



GALATIANS

PAUL DEFENDS HIS APOSTOLIC CALL
AND THE SPIRIT'S REVELATION. CA. A.D. 54–58.

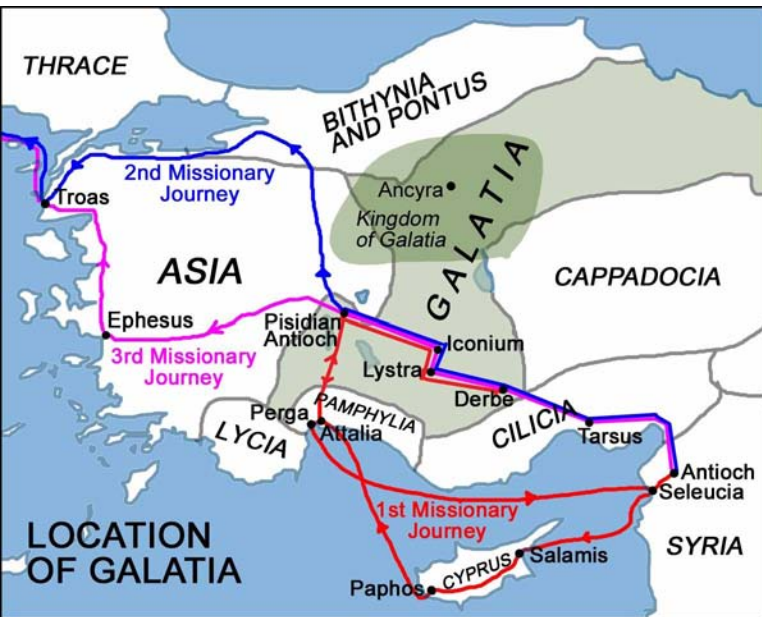
Galatia and Judaism-Christianity

The Roman province of Galatia is now in central Turkey. Galatia had a strong Jewish population (Acts 15:1; 16:3). Perhaps this is why some Galatians wanted all Christian converts to adopt circumcision and live all the Mosaic laws (613 written and 10,000 oral laws). Biblical scholars' opinions range in their estimates of how many Jews in Galatia converted to Christianity—from as high as 1/5 to as low as 1/100.

Paul in Galatia

Paul and Barnabas preach and baptized in at least four cities in southern Galatia—Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia—on his first apostolic mission.¹ This was the hometown of Timothy and Gaius, where Paul healed a man and the locals called him Mercury and Barnabas Jupiter, and where Paul was stoned and raised from the dead. Paul returned with Silas to visit the early saints on his second and third missions when

he “ordained elders in every church and prayed with fasting” (Acts 14:23; 16:6; 18:23; Galatians 3:1–4; 4:13–14; 5:7a). By the time Paul wrote this letter, he and his companions had established about six to eight churches in Galatia.²



Paul's Aim in Writing Galatians

The Epistle reflects Paul's passionate opinion that the Law of Moses was fulfilled in Christ and should not burden Christians. Paul defended himself against those who wanted Christians to live the full Law of Moses. Up to a decade earlier, in Acts 15, Paul addressed the same issue at the Jerusalem Council, “How many Laws of Moses should Christians live? Should Gentile converts be circumcised?” These controversial questions continued to plague the church and were answered in his Epistle to the Romans and Galatians. Yet adopting such a change was difficult for some known as “Judaizers.” We see Paul's impatience at those who undermined his teachings in this Epistle.

Outline³

- Galatians 1:1–10** Introduction of Paul and the issue: One Gospel—Received Only Through Christ
- 1:11–16** God called and trained Paul as an authoritative apostle—including his thesis in 1:11–12
- 1:17–2:14** Paul's Autobiographical History
- 2:1–10** Recounting the Jerusalem Council: The apostles received Paul in Jerusalem
- 2:11–14** Paul rebuked Peter in Antioch over the Jewish-Convert Dilemma
- 2:15–21** Justified by faith in Christ
- 3:1–14** **Does Revelation come by Faith or works of the Law?** (drawn from Abraham's experiences)
- 3:19–29** The law was given as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ and unity
- 4:1–11** We are God's sons and heirs, no more servants
- 4:12–20** Therefore we should remain zealous in righteousness
- 4:21–31** Hagar and Sarah form an allegory of Jews and Gentiles
- 5:1–15** Christ's liberty comes through faith, hope, and love
- 5:16–26** Fruits of the Spirit and works of the flesh
- 6:1–10** Exhortation to walk by the Spirit of revelation, and bear others' burdens
- 6:11–18** Conclusion from Paul's own hand reconfirming his stance and a benediction

INTRODUCTION TO THE EPISTLE

Paul wrote this Epistle to correct false doctrine that salvation comes through Jesus, not living the Law of Moses. He defends his teachings with the assurance that they came through personal revelation (Galatians 1:11). It includes important biographical and historical information. However, it opens in high drama. It feels as though we have walked into the last act of a play or opera—without being told why everyone is mad. By gathering each shred of evidence, we can assume that “Judaizers” came to Galatia after Paul left and poisoned the faith of his new converts. They upheld the need for the Laws of Moses (or the Law of Circumcision), which undermined what Paul had taught about Jesus’ atoning grace as the source of salvation.

It appears that when Paul received this upsetting news, he reacted immediately and wrote to denounce the Judaizers’ false teachings. The dating is surmised by calculating when Paul’s companions traveled to Galatia to collect the welfare contributions either at the end of his third mission or at another time.

GALATIANS 1

TEXT: Introduction of the Issue

Galatians 1:1-5

Galatians 1:1 “Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father” Paul begins his letter with a clear defense of his Apostolic authority. This theme grows throughout his letter.

Galatians 1:2 “all the brothers and sisters are with me, To the churches in Galatia” (NIV) We don’t know which companions were with Paul at the time. He writes to the plural, “churches,” meaning the letter was to be circulated from church to church and read as a “circular letter.” A footnote for this verse in the NIV reads: “The Greek word for “brothers and sisters/*adelphoi*” refers here to believers, both men and women, as part of God’s family; also in verse 11; and in 3:15; 4:12, 28, 31; 5:11, 13; 6:1, 18. I mention this again as a dramatic inclusive change that Apostolic Christianity brought to the ancient world.

Galatians 1:3-5 “Grace *be* to you and peace from God the Father, and *from* our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for our sins . . . whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen” Paul uses his standard opening again, with a beautiful testimony of Jesus’ role and His relationship to His Heavenly Father.

One Gospel—Received Only Through Christ

Galatians 1:6–10

Galatians 1:6 “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel” As part of Paul’s brief introduction, he skips the Greek traditional “thanksgiving” portion of a standard letter and jumps right into condemning his audience for changing the doctrines of Christ. The second word, “marvel,” is also translated as “astonished” (RSV, NEB, JB, NIV) or “amazed” (NAS). And “removed from him” is translated with the stronger words: “deserting” (in RSV, NAS, NIV), or “turned away from” (NEB, JB). Paul fears that the Galatians are changing Christ’s message.

Galatians 1:7 “Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ” (NIV) Paul reminds the saints that Christ leads a unified gospel message—even if some charlatans have tried to convince the saints otherwise. This speaks of the problem that Paul attacked: others had perverted the gospel of Christ.

Galatians 1:8–9 “If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” This important message calls for unity under Jesus’ leadership. It is not Paul’s church or Peter’s church—it’s Christ’s church. False teachers had come and stirred up the saints, so Paul reminds them that the only source of truth is revelation. Paul does not attack other church leaders here, but emphasizes having unity under Christ or being accursed by Satan. The last word “accursed” means “damned to hell.”

