

Galatians 1: Another Gospel

The Galatian churches are those churches established by Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13-14. Paul's letter to them may be one of the earliest letters of the New Testament. We assume, that because the letter of Acts 15 is not mentioned, that this letter was written prior to those events.

Galatians one begins with Paul admonishing the Galatians for making another Gospel. He then describes his personal encounter with the Gospel, the true Gospel, which has the power to save.

Paul describes himself as a "true" Hebrew. "Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee" (Philippians 3:5). We read of his conversion and subsequent experience recounted in Galatians 1 in Acts 10:20-28. If there is anyone who could testify that Judaism was not truth, that the Law of Moses was annulled, and that circumcision was meaningless, it was Saul of Tarsus!

Paul tells us about a new religion, the New Religion of Judaism. That word "Judaism" has not appeared before in Scriptures; Paul is suggesting that it is a new religion, because it is not the legal observation of the law of Moses. For one thing, that law's authority ended at the cross. Therefore, it was not the law of Moses that was being followed, but something else. Too, Paul will suggest that even before Christ the Law of Moses was ABSENT the Promises original to it; they had been lost 500 years before. A Law without promises is a CURSE (Galatians 3:10,13)

The Galatian Dilemma (Galatians 5:2-4) was the issue of Circumcision. It is NOT a sin to be circumcised, but it IS a sin to make the Law of Christ. Circumcision was a slight matter of liberty; adding things to law is ANOTHER GOSPEL.

The Galatian Dilemma teaches us that adding the things of the Old Testament to the Law of Christ make ANOTHER GOSPEL. Today there are a number of "old" things added to the law of Christ that create another Gospel: adding clergy or holy places; adding the Sabbath or Passover (.i.e. Easter) or days; adding the importance of the "Promised Land" (modern Israel); adding instrumental music. All of these things are from the Law of Moses, all of these things were done away with by Christ, and all of these things are therefore part of "another Gospel".

We need to understand that even small changes make another gospel. The Old testament is full of examples of how "little things" caused great destruction. We have the example of Moses and the rock in Numbers 20:11. We have Nadab & Abihu in Leviticus 10:1. Even small changes make another gospel; things like churches supporting institutions, having fellowship halls or churches in cooperation may seem like small potatoes, but they are deadly. As well, it does not matter WHO misleads us; in I Kings 13 a man of God was misled in a "little things" by another prophet; it cost him his life.

In the end, Salvation is your responsibility. You must ensure you are obedient to the entire Gospel, and have neither added to nor taken from that truth.

Galatians 2: Brethren in Contention

Galatians two ties to chapter one in being a story of a series of events that led ultimately to a confrontation between two apostles. To summarize these events we look back into Acts 11:27-30 when a famine in Judea predicted by Agabus in Antioch. At that time relief sent with Paul and Barnabas (and we find out here, also Titus). This ties to Galatians 2:1-10, where additional facts are added to that record. Paul, Barnabas & Titus arrive in Jerusalem with the relief aid (for the poor, ie saints). It is at this time that Paul submits himself for examination to the (other) apostles, and they concede to Paul's work with the gentiles. Now we return to Acts 12:17-25 and there we see new persecution in Jerusalem sees Peter arrested and then supernaturally freed. After being freed Peter "went to another place"; this place is not stated, but it may have been Antioch. If so, we can deduce that when Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch in Acts 12:25, this is when the confrontation discussed in Galatians 2:11-16 occurs.

The first issue here is the issue of false brethren. Judaizing teachers among brethren are a constant problem in the New Testament. We see them in Acts 15:1 and verse 24. There are still false brethren today. They have an attitude of infallibility. They refuse to debate or discuss their views, but instead resort to name calling (*legalist, patternist, anti, etc.*). Ultimately, we can know them by their fruits, such as division and discord.

The second issue here is the division of Racism, a work of the flesh. Paul addressed the unity of believers in Galatians 3:28. He made it clear there and elsewhere that it is unlawful to divide brethren by race. Racial prejudice is worldly; we cannot permit society to force this. Racial prejudice ought to be seen as a work of the flesh similar to lust or covetousness. It must be controlled in all of us.

We also see a pattern here established in confronting error. Paul confronted Peter publically and without a prior warning. This sets for us a pattern that (generally speaking) public sin requires public address. Matthew 18:15-17 applies only between brethren; public sin and sins by men of authority while in the execution of their authority must be handled publically. This is re-emphasized in I Timothy 5:19-20.

As well, we need to see that Peter's error was NOT resisting the false teachers. He did not agree with the false teachers, but he did not stand up against them. As seen in Titus 1:9, we must stand against falsehoods and false teachers. Confrontation is a most difficult duty of a Christian.

