devouring one another, the Christian is to be controlled by love and thus act out of respect for his brother's conscience, not his own personal pride. To surrender liberty because of love is not legalism, for love produced by the Holy Spirit is closely connected to sanctification also produced by the Holy Spirit. Without concern for each other expressed in love produced by the Holy Spirit, they were in danger of "cannibalism" (5:15).

The way to sanctification is not by Law but rather through the faith principle made operative by the Holy Spirit. Living in one's own strength only produces the works of the flesh described in verses 19-21. Liberty from the Law does not permit walking in the flesh. The believer is impotent. He cannot produce sanctification by his own effort. He needs the Holy Spirit both for support (5:16) as well as for guidance (5:18).

The Holy Spirit will do what the Law could not do. He will guide the believer and produce the spiritual graces described in verses 22-23. Any system depending upon the flesh cannot produce sanctification because of the inherent weakness of the flesh. Those who belong to Jesus Christ have crucified the passionate and weak flesh. When the believer reckons himself to be dead to the flesh in his experience, even as positionally it has been accomplished (See Rom. 6), then he can walk by means of the Spirit. Only such dependence will safeguard the unity of the assembly (5:26).

Believers should show love for one another by ministering to those who have trespassed, perhaps fallen into legalism. When one member of the body is incapacitated, the whole body is incapacitated. Those delivered from the Law are to work to reduce the fracture in the assembly brought about by the Judaizing teachers. The teachers are to be kicked out, but then the broken bones need to be reset (6:1). Believers are to help one another by bearing those burdens for a weaker brother which are too much for him. But everyone ought to bear the normal burdens of life (6:2-5).

Those who have spiritually benefited from teachers of the Word ought to generously share materially with the teacher. The one who is stingy with his teacher will get nothing from God. The liberality Paul spoke of is a fruit of the Spirit. The need to give will be frequent, more than one offering, but they ought not to grow weary (6:6-10).

Paul usually wrote by dictating his letters perhaps because of the eye trouble of 4:15, but more likely the expression "bold letters" refers to the boldness with which he wrote to the Galatians. Paul had no desire to boast in them as did the Judaizers who boasted in the flesh. His only boast was in the stigma of the Cross of Christ by which his flesh was crucified (6:11-15).

The Judaizers made circumcision the basis of fellowship but Paul did not need such a work. 2 Corinthians 11 describes how he bore in his body the brand-marks of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul trusted that his letter would solve the Galatian problem and that the grace of the Lord Jesus would be with their spirit. May it likewise be true today (6:16-18).