Galatians 1:10 “Am I trying to win the approval of men or God? . . . If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (NIV) Paul emphatically insists that he has not taught them man’s doctrine, but Christ’s! For the following several verses Paul defends his authority.

Paul Called by God through Revelation

Galatians 1:1–5

Galatians 1:11–12 “I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin . . . I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ” (NIV) or “I make it clear to you” (NEB) This is the thesis statement of Paul’s Epistle. He wants to be completely transparent with his saints that his messages were learned through divine revelation. His teachings came from heaven to earth, not from human innovation. Paul’s reference to revelation refers to both his visions of the resurrected Christ Jesus, as well as regular inspiration from the Spirit that guided his missionary work (Acts 9:3–6; Romans 8:16; 2 Corinthians 3:6; 12:2; etc.)

Revelation was the source of the restoration as well. One of the first things the Lord taught Joseph Smith was how to recognize the Spirit as revelation. Usually it comes after belief, when the Holy Spirit enlightens one’s mind and heart, fills one with peace, speaks in a still small voice, or offers either a burning in the bosom or physical energy

in answer to faith-filled petitions (D&C 5:16, 6:14–15, 22–23; 8:1–3, 9:7–9; etc.). Today, everyone who earnestly reads and prays for revelation about the Book of Mormon, and every seeking faithful human has the hope and potential of receiving revelation or personal inspiration as the basis of their belief or testimony.

Galatians 1:13–14 “I persecuted the church of God . . . being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers”

In Paul’s “previous way of life” (NIV) he intentionally tried to destroy Christianity, thinking it was a devilish apostasy from Judaism (Acts 9:10–22). He excelled in academic Judaism because of his great zeal to live the Law of Moses (Acts 22:3⁴). He also excelled in Greek, as his letters attest. He was uniquely qualified, being born in a capital Greek city, as a Roman citizen, into a zealous pharisaic family. Even more importantly, once the Lord intervened and corrected his understanding of the Gospel, he learned through personal revelation (Acts 22:6–10; etc.).



Jeremiah by Michelangelo, 1511. Imga via Wikimedia Commons.

Galatians 1:15 “God, who separated me from my mother’s

womb and called me through His grace” (NKJV) Paul may have paraphrased Jeremiah 1:5, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations,” or Isaiah 49:1, “Before I was born the LORD called me; from my mother’s womb he has spoken my name.” These two Old Testament prophets and Paul referenced a premortal relationship to God and their foreordained call (also see Alma 13:3; D&C 49:17; 93:29; Abraham 3:19–25). “Separated/*aphorizō*” also means, “set apart,” and “from my mother’s womb” means, before I was born. Paul was called by God’s precious gift of love. Forgiveness is known as “His grace.” The same can be said for all disciples of Christ. Our restored understanding of a premortal life is unique among Christians. Much of the restored Plan of Salvation hangs on this clarifying understanding of premortal lives and calls that Paul hints at here.

Galatians 1:16a “to reveal His Son in me that I might preach Him among the Gentiles” (NIV, BSB) The use of “in me” focuses on Paul becoming a mouthpiece of God’s Spirit. Heathen (KJV) and Gentile were synonymous.

Paul’s Autobiographical History

Galatians 1:16b–2:14

Galatians 1:16b–17 “I consulted not immediately with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to the apostles before me, but . . . to Damascus” (BLB) This begins a discussion that we surmise was Paul’s answer to some who attacked him about when and how he had learned the gospel. The phrase, “flesh and blood” means Paul was not taught by anyone mortal, nor did he get permission to preach from another man or apostle, but

Saint Peter and Saint Paul by El Greco, ca. 1592. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



from God. He returns to his thesis on personal revelation. His first missionary efforts came years before he ever visited the apostles in Jerusalem. It is as if he is saying, “I didn’t need human permission because I was called by Jesus.” After Paul’s transformative vision, he immediately began teaching that Jesus was the Messiah/Christ, in the city of his conversion, Damascus, and two other local Greek cities near modern day Jordan (Acts 9:19–22).

Galatians 1:18 “Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days”

What an amazing opportunity as a young convert, to stay with the chief apostle and his family for fifteen days! What did they talk about? Three years after his conversion fits chronologically into Luke’s retelling of the same visit to Jerusalem in Acts 9:26–27, but the story differs slightly in Luke, which is evidence that the authors retell the story for different purposes. This example of the leader of the church ministering to a new young leader is a great example of correlation within the church. Many Christian historians claim that Peter and Paul worked in separate directions—but this verse gives evidence to the contrary.

Galatians 1:19–20 “But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord’s brother” (BSB) Paul claims that during those two weeks in Jerusalem, he

did not meet any other apostles except for James, the brother of our Lord, the second son of Mary (Jesus had four half-brothers and at least two sisters who are listed in Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). There are three different James in the New Testament. James was a popular name among the Jews because in Hebrew it is, “Jacob.” This James was not either of the Jameses mentioned as original members of Jesus’ Twelve apostles/disciples,⁵ James the son of Zebedee and brother of John the Beloved—as he was martyred in ca. AD 44 (Acts 12:2), nor James the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3). This James was probably the author of the Epistle of James. We also learn from this verse that James was an apostle too, but we do not know if he were ever a member of the Quorum of the Twelve (just as Paul is never included with them).



James the Just, Lord's brother. Artist Unknown, ca. 1809. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

By reading through the lines, trying to patch together Paul’s concerns, it sounds as though the Galatians have accepted a false story about Paul’s conversion or early missionary efforts and apostolic call.

Galatians 1:21–24 “I . . . was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ: But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed”

We are missing half of the story, and must assume that someone in Jerusalem had suggested they knew Paul shortly after his conversion, but Paul objects saying they had only heard of him, as no Jerusalem saints—beside Peter and James—had seen Paul face to face at that time.

GALATIANS 2

Recounting the Jerusalem Council from ca. AD 49 or 50

Galatians 2:1-3

Galatians 2:1 “fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with *me* also”

Paul now turns the next ten verses in his historical memories to the time he had next gone to Jerusalem. There was a pressing need for a general church policy stating which of the Laws of Moses the Gentile-converts needed to live. Thanks to Peter’s vision to accept Gentile converts into a predominately Jewish-Christian church, the missionaries sent to the Gentiles felt an urgency about implementing a church-wide practice for their converts. We now call this meeting the “Jerusalem Council.” A parallel account of the Jerusalem Council is found in Acts 15:2–23. By comparing the two accounts we see the continuity within the story:

ACTS 15:2–5, 23

“They determined that Paul and Barnabas . . . should go up to Jerusalem” (v. 2)

“They were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them” (v. 4)

Certain believing Pharisees insisted “that it was needful to circumcise them” (v. 5)

The Twelve sent Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch with their decision and a letter to “the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia” (v. 23)

GALATIANS 2:1–5, 9, 11–13

“I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus” (v. 1)

“I went up by revelation and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles but privately to them which were of reputation” (v. 2)

Certain “false brethren” sought to compel Titus “to be circumcised,” but Paul absolutely refused (v. 3–5)

Peter, James and John “gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles” (v. 9 NKJV)

Paul and Barnabas went to Antioch (v. 11–13)

Galatians 2:2 “I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I spoke privately to those recognized as leaders, for fear that I was running or had already run in vain” (BSB) Paul’s returns to his thesis, that since Jesus called him through revelation, he continued to learn through personal revelation. Another point he communicates is his desire for unity across Christianity and with the Twelve. His education and experience far surpassed that of Peter, James and John, yet he still honored them as his leaders in the church and counseled with them. There are three key points in this verse that show Paul’s wisdom in communicating his side of the story.