Paul's last point is that Christians are justified not through law but through Christ. Specifically, in this context he refers to the Law of Moses. However, even now we are justified by Christ outside law; we are then obedient to Law, but it is the Law of Christ.

Galatians 3: Curse of the Law

How Were You Saved? This is the main question to the Galatians. When they considered it, they would reply "by faith". They had left the law of Moses as unable to sustain them. And yet here they were, returning to a portion of it. That which brings you in keeps you in; if faith, then faith. If works of the law of Moses, then works. Yet even then, the salvation by faith had, by the Spirit, been miraculously shown. So how could they be so illogical?

Paul speaks about a Curse of the Law. The idea is that law, when it is not coupled with a blessing, is a curse, because it can only bring condemnation. When a law is coupled with a promise, whether it is the promise to Abraham of his Seed, or to Israel of the land, or in Christ, when it is grace, it is called a Covenant. When a covenant is broken, all that remains is the law. Consider a marriage symbol, a wedding ring. When that ring (a symbol of the law of marriage) is on in a covenant of marriage, it is a blessing. However, if that party cheats on the other, then is put away, they are now cursed by that same law. That wedding ring is a symbol that they cannot remarry. If someone is to live under a law, they must live under the entire law. Law (alone) provides no justification.

Paul then tells us that Christ Redeemed from the Curse. Christ was the answer to the Law. Imagine that the law had a large hole in it. This hole was the absence of forgiveness for transgression of the law. It could only pass on sin, not remedy it. Jesus said He was sent to "fulfill" this hole in the law; He was the remedy for the curse. Matthew 5:17-19, Colossians 2:13-14, Ephesians 2:15

Now Paul moves to the Faith of Abraham which is found beginning in Genesis 12-17. We see Abraham obeying God because he believes God, and it is counted as righteousness. There is in Scripture a dual Citation of Abraham; one in Galatians 3 for his Faith, and one in James 2:21-24 for his works. Both are in fact the same citation; neither James nor Paul contradict, they speak to the same Abraham and the same actions. Both want us to see that obedience is vital to faith; Paul wants us to see it was not the Law of Moses, but the commandment of God. James wants us to see it was not just believing God, but acting on it.

Abraham's promise supersedes the law by existing before the law. His promise of a Seed salvation (which is Christ) was greater than the law, which came later. Thus, whatever promises the Law of Moses made (which were the land promise, not salvation) are less than the previous covenant of Abraham, which was the promise of a Savior to all mankind.

Paul then says that the Law served as a tutor to us. Because of sin, we are enslaved. The law acted as a guard to those before Christ, because they needed a jurisdiction that prevented their eternal condemnation. Without law, there is simply judgment and death. With the law, there is a captivity of jurisdiction that could be settled by Christ, thus preventing utter damnation. The Whole World is Slave to Sin (John 8:32-36, Romans 6:16-20); even now, we are held captive by our sins, in a jurisdiction not of Moses but of Christ. Yet those who have appealed to Christ are free.

Are You So Foolish? Would you exchange truth for a lie, the Lie of another Gospel, the Lie of worldly desires? Would you dispose of all that you obtained? Such is the question Galatians 3 charges us to answer. We have departed from the truth, how can we return?

Galatians 4: Born of Christ

The Galatians have left Christ by following another Gospel. This new gospel is “elemental” in that it appeals to the worldly elements of the flesh, the works of the flesh. Paul has a great “fear” for them because they have fallen from Grace (Gal. 5:4). In Galatians 4 Paul reminds the Galatians of their adoption in Christ. By returning to former things they are turning back to slavery. They need to have discernment in their teachers; they have true friends and false friends; there is a way to tell them apart.

Jesus came a specific way. First, He came at the time the prophets said He would come (Daniel 7, Malachi 4, etc.). Second, He came born of a woman, i.e. He came in the flesh, and in the fullest experience of the flesh. Finally, He came under the Law of Moses. He had to live sinless by that Law in order to be found justified before God. All of this accomplishes the great work of God: the Adoption of Grace.

Paul now brings the Galatians to the inheritance of God. This is the great value of the testament of Christ. Our adoption into Christ makes us heirs as sons rather than servants. Eternal life is the Inheritance of God; only as sons is an inheritance possible. Heirs (often) bear the name of the one from whom they inherit; this is the significance of Galatians 3:27. The Son-ship concept was (practically) absent in the Old Testament, but the main theme of the New Testament.

So how does one lose their son-ship and become slaves? In Romans 6 Paul discussed how sin brings about slavery. Here Paul wants the Galatians to know that false religion accomplishes this too. Circumcision is one such way that we are returned to slavery of the Old Testament. The observance of religious holidays (Colossians 2:20-23) is another (this is not to say we cannot observe days, Col. 2:16-17). What is remarkable is that returning to the OT is contrasted in verse 8 with the idolatry of the Gentiles. It is a turn to a false religion.