1. “*I went up by revelation.*” He felt inspired by God to gather a council among the apostles in Jerusalem to come to a global consensus (In Acts 15:28, Luke also emphasized the Spirit’s guidance during that council, “it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us . . .”).
2. Paul first met “*privately,*” with Peter and “those of reputation” (KJV), or “those esteemed” (NIV), or other leaders, to make sure he was on the right track.
3. He “*communicated unto them that gospel which I preach,*” so everyone understood Paul’s testimony and approach on his mission to the Gentiles. This way, the leaders could trust his concerns about the worthlessness of requiring circumcision for Gentile Christians.

Galatians 2:3 “Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek” (NIV) The leadership agreed together in the Jerusalem Council that Titus (as an example of all new Gentile converts) could be a full standing Christian without circumcision. Since the time of Abraham, circumcision was a required sign of the covenant—for those males who joined him by birth or proselytizing—to obey God (Genesis 17:11). It became common among ancient Semitic people, but was despised by the Greeks.⁶



Illustration of the Council of Constance, ca. 1465. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Judaizes

Galatians 2:4-6

Galatians 2:4 “. . . false brothers had come in under false pretenses to spy on our freedom in Christ Jesus, in order to enslave us” (BSB) The “false brethren” mentioned here appear to be ultra conservative Jewish converts to Christianity who wanted to keep the Judaic laws as part of Christianity. Josephus and the early church used the nick-name, “Judaizers” (Greek for “live according to Jewish customs”) to describe them.⁷ The “liberty” (KJV) or “freedom” he refers to comes from Jesus’ salvation freeing us from sin and death. Christians are also freed from the “bondage” (KJV) or “enslavement” of the Jewish regulations. Jesus taught that He had fulfill the Law of Moses

(Luke 24:44). Jesus repeatedly denounced the “traditions of the Jews” referring to the ten thousand oral laws that the rabbis added to Moses’ 613 laws from the Torah (Mark 7:3–11).

Galatians 2:5 “We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you” (BSB) It appears that some people opposed Paul’s position of not requiring circumcision for Christians. Paul did not give any attention to the Judaizers in order to maintain Jesus’ cleansing and Gospel.

Galatians 2:6 “But as for the highly esteemed—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism—those leaders added nothing to my message” (BSB) Paul seems to be defending himself from an attack that he had changed for popularity among the leaders or something like that. But Paul protested that he and God do “not judge by external appearance” (NIV). The problem was leaving the thousands of laws that had become barnacles to the Law of was a major brake with Judaism.

Pillars of the Church

Galatians 2:7–10

Galatians 2:7–9 “They recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised . . . James, Cephas, and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship” (NIV) Paul gives evidence that the church leaders, or pillars, supported his assignment as a missionary to the gentiles. The same Spirit directed both Peter and Paul, which made them great missionaries (v. 8). Paul describes himself and Peter as working on the same team, but with different assignments. He tells his audience that he worked in harmony with the church authorities at the time. By calling James (the brother of the Lord), Cephas (Peter), and John “pillars,” Paul shows honor to them. I see this verse as an example of leadership under the first presidency.

Galatians 2:10 “All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along” At the conclusion of the Jerusalem Council, Paul remembered that they clarified the need for Christian converts to continue to take care of the poor. As they lived a form of the Law of Consecration this was very important. When we read the account of the Conference in Acts, Luke also included to not eat foods offered to idols, strangled, blood, or to break the law of chastity (Acts 15:29).

Paul and Peter on a Bad Day

Galatians 2:11–15

Galatians 2:11 “But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed” We do not know what the full argument against Paul by some of the Galatians, but to set the story straight, he tells of one of his and Peter’s bad days. Evidently, Paul retold his view of the story because earlier the Judaizers used it to give the impression that Peter agreed with them. The story intentionally comes after Paul has

listed several examples where he honored Peter as a pillar and apostle, when they worked in harmony on difficult issues, and when he even spent over two weeks as Peter's house guest. With that as background, Paul shares the story of a dinner party in Antioch, when he got frustrated with Peter. Paul was upset because Peter's behavior seemed inconsistent with the harmony they had curated at the Jerusalem Council.

However, the dinner incident described in this verse "is instructive in showing two strong leaders agreeing on a principle that came by revelation, but applying it with different timing."⁸ We do not get to hear Peter's side of the story, but it sounds as if Peter felt at home with the Antioch saints, because Antioch history claims that he settled there after his Jerusalem imprisonment.⁹

Galatians 2:12 "For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party" (ESV) It sounds as though Peter ate with Gentile converts in Antioch until some "Judaizers" or Jewish converts who were friends of James arrived. At that point Peter stopped eating with the Gentiles so as not to offend them. This stems from the Law of Moses (Leviticus 7:21). I can appreciate Peter's challenge because he had the responsibility to preach to the Jews and wanted to meet their needs. Also, Paul knew this lesson because as he expressed: "unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, ... for the gospel's sake" (1 Corinthians 9:21–23).

Galatians 2:13 "The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray" (NIV) This sounds like a major concern for Paul—his first companion and fellow apostle, Barnabas, was among those intimidated by Peter's example of not eating with Greek converts. It escalated the cultural differences and it put Paul in an embarrassing position too, as he now opposed at least two apostles.

Galatians 2:14 "But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all . . ." Paul, forgetting about the need for private conversations, stood up at the dinner to confront the false message that was sent by leaving the Greek table. This is a good example of the challenges of human nature when trying to work together, especially when people with strong personalities—who are both trying their best to fulfill their divine calling—collide on an issue they feel strongly about. Disagreements arise among all of us. In this scriptural account, we see the reality of daily challenges. We also see no sign of "infallibility" of Peter and other apostles (as is claimed by Catholics and Reformed Christian traditions).¹⁰ The restoration corrected this in the early chapters of the Book of Mormon:

O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities. I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me. And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins; nevertheless, I know

Moses Receiving the Law by William Blake, ca. 1780. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



in whom I have trusted. My God hath been my support . . . why should I yield to sin, because of my flesh? Yea, why should I give way to temptations, that the evil one have place in my heart to destroy my peace and afflict my soul? Why am I angry because of mine enemy? Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul (2 Nephi 4:17–21, 27–28).

This perspective not only gives us more patience with our leaders and fellow mortals, but also with ourselves who are equally apt to succumb to the habits of the natural man and adversarial temptations.

Justified through Faith in Christ

Galatians 2:15–21

Galatians 2:15–16 “a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith” (NIV) The Greek verb, “*dikaioó*/justify/to show to be righteous, declare righteous” was used to mean, “defend the cause of, plead for the righteousness (innocence) of, acquit, justify.”¹¹ Judges used the word “justify/*dikaioo*” to declare innocence. The free gift of immortality from God is not justified by obedience to the Law of Moses, rather God justifies mortals only through our faith in Jesus as the means to salvation. When God justifies us, He forgives us through Christ’s atoning sacrifice.

One is justified when one repents: “I, God, have suffered these things for all that they might not suffer if they would repent” (D&C 19:16–18).

Many Jews at that time felt that it was the “Law” that saved them, so Paul clarifies that misunderstanding. The Law of Moses and Jewish temple sacrificial rites did not justify humanity or provide forgiveness for mortals from God. Rather they were like signs that pointed the way to their Messiah’s atoning sacrifice. The symbols portrayed the salvation that was possible through God’s Son, Jesus the Messiah.

Galatians 2:17–18 “**But if, while we seek to be justified in Christ, we ourselves are found to be sinners, does that make Christ a minister of sin? Certainly not!**” (BSB) Paul clarifies what he means by abandoning the “works of the Law” (Galatians 2:16) He does not say that sinners can claim justification; rather he emphasizes that *Jesus saves not the Mosaic Law*. All must obey Jesus to receive Grace.

Galatians 2:19–20 “**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**” (NIV) Through baptism, we symbolically die with Christ; our old life is buried under the water, and we rise again to live a new life with God and His Spirit. The whole plan centered on God’s love by means of the At-one-ment.

Galatians 2:21 “**if righteousness comes through the law, Christ died for nothing**” (BSB) Paul continues to address the problem with relying on the Law of Moses as the redeeming factor of the world. God’s plan was never meant to say that justification came by the Law of Moses—it was always a means to the end in Jesus’ at-one-ment.

GALATIANS 3

Does Revelation come by Faith or works of the Law—via Six Questions

Galatians 3:1–5

Galatians 3:1 “**O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?**” (ESV) For the second time in this Epistle, Paul rebukes his audience (the first was Galatians 1:6). He arranges the rebuke with six questions. Unfortunately, we only have his rebuke, so we can only guess at the problem—but clearly Paul is exasperated by the Galatians’ change of allegiance. Perhaps the Lord’s death was part of it as Paul protests: “Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified.” To many of that day, the fact that Jesus was killed, and worse still, was crucified, was evidence the Jesus was just a mortal. To them, it was crazy to think of a God being put to death, especially in such a torturous fashion. Paul claimed that they were taught this and were able to accept it earlier, but now, with winds of new ideas and contentious ideas floating around, they have lost their grounding.

Galatians 3:2 “Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?” (BSB) Paul continues to focus on revelation, specifically, the personal witness of the Spirit. He asks whether the converts had had enough faith to receive a witness from the Spirit when they had first heard the Christian message. As mentioned previously, when the New Testament, and Paul specifically here, uses the word “law,” he refers to the Mosaic Law. Perhaps Paul feels more emphatic about leaving the Mosaic Law behind because as a Pharisee, he had been bound by all 10,000 oral laws in addition to the 613 commandments in the Torah.

I do not think Paul argued that one could not feel the Holy Spirit while doing good works or obeying the Law of Moses. Rather, he saw belief and faith as prerequisites to feeling a witness of the Spirit. His question asks about how to receive or hear personal revelation.

Galatians 3:3 Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? . . . He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” Paul’s sixth and final question, asks whether they are going to follow the Spirit or the natural man? Paul reminds them that when he initially taught them, the power behind his words and miracles was from the Holy Spirit. The source of revelation was paramount to him.

Abraham as our Christian Example

Galatians 3:6–14

Galatians 3:6 “as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” Paul’s second attack against the false poachers begins by quoting Genesis 15:6, which referred to Abraham as a great example (As an aside, Paul claimed to have studied under one of the greatest Jewish teachers of the time, Gamaliel, which probably means that he had much of the Torah memorized.¹² He will quote seven verses in this section, which opens the possibility that Paul knew the Law of Moses as well if not better than any other Christian).

Galatians 3:7–9 “those who have faith are children of Abraham. . . . “All nations will be blessed through you.” So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham” (NIV) Paul next recites Genesis 12:3 from the Septuagint (or LXX, the Greek version of the Old Testament). According to Genesis, Abraham lived over four-hundred years before Moses received the Law on Mount Sinai. So, Paul argues that God’s blessings came by faith well before the Law was even given.

Galatians 3:10–13 “For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written . . .” Paul hammers away against the law with four more Old Testament verses that all refer to some part of the law as a curse. Here he recites Deuteronomy 27:26, Habakkuk 2:4; Leviticus 18:5, and Deuteronomy 21:23. In his last example, “Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree,” Paul uses the Jewish scripture to claim that Jesus’ crucifixion on a tree carried the curse in order that we might be redeemed.

Galatians 3:14 “That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” Some scholars say Paul’s debate about the relationship to Abraham and gentile converts was probably begun by the false itinerate preacher(s) that led his young converts astray.¹³ Paul’s response claims that Christians can also share Abraham’s blessings if they exert the same faith as the Spirit of the Lord promises.

The Law and the Promise

Galatians 3:15–25

Galatians 3:15–16 “**Brothers and sisters . . . The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed .**

.. meaning one person, who is Christ” (BSB) Paul uses a Jewish pedagogical technique here called, “midrash.” The Rabbis looked for all Old Testament scriptures that foreshadowed their promised Messiah.¹⁴ Paul uses Genesis 12:7; 13:15; and 24:7 to show Jesus as the mediator as foreshadowed as the only offspring of Abraham.

Galatians 3:17–18 “**The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God**” (NIV) As Abraham lived 430 years before Moses received the lower Law, the blessings or inheritance given to Abraham has nothing to do with the Mosaic Law. Furthermore, the promises to Abraham are still valid, and they apply to a much larger group than just the Jews.

Galatians 3:19a “**Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come**” (NIV) Not only does Paul denounce the redemptive nature of the Law, but he also degrades it to only an entr’acte.

Galatians 3:19b–20 “**the law given to Moses, who was ordained by the hand of angels to be a mediator of this first covenant, (the law) . . . but there is one mediator of the new convent, which is Christ, as it was written in the law concerning the promises made to Abraham and his seed. Now Christ is the mediator of life**” (JST) This version adds significantly to the text. It clarifies that Moses was a mediator of the old covenant, and Jesus in the new covenant (The full text is in the Appendix of the LDS Bible).

Galatians 3:21–23 “**Is the law, then, opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not! . . . The Scripture pronounces all things confined by sin . . . Before this faith came, we were held in custody under the law**” (BSB)



Abraham and the Three Angels by Gerbrand van den Eeckhout, 1656. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Paul offers a practical approach, he saw the Law as only temporary. We also believe that the divine Law giver and Creator who brought mortal and immortal life was Jesus. He designed it to prepare the Israelites for Him. The Law was more like an elementary level text book until the Israelites learned enough to move onto Jesus' higher laws.

Children of God

Galatians 3:26-4:11

Galatians 3:24 “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” The Mosaic Law was to act as one who had direct responsibility for a child's upbringing—like a “tutor” (NASB), “guardian” (NIV) “trainer” (BLB), or “guide” (ABPE). The Mosaic Law was supposed to lead the Israelites to their promised Messiah/Christ, not the other way around. It was set up this way from the time of Adam (Moses 5:7). We see this especially clear in the words of the Book of Mormon prophet Jacob.

My soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him.

Sadly, many Jews from Paul's generation were not looking for a suffering servant but a conquering Messiah and thus did not recognize the Son of God.

Galatians 3:25–26 “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” Christians are no longer under the custodian of the schoolmaster but should move onto taking their own responsibility through faith in Jesus Christ. John taught the same thing in his Gospel's prologue (John 1:12).

Galatians 3:27 “all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (BSB) those who covenant with Christ are “clothed/*enduo*” or put on, “in the sense of sinking into a garment.” That clothing shares roots with the original meaning of atone.¹⁵

Galatians 3:28–29 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” All sons and daughters of Adam and Eve were originally equal; all were born in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27). Our different human stations do not change this natural equality. This was reaffirmed in the restoration when the Lord revealed this equality of literal sons and daughters, when Moses claimed, “I am a son of God, in the similitude of his Only Begotten” (Moses 1:13; also see Moses 3:5; Abraham 3:21; D&C 76:24; etc.).¹⁶ Our gender, ethnicity, and age differences are meaningless in Christ's love. The promises given to Abraham are for all of us, not just the Jews or Jewish Christians. All the peoples of the earth will be blessed through their Savior.