Paul presents himself as a friend who has become an enemy because he is willing to tell truth. True friends will speak to you the truth (4:16,20; Psalms 141:5 Proverbs 13:18, 15:31-32). They warn you of dangers you face, and want the best for you. False Friends will tell you what you want to hear to accomplish what they want (4:17, Proverbs 26:23-26).

These practical comments lead Paul into a foreshadow conversation about the nature of the two covenants of God. Paul reminds the people that in the life of Abraham there are two sons (of prominence): Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael was the son of Hagar, a servant, while Isaac was the son of Sarah (a princess). The son of the servant was the work of the flesh, of Abraham’s weakness, while the son of the princess was the son of spirit, the working of faith. He adds to this that these things correspond to two mountains: Mount Sinai (where the OT came) and Jerusalem, from where the New Covenant was born.

Paul tells us that these things are symbolic of the two covenants: the Covenant of Moses (the Old Testament) and the Covenant of Christ (the New Testament). One is an inheritance of slavery, one is an inheritance of royalty. Jerusalem above (Heb. 12:22, Rev. 21:2), the heavenly Jerusalem, is the church AND the covenant of Christ (to be in one is to be in the other).

Galatians 5: Works of the Flesh or Fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:4 bring us the more blunt words of Paul: The Galatians have fallen from Grace. This is the most dramatic statement of several dramatic statements ("you believed another Gospel", and "who bewitched you"). It saddles nicely to Peter's statement in Acts 2:36 - it should compel someone to say "what do I need to do" (while the hardened heart would say "you're wrong" or a personal attack. Paul redirects them to two choices - life and death – much as Moses did in Deuteronomy 30:19. The Galatians must choose Life in the Spirit or Death in the flesh.

Paul moves into the accusation that the Galatians have lost the Liberty of Christ. We are told that Christ is Himself Liberty. Let us not mistake liberty for lawlessness (1 John 3:4). Liberty is to be free from the bondage of sin. Christ's Law is itself a Law of Liberty (James 2:12). It is to be free from a master who offers no hope of mercy. It pertains to the distinction made the last chapter: sons of slavery or sons of royalty.

There is an important point that underlays Paul's directions. The basis of the Law of Christ (which as the Law of Liberty is the source of our liberty) is Love. Consider James 2:8 (*If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well*) or Romans 13:8-10 (*Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law..... Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law*).

What is the opposite of Love? Some might say hate, but God (who is love) can hate (Prov. 6:16). Some might say it is fear, but we are commanded to both love and fear God at once. Here Paul directs us to see than an/the opposite of love is selfish desire in the flesh. For this message, selfishness is the opposite of love. See too that selfishness is the ultimate definition of the flesh - it wants what it wants (Romans 2:8, James 3:16). Love then is the desire of the Spirit; true love wants what God wants, both for ourselves and for those around us.

This leads to Paul's profound call to action: the choice of our service. We can either serve the flesh or serve the Spirit. Serving the flesh (the Works of the Flesh) are visible and known (adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies). These things can be placed into three categories, and all reflect selfishness: sexual sins against our flesh; behavioral sins against our fellow man, and purity/sobriety sins against God.

Paul then contrasts the service of the things of the Spirit. He calls these things "fruits", i.e. the spiritual results of Godly service (love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control). These things ARE the Law of Christ. These too are categorical, and all reflect the divine Love: They are our personal behavior, behavior towards our fellow man, and our service towards God (Romans 12:1-2).

People who belong to God walk the latter, not the former.

Galatians 6: Fulfill the Law of Christ

Paul brings his ideas to their full impact with a message about the fulfillment of the Law of Christ, which he brought to us as the Fruit of the Spirit. The Law of Christ is fulfilled in actions of genuine love for others. Thus the fulfillment of law is in our command to bear one another's burdens. This can refer to weaknesses; bear with one another to aid in overcoming sin, or even the patience of living with each other (2 Timothy 2:25, Romans 15:1). We are commanded to aid all men, not as a work of the church, but part of our bearing our load.

What is meant by "bearing our own load"? Some have seen this as a contradiction to the statement of 6:2. But our own load is a reference to our own salvation. We must each personally take the yoke of Christ (Matthew 11:30) and work out your own salvation (Philippians 2:12). This requires a tremendous focus on self-examination (2 Corinthians 13:5). What we sow is what we reap; will we reap the spiritual fruit or works of the flesh?

What are we meant to see in all of this? There is nothing we do to create our salvation; Christ has done the work. But we must confirm ourselves to Him by obedience. If there is nothing we can do that is the power of salvation, then here can be no pride in being in Christ and obedience to the gospel is humility, not pride.

Paul's closing reflect this: *But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*