GALATIANS 4

We are God's Sons and Daughter—Heirs, no more Servants

Galatians 4:1-11

In chapter four, Paul sets up an analogy between heirs in a family and heirs of God. He starts with the common practice that both servants and children do the same work even though some are heirs, but then when they mature, the heir moves onto more rewarding life. Paul uses this as an analogy to the Mosaic traditions that can be outgrown when it is time to receive one's inheritance in the Kingdom of God. This analogy develops out of his earlier motif that the Law of Moses acts as a schoolmaster to bring those tutored unto Jesus as the Promised Messiah/Christ/Anointed one (Galatians 3:24).

Galatians 4:1 “the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave” (NKJV) One of the Greek words for child, also meant “servant or slave/*pais*” (Lk 2:43, 7:7; 8:51; 12:45; 15:26; etc.).¹⁷ At this time in many Judaic-Greco-Roman families, children and servants did similar work. Each had to stand up in the presence of their master or father “to greet him, and perhaps even to bow down before him. He [the child or slave] could not stand or sit in his place, speak in his presence, contradict him, or respond sharply to him. This was the way of the Torah.”¹⁸ Children were to “give [their fathers] food and drink, to clothe and cover him, to help him in and out when he grew old, and to wash his face, hands and feet.”¹⁹ As ninety percent of Jews living in Palestine at the time lived and worked in farming or fishing villages, children and slaves were needed to help.²⁰

Galatians 4:2 “The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father” (NIV) Up to the age of 12, a Jewish father had full control over his children, acting as both their master and father.²¹ Not until Jewish children reached 12.5 years could they receive their succession and rights as his heir (although usually an inheritance was not received until the death of the parents). Roman Laws also had a time frame when sons could become heirs.²² Paul speaks figuratively in this verse about “guardians,” possibly to reflect himself as one who had helped with their conversion, or covenant making with the Lord. He continues to build an analogy based on the servitude of the Mosaic Law versus the inheritance of everlasting life through Christ.

Galatians 4:3 “So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world” (NIV) Continuing with the analogy of heirs and servants, Paul explains that converts have the opportunity to leave their youthful servitude (to falsehoods, sin, old traditions), and become heirs through Christ. Whether converts were Jewish or Gentile, Paul describes them living figuratively as servants under bondage to the worldly law. They lived under partially correct teachings on the fallen man. And all inhabitants of the world suffer under the bondage of Satan.

Galatians 4:4–5 “When the time had fully come, God sent His Son . . . to redeem those under the Law, that we might receive the divine adoption as sons” (BSB) The KJV translated the first phrase, “fullness of time” (KJV), to mean when Christ came to earth carrying over to his time. But this is not the way we use it in our dispensation. We refer to Jesus’ time as the “meridian to time” and the “fullness of time,” from our dispensation as we prepare for Jesus’ Great Second Coming.²³ Then comes the wonderful redemption through God’s Son.



The Return of the Prodigal Son by Francesco Bassano the Younger, ca. 1580. Image via Wikimedia Commons. Through repentance, we become heirs with Christ.

Jesus taught how to take advantage of His redemption. All have the opportunity to leave bondage and receive an inheritance. Once one covenants to follow Jesus as the Son of God and as their Redeemer, they can leave their cultural baggage and bondage behind, and find freedom in the truths of Christianity. Many converts to Christianity were not sons of Abraham by birth (Galatians 6:29), but importantly, through their covenants they became heirs of God, his sons and daughters.

Galatians 4:6 “And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’” (BSB)

With Christ adopting His disciples spiritually, He becomes their father. The Spirit is the one who sends out the pleading cry, “Abba.” Paul emphasizes the Spirit’s influence again as evidence to support his thesis on revelation (Galatians 1:11–12). Paul’s use of the Aramaic “Abba/father” was probably his mother tongue. The proper noun was “also used as the term of *tender endearment* by a beloved child—i.e. in an *affectionate, dependent* relationship with their father; ‘daddy’ ‘papa.’”²⁴

Christians can feel a sense of their adoption as the Spirit communicates God’s love and care. Especially when one has felt God’s forgiveness of a sin, the Spirit seems to envelope one’s inner being with love, acceptance, and unity. The Spirit becomes the sign that they have been adopted into God’s family.

Galatians 4:7 “thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” Paul uses the analogy to show the importance of accepting Jesus as our Redeemer. As disciples accept Him as a father, the Spirit facilitates our rebirth. It is a spiritual birth through His atonement. Yet, purely theologically, as heirs of Christ, we still serve, obey, and honor Him as our Master and God.

Galatians 4:8–9 “**now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces?**” (NIV) Paul asks his readers about their pre-Christian life when they had served polytheistic Greek gods. “So why—now that you have adult faith—in the true God—why do you seek to follow the old ideas that kept you in bondage?” I presume from the context he refers back to the Jewish ritual and customs of purification. Yet he is not denouncing Christian ordinances, because we know, “in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest” (D&C 84:20). Living the covenants keep us attached to God. His point is that after we receive the truth, and covenant with God to follow Him through baptism, obedience to that covenant provides freedom and heir-ship.

Galatians 4:10–11 “**You are observing special days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, lest perhaps I have toiled for you in vain**” (BSB) The days and months refer to Jewish traditions and ritual cleanings, fasting, major feasts, etc. Paul continues to denounce the false teachers or Judaizers who preached to the young converts about the need to return to Jewish rites.

Christians should Remain Zealous in Righteousness

Galatians 4:12–20

Galatians 4:12 “**I plead with you, brothers and sisters, become like me**” Paul changes his approach and creates a personal bond appealing to their emotions. In the ancient Mediterranean world of apprentice and tutors following master teachers, they took role modeling very seriously.²⁵ Their philosophies were tested by how they played out in the lives of their disciples. Paul remembers that he set a good example for them, so he asks why they are not following. He stopped living the Law of Moses when he became a missionary to the Gentiles (or at least after the Jerusalem Council).

Galatians 4:13 “**Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And . . . ye . . . received me as an angel of God**” Paul’s infirmity of the flesh is a “bodily illness” (NAS). But he does not repeat what he dealt with. In the ancient world, pain and sickness plagued people constantly. If it were not a tooth ache or broken toe, it was food poisoning or diphtheria. Whatever plagued him, the Lord did not see fit to heal him. Like many of our challenges, God sees the value in our enduring and developing patience, sympathy, dependence on God and others, all for the long-term good.

Galatians 4:14 “**although my illness was a trial to you, you did not despise me or reject me. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God**” (BSB) The KJV, refers to the illness as a “temptation/*peirasmos*,” which can also translate, “probation, testing, calamity, affliction.” In the ancient world, sicknesses and disease were often thought to be connected to specific sins, but Jesus and the apostolic church denounced that (John 2–3).

Galatians 4:15–16 “if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me. Am I therefore become your enemy” The attentive love they once felt toward Paul, is now gone. The reference to plucking out an eye, or any mutilation to the body, was probably not literal as that was highly offensive to the Jews who saw the body as a sacred creation in God’s image (Genesis 1:26–27; 1 Corinthians 11:7?). Besides, blindness was the worst thing that could happen to someone (and they often killed blind children rather than have them suffer through life).²⁶ Perhaps instead, it is a reference to the affectionate Psalm 17:8, “Keep me as the apple of your eye” (also see Deuteronomy 32:10; Proverbs 7:2). He asks for a return of their initial gratitude for a messenger from God.

Galatians 4:17 “Those people are zealous for you, but not in a good way . . . it is good to be zealous if it serves a noble purpose” (NIV) Paul refers to the Judaizers who have tried to make the Gentile converts look inferior and who sought to adopt Jewish traditional superiority. “They zealously affect you” (KJV) is also translated, “are zealous to win you over” (NIV), or “are envious of” (NEB), and “eagerly seek” (NAS), to live the thousands of laws or traditions attached to the Law of Moses. So, Paul asks, “why waste our energies on causes that are not right?”

Galatians 4:19 “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you” (NKJV) Paul reminds them that he gave them a new birth in Christianity, but they have aborted too early. The use of “anguish of childbirth” (ESV) suggests that more than a ruptured friendship was at stake—the new birth of the early church in Galatians was part of the new creation that Jesus brought as the second Adam. By returning to the old Law of Moses, Jesus’ new creation was being rejected.

Galatians 4:20 “how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!” (NIV) Paul tenderly wishes that they could have a face to face conversation and clear up this misunderstanding.

Heirs of Abraham

Galatians 4:21–30

Galatians 4:21 “Tell me . . . are you not aware of what the law says?” When one leaves truth for something else, one problem may be that one does not know what one is running to (nor appreciate what one is running away from). In the KJV, Paul’s asks them to: “hear the Law.” This sounds as if he were quoting one of the most oft repeated Old Testament scriptures by memory, the Shema, “Hear O, Israel . . .” (Deuteronomy 6:4).²⁷ Could Paul be asking his audience to see his application as God’s new law?

Galatians 4:22–23 “Abraham had two sons . . . His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born because of the promise” (BSB) Paul develops a Jewish “midrashic interpretations” of the scriptures. They believed the scriptures had innumerable interpretations, hence could be



Hagar and Ishmael Banished by Abraham by Pieter Jozaf Verhaghen, 1781. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

applied anywhere else. (We take a similar approach when we “apply the scriptures to ourselves.”) Paul talks about Abraham’s wives, Sarah (the “freewoman”) and Hagar (the “bondmaid”), and their two sons, Isaac and Ishmael respectively. He refers to the converts who want to return to the old Law of Moses as Hagar, and those accepting Jesus’ the new law as Sarah (Genesis 16–21). Sarah’s son Isaac became the heir, just as Christ can provide an eternal reward for all His posterity. Paul continues to expand on this analogy through the end of the chapter.

Galatians 4:24–25 “These things are being taken figuratively: The women represent two covenants” (NIV) Paul compares the Law of Moses as slavery and bondage through the image of the bondswoman Hagar.

“Hagar . . . bearing children who are to be slaves” represents slavery to the thousands of Jewish traditions around the Law (NAS).

Galatians 4:26 “But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother” (BSB) Jerusalem, the holy city of the temple, takes on the role of the heavenly Jerusalem “which is above” (KJV). At this point in Christianity, Jerusalem also represents the mother church of the Lord’s passion and resurrection. Paul then quotes Isaiah 54:1, rejoicing in the blessed fruit of a barren woman.

Galatians 4:28–29 “Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time, the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit” (NIV) The Genesis account reads that Ishmael, who was 14 years older, “mocked” (Gen 21:9) or teased Isaac, just as the Judaizers are fighting with the Gentile converts.

Galatians 4:30 “what does Scripture say? “Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman’s son” (NIV) Paul changes Genesis 21:10 a little as he portrays Sarah as the symbol of heavenly Jerusalem or reward here. This analogy leaves a sour taste to the modern reader, as it can be interpreted as a racial slur. Yet, this follows Paul’s witness that God is no respecter persons “There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for ye are all one in Christ” (Galatians 3:28–29). In that context, Paul is not belittling the Egyptian Hagar or her son Ishmael’s Arab descendants. It is just an allegory for his of argument against the Judaizers.

GALATIANS 5

The Liberty of Christ

Galatians 5:1–15

Galatians 5:1 “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not be encumbered once more by a yoke of slavery” (BSB) While Paul preaches the advantages of “liberty” (KJV) or freedom through faith in Jesus Christ as compared to the “yoke” or burdens of the Law of Moses, he does not preach liberty without laws. In nature there are laws—gravity, osmosis, cell regeneration, etc.—that make life free to live at its optimal. Alma 42:14–15 explains that certain laws hold even God eternally bound, “all mankind were fallen, and they were in the grasp of justice.” So God followed other eternal laws to redeem humanity because “the plan of mercy could not be brought about except an atonement should be made.” Richard Anderson explained it, “The God who controls the physical world through law would not ignore laws savings his children. . . . God respects *law* enough to require his Son to meet the penalties of law in order to save mankind. Then does he ignore law in their personal lives after that?... Is God careless of the acts of his children who accept Christ?”²⁸ God’s laws enable and ennoble His children to become heirs. These are the laws that provide the “liberty” that Paul references. He does not denounce all laws, as he refers to the “law of Christ,” in Galatians 6:2, the law of chastity in 1 Corinthians 7, the law of consecration in 2 Corinthians 8:10–15, and to “walk in the Spirit” in Galatians 5:25.

Galatians 5:2–3 “I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing” Paul uses “circumcision” to represent the Law of Moses. It sounds as though he is exaggerating, or just using the word differently. As Paul himself was circumcised and is also a full disciple of Christ, I think he means something else. His logic does not work for the outward action, but only if it is the inward belief that one was saved from relying on the law of circumcision (as another name for all 613 commandments in the Law of Moses, and possibly the ten-thousand oral laws too) or the law. The Jews believed their salvation came through living the law, not through the Savior. Without the full context we cannot understand Paul completely. Rather than figuratively, throw rocks at the apostle, we must assume that we are missing the perspective to understand it.



Image via Wikimedia Commons.

This is an example of not knowing the whole story especially in light of Paul having his companion, Timothy, circumcised. As a baby, Timothy had not been circumcised even though his mother and grandmother were Jewish, because his father was Greek. But, to appease the Jews, before Timothy joined Paul on his second mission, “he circumcised him because of the Jews” (Acts 16:3, NIV). This probably ensured that the Jews would welcome him into their synagogues.

Galatians 5:4 “You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace” (NIV) Paul basically says, “If you think that you are being saved by the Law of Moses, not that precious undeserved gift of God’s Grace, you’re wrong.” Some Christians, including those of our faith, fall into a related problem. Some feel that it is by their efforts that they will be saved. And, others feel they are beyond Christ’s forgiveness. All of these ideas are a misunderstanding of Jesus’ gifts of grace, repentance, forgiveness, immortality, and exaltation.

Galatians 5:5–6 “We through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith” (NIV) The Spirit of God sustains our faith through the motivation of feeling His love, which brings us to Eternal Life. By exerting faith, we can feel God’s love, and by following the Spirit’s promptings we can feel God’s love even more.

Galatians 5:6 “. . . neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any power, but only faith working through love” (BLB) Power comes through our faith in Christ and loving Him enough to keep our covenants with Him. The NIV reads: “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” This combination of faith,

hope, and love is consistent with Paul's list of greatest gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12–13). In Galatians 5:22, Paul lists both faith and love as fruits of the Spirit, but their connection in vs. 5 sounds contributory. Alma 13:29 also connects them, "Having faith on the Lord; having a hope that ye shall receive eternal life; having the love of God always in your hearts." We both feel God's love and share it with others through faith. Faith allows us to feel God's love.

Galatians 5:8–10 "You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? . . . The one who is throwing you into confusion . . . will have to pay the penalty" (NIV) The Judaizers opposed the teachings of Paul and his missionary companions. Paul uses the image of interfering in a race and leaven in bread to represent the corrupting influences and pride of the Judaizers. He reiterates that whoever taught these falsehoods, would be held responsible at the judgment. He wants to make sure everyone knows that the false voices are not speaking for Paul.

Galatians 5:11 "Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?" (NIV) Someone must have charged Paul for changing his message on circumcision. Many of the Jewish converts did not want to see their Mosaic traditions cast out in order to accept Jesus. It sounds as if these "Judaizers" bad-mouthed Paul's authority and teaching to the degree that the new Christian converts began to follow their bad example. He asks, if he had ever taught that the Law of Moses were sufficient, why would he also preach the need for the Savior who died for our sins?

"In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished" (NIV) or "the offense of the cross ceased" (KJV), or "the stumbling-block of the cross is no more" (NAB). These different translations all mention the difficulty of accepting a god who had died—especially Jesus' death on a cross like a common criminal. This idea seemed absurd to them. It was a confusing and foreign concept because the Greeks saw no need for a god to have a body, nor die, nor want a resurrection of that body.

Galatians 5:12 "I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!" (NKJV) We see Paul's frustration turning to verbal anger at whoever had lied about him and had poisoned the faith of so many saints. His letter has several examples of his growing irritation. He even attacks his enemies through a jest that perhaps the surgery from circumcision should continue to cut more for a complete castration of the culprits. A few modern translations are quite graphic about the process of circumcision, "would go the whole way and emasculate themselves" (NIV) or, "had better go the whole way and make eunuchs of themselves." (NEB). I think Paul is having a bad day as his anger takes over the quill.

Galatians 5:13–14 "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free . . . For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (NIV) With all the freedom offered through

Christ, Paul does not want his audience to lose sight of the fundamental law—in both the Old Testament and the New Testament—to love and serve others. This is stated in the chiasmic center of the Law of Moses (Leviticus 19:18) and repeated by Jesus’ summary of the most important focus of the law (Mark 12:31).

Live by the Spirit

Galatians 5:16–18 “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” Paul instructs disciples to deny the instincts of the “natural man,” or “lusts of the flesh” in order to feel the Spirit (repeated from 2 Corinthians 2:14). He uses the “flesh” for the “natural man” who is the antithesis of the “spiritual man” who obeys the enticings of the Spirit (Mosiah 3:19). The Spirit is the vehicle to receive faith and salvation through Christ, so Paul encourages his audience to “be led of the Spirit” as a means of following Jesus, not relying on the Law of Moses.

Works of the Flesh vs. Works of the Spirit

Galatians 5:19–26

Galatians 5: 19–20 “that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God . . .” (NIV) To make sure he is clearly understood; Paul systematizes the two opposing groups of works of the flesh and Spirit. In his list he includes at least five of the Ten Commandments, which reiterates the need to live these commandments.

WORKS OF THE FLESH

The acts of the flesh are . . . sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, . . . desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another

WORKS OF THE SPIRIT

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions

Galatians 5:22–24 In contrast to works of the flesh, Paul lists the fruits of the Spirit. Interestingly, his list of “the fruits” is different than his list of “the gifts” of the Spirit as listed in 1 Corinthians 12 (also see Moroni 10 and D&C 46). He includes different traits that disciples strive to emulate from Christ. Fruits are born from the tree after it is nourished, pruned, and watered, while the “gifts of the Spirit” seem to be a gift beyond the law of the harvest—charity, healing, visions, and interpretation of tongues.

Galatians 5:25–26 “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” Paul’s theme of seeking the Spirit or personal revelation builds to a new height as he describes the blessings that come from walking as the Spirit directs. In the KJV, Paul uses “walk,” thirty times. He communicates a sense of careful control in our daily lives by spiritual focus in order to receive the added strength of the Holy Spirit (also a theme in 1 Thessalonians 2:12). His sense of doing speaks to his consistent support of the need to obey Jesus’ laws. Paul’s “liberty” or “freedom” from the law of circumcision does not mean that Christians do not have other laws to live by. Positive commandments, such as Christ’s new commandment—that goes beyond the Old Testament call to love our neighbors—to love as He loves (John 14:15–17), and his list of negative commandments just mentioned, are examples of the Christian need to live by the higher laws. Paul carefully mentions these to differentiate all of God’s law from the law of circumcision—which he sees as a “vain glory.”

GALATIANS 6

Bear One Another’s Burdens

Galatians 6:1–15

Galatians 6:1–2 “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently . . . Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (NIV) Most often, the best way to encourage change and repentance is through gentleness and love. This is how Jesus usually acted. Yet, we also saw Him work in a powerful way as He denounced those who had desecrated the temple or distorted the truth (Matthew 11:21; 18:7; 23:25; etc.). Paul had mentioned the “law of Christ” earlier in 1 Corinthians 9:21, but here he defines it as bearing one another’s burdens.

Galatians 6:3–4 “But let each one examine his own work” (NKJV) If we “prove” (KJV) something we are testing it, or examining it. If we examine our work, we can find the satisfaction of a job well done.

Galatians 6:6 “Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches” Paul may be asking his converts to report to him. Or perhaps he also wants disciples to share their good deeds in prayer with God as the great teacher. This may also be a call for missionary work as Christians should share their knowledge of the Lord with others.

Galatians 6:7–8 “whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life” (NIV) Humans have the agency and power to nurture base or spiritual ideas. Wickedness will grow in our hearts and minds as we allow it. The law of the harvest works in that way as we can harvest the fruits of the Spirit, too. To receive the Spirit, disciples must nourish the Spirit through: prayer (Acts 4:31; Ephesians 5:18; Ro 15:30; Luke 22:44), faith (John 7:39; Galatians 3:2); serving (Philippians 3:3), listening to the words of God (Ephesians 6:17); and repen-

tance (Acts 2:38). The restored scriptures teach even more clearly how to foster and retain the Spirit of the Lord.²⁹

The Lord revealed a similar spiritual “law of the harvest” to the Prophet Joseph Smith: “There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated” (D&C 130:21). The produce that grows from obedience is the sanctification of the Spirit that allows for the gift of exaltation.



Galatians 6:9–10 “And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap . . . As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people” Of all people who worked themselves to weariness Paul could have claimed weariness. But he asks his readers to avoid the temptation to feel weariness in God’s work. President Spencer W. Kimball taught a similar principle by encouraging the saints to “lengthen your stride.”³⁰ Honestly, it is often a matter of where our heart and mind can strengthen the body. Usually the other cares of life that drag us down, and most of God’s work builds us up. Paul reminds his readers of the judgment day when we may reap. “If we faint not” is also translated, “do not slacken our efforts” (NEB) or “don’t give up the struggle.” (JB). Paul asks the Galatians to be especially loving to other Christians (and family members, I might add).

Galatians 6:11 “See what large letters I am using to write to you with my own hand!” (BSB). The KJV of this verse, sounds as if Paul acted as his own scribe and penned the whole letter. However, the Greek text may equally suggest that Paul added this traditional greeting at the end in his own hand using large letters (plural). It does not clearly communicate whether Paul wrote via a scribe.³¹ The word “letter/*gramma*” means “that which is drawn or written, a letter” as was used for “a letter of the alphabet; collectively: written (revelation); (a) a written document, a letter, an epistle, (b) writings, literature, learning.”³²

Galatians 6:12–13 “Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. They only do this to avoid persecution . . . they want you to be circumcised that they may boast” (BSB) Paul comes up with three more final attacks against the Judaizers who tried to compel the Greek-Christians to live the Law of Moses: 1. To avoid persecution, 2. They don’t keep the whole law themselves, 3. They want to boast

Galatians 6:14 “**May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus**” (NIV) Paul reminded his audience that he finds glory in Jesus’ at-one-ment and sacrifice on the cross.

Galatians 6:15 “**What counts is a new creation**” (BSB) In most modern translations, “creature,” is translated, “creation,” as in born again. Paul said it doesn’t matter if you are circumcised or uncircumcised. It matters if you have been born of the Spirit.

Benediction

Galatians 6:17

Galatians 6:17 “**I bear on my body the marks of Jesus**” Paul refers to “marks” or in Greek *stigmata*, which originally meant *scar* and came from the branding irons of slavery. A person was identified as a slave if they had scars on his or her back. Paul reported in 2 Corinthians 11:24, “Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.” So he and the Lord shared welts on their back for a period of time. The marks may also have come from being stoned; the broken bones may have been from his beating with a rod—all of which came because of his valiant missionary service. The negative connotations have led to our word, “*stigma*.” Paul uses this to show faithfulness in the face of persecution. He received a lot of persecution in Galatia (stoning, Acts 14:5,19; 13:50; etc.).

Header Image: Moses with the Tables of the Law by Pieter Gaal, 1803. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ENDNOTES

4. There are two cities named Antioch in the New Testament, one north and one west of Jerusalem. Antioch in Pasidia or western Galatia where Paul is now (not to be confused with the eastern city of Antioch in Syria where Paul spent most of his early Christian life).
5. J. Louis Martyn, *The Anchor Bible: Galatians* (NY, London: Doubleday, 1997), 15–17.
6. Adapted from John W. Welch, *Charting the New Testament*, section 14, and Raymond Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 468.
7. Gamaliel was not only a well-respected member of the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:33–40), but also the grandson of Hillel, one of the greatest Jewish teachers in the Mishnah and the father of rabbinism.
8. The Gospels of Matthew and John usually refer to the Twelve as Jesus’ “disciples,” Mark and Luke call the Twelve apostles more often.
9. William Pinar, *Race, Religion, and A Curriculum of Reparation* (NYC, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 44. To the Greeks, one was not naked unless the male foreskin was removed. “As a mutilation of the natural male form, **circumcision** violated **Greek** aesthetics. Moreover, **Greeks** held athletic contests in which the young male participants appeared **nude**. The **Greeks’** sense of modesty dictated that the foreskin should cover the glans.”
10. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, II.xviii.2. “When the Syrians thought they had ruined the Jews, they had the **Judaizer’s** in suspicion also”
11. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 258.
12. Glanville Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Press, 1961, reprint 2012), 583–586.
13. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology in three volumes* (NYC, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1871), 1.152, 163, 182. Speaking as a mouthpiece of the *Westminster Confession*, and Reformed Protestant theology in America, Hodge insisted that the entire Bible was divinely inspired: “All the books of scripture are equally inspired. All alike are infallible in what they teach. And secondly, that inspiration extends to all the contents of these several books . . . the Spirit of God pervades the whole Scripture” (also 1.138–140).
14. All Greek definitions are taken from Strong’s *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, for the KJV. Available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/1344.htm> (accessed 9-10-19)
15. Tom Thatcher, Chris Keith, Raymond F. Person, Jr., *The Dictionary of the Bible and Ancient Media* (London, Oxford: Bloomsbury, T&T Clark, 2017), 113.
16. Michael Edward Stone, Esther Glickler Chazon, David Satran, Ruth A. Clements, *Supplements to the Journal of the study of Judaism: Things Revealed: Studies In Early Jewish And Christian Literature* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2004), 210. “Paul steps onto an exegetical platform, first erected probably by the itinerant teachers, to debate the relevance of Abraham . . . Paul’s midrashic argument of [Galatians] 3:10–13 is notoriously complicated.
17. *Psalms of Solomon*, available online at <http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/psalmssolomon.html> (accessed 9-12-19).
18. Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1989), 558.559.

19. A premortal descendant of Heavenly Parents was also mentioned in the Bible, but not interpreted that way: “Ye are gods, children of the most High” (Psalm 82:6); “We are the offspring of God” (Acts 17:29), and “Be in subjection unto the Father of spirits” (Hebrews 12:9).
20. Matthew 2:16; 8:6, 8, 13; 12:18; 17:18; 21:15; John 4:51; Acts 3:26; etc. Also in Greek, “servant” is the same word as “*doulos*/slave, bondman, man of servile condition,” and similarly a female servant or handmaid, was a “*doule*/female slave, bondmaid” (see John 15:15; Lk1:38). Section shared in Wilson, *Emancipation of Women in the New Testament*, chapter 7.
21. Shaye J. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1987), 122.
22. J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem at the Time of Jesus*, 363
23. Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament* (NYC, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1998), 15–16. Unfortunately, we do not have many historical records from this class of people as they were too poor.
24. *Mishnah, Kiddushin*, 2.1. The day after the twelfth birthday, the child was no longer a minor, and the day after she turned twelve and a half the boy or girl could legally be married. “A man may give his daughter in betrothal while she is still in her girlhood either by his own act or by that of his agent.”
25. Martyn, *Galatians*, 386.
26. Moses 5:57; 6:57, 62; 7:46; also 2 Nephi 2:3, 26; D&C 20:26; 39:3; 76:106; 112:30.
27. See Bible Hub, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/5.htm> (accessed 9-11-19)
28. Martyn, *Galatians*, 419.
29. Avraham Steinberg, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics* (Jerusalem, Israel: Feldheim, 2003), 106. “Blindness was a very common condition in antiquity. Throughout the bible where human blemishes are cited, blindness is always mentioned first. A blind person in ancient cultures was considered very lowly and was the subject of scorn, ridicule and even death. A newborn determined to be blind was not allowed to survive. If the blindness was not recognized until he grew up, he became a beggar.”
30. The Shema included three Old Testament passages: Deuteronomy 6:4–9; 11:13–21; and Numbers 15:37–41. As mentioned earlier, it was written on phylacteries, door posts, and recited daily at the temple
31. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 164.
32. “Whosoever believeth on my words, them will I visit with the manifestation of my Spirit” (D&C 5:16). “As often as thou hast inquired thou hast received instruction of my Spirit. . . . thou hast been enlightened by the Spirit of truth” (D&C 6:14–15). “If you desire a further witness, cast your mind upon the night that you cried unto me in your heart” (D&C 6:22). “Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have than from God?” (D&C 6:23). “Whatsoever things you shall ask in faith, with an honest heart, believing that you shall receive” (D&C 8:1). “I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost . . . this is the spirit of revelation” (D&C 8:2–3; also see D&C 12:5; 14:8). “You must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right . . . But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong” (D&C 9:7–9).
33. Spencer W. Kimball, “Becoming the Pure in Heart,” General Conference April 1978.
34. A professional **scribe** was called an *amanuensis*, **Paul probably asked a fellow saint to help him in his Epistles. We**

have the names of a few of them: Tertius (R0 16:22), and possibly Epaphras (Colossians 1:7; 4:12; Philemon 1:23).

35. See Bible Hub, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/1121.htm> (accessed 9-12-19).