**Galatians Commentary**

**Galatians Chapter 1**

Gal 1:1

**“not *sent* from *any group of* people, nor through any person**.” This statement shows the doubt and confusion that people had about Paul and his teaching (cf. Gal. 1:7). It also points to the truth of the Gospel and its divine authorship. Critics might say, “Anyone can say they are apostles of God, but how do we know?” Paul’s words and works spoke for themselves, and when he wrote Galatians, he wrote the words of God. It is easy to be a doubter and a critic. The honest person takes the time to check the evidence and understand the arguments, and then is meek enough to accept the conclusion and its implications.

**“through Jesus Christ and God the Father.”** True ministers are called, and placed in their calling by God and Jesus Christ. Every person has a calling and place in the Body given them by God and Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-26), therefore just because someone is called to a position in the Body he or she is not better than anyone else. Nevertheless, some positions in the Body carry more authority and responsibility than others when it comes to the practical aspects of running the Body here on earth. While we should not boast about our position in the Body, occasionally it is the will of God to tell others about the authority one has in order to maintain order in the Body. This is such a case. Paul’s authority as an apostle needed to be recognized to keep the Body from being confused and scattered. He was the called apostle of God, not the Judaizers who were contradicting him, and it was right and appropriate for him to make that point.

**“from among the dead.”**[[1]](#footnote-19277) See commentary on Romans 4:24.

Gal 1:2

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek text is “brothers,” but that often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

**“of Galatia.”** There is much debate about the place and date of Galatians; however, the evidence seems to weigh in favor of Paul penning the Epistle to the Galatians from Antioch of Syria after his first missionary journey (Acts 14:26-28) and before the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:1-29). Thus, it seems most likely written from Antioch in 48-49, and that would make it the first Church Epistle written by Paul. This would explain in part why Paul spent so much time declaring that what he taught came by revelation from Jesus Christ and introducing himself and giving his personal history (Gal. 1:11-2:21).[[2]](#footnote-29688)

Gal 1:3

**“Grace to you and peace.”** The Greek text does not say, “Grace and peace to you,” even though many English versions read that way. By separating the phrases the way it does, the Bible shows us that “grace” and “peace” are not equal; instead, God’s grace is preeminent. We have peace with God because we have grace from God, offered through faith in Jesus Christ.

**“God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** This is what many scholars consider to be the most likely reading of the original Greek text.[[3]](#footnote-28207)

Gal 1:4

**“deliver.”** The Greek word is *exaireō* (#1807 ἐξαιρέω), and it means to take something out of its place; to pluck out, draw out, or remove. Hence it can mean to rescue by virtue of drawing someone out of danger. Although many English versions have “rescue,” that seems to be a secondary meaning here. The word “rescue” means to “free from danger,” and places the emphasis on the fact that the person is out of danger. While that is certainly a part of the meaning of *exaireō* in this context, the force of *exaireō* is not just that we are out of danger, it is how we got out of danger, by being pulled out and put somewhere safe. Yes, Jesus will rescue us from this evil age, but it will be because he will pluck us out of this age and get us safely to the next age. Just like a “delivery truck” that delivers goods from one place to another, Jesus will “deliver” us out of this age and deliver us safely into the Messianic Age in new and everlasting bodies.

**“this present evil age.”** The “present evil age” is one of the two “ages” portrayed in Scripture, and they were also recognized by the Jews of the time. In the future there will be a wonderful “age,” a Messianic Age, in which the Messiah, Jesus Christ, will rule on earth. Thus, the two ages in Scripture are the present evil age, and the “coming age”; so, for example, Matthew 12:32 shows the two ages when it says that those people who blaspheme the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven “neither in this age, nor in that which is to come.” Ephesians 1:21 also speaks of both the present and future age, telling us that Christ is far above all rule and authority, not only “in this age but also in the one to come.”

Many English versions translate the Greek word *aiōn, age,* as “world” in that verse but “world” is misleading. For one thing, the “world” does not come to an end; it is the evil “age” that ends. This earth we live on will be restored to a pristine condition by Christ. Also, by always translating *aiōn* as “world,” the English reader never really understands the important biblical teaching of the two ages. For example, in the King James Version, there are about 30 places where *aiōn* is translated “world” where “age” would have been both more accurate and also more helpful in communicating to people the teaching of the New Testament. For example, the “sons of this age” are people whose character reflects the character of this age (Luke 16:8), and the “god of this age” is the Devil (2 Cor. 4:4). It is the active presence of the Devil, his demons, and evil people that make this age into “the present evil age.”

The Bible makes it clear that this evil age will come to an end. For example, the disciples came to Jesus while he sat on the Mount of Olives and asked him about his coming and “the end of the age.” (Matt. 24:3). Other verses that speak of the end of the age are: Matthew 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:20; 1 Corinthians 10:11; and Hebrews 9:26.

After this age ends, the Age to Come, the wonderful Messianic Age, will begin, and it will be a time of great blessing and joy. The future “Messianic Age” has two parts, and Christians who are in the Rapture and the Old Testament believers who are in the first resurrection will participate in both parts. The first part of the Messianic Age lasts 1,000 years (Rev. 20:4), and so it is known as the “Millennial Kingdom” (from the Latin word *mille*, “thousand”). In the Millennial Kingdom the earth will be similar to the earth we know now, but it will be mostly restored to a pristine state (Matt. 19:28).

Revelation 20:7-15 tells how the Millennial Kingdom ends: there will be a war with Satan, then the second resurrection and the White Throne Judgment, at which point the wicked will be thrown into the Lake of Fire. Then the second part of the Messianic Age begins, which lasts forever, so it can be referred to as the “Everlasting Kingdom” (Rev. 21:1ff).

[For more on Jesus ruling on a restored earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on Paradise being the future restored earth, see commentary on Luke 23:43.]

**“according to the will of our God.”** Almost this same phrase occurs in 1 Peter 4:19, see commentary on 1 Peter 4:19 for details.

Gal 1:5

**“forever and ever.”** The Greek phrase is *tous aiōnas tōn aiōnōn* (τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων), and it occurs 20 times in the New Testament. It can refer to time that does not end, “eternity future,” or it can refer to a time that is very long but does come to an end, depending on the context.

[See Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Gal 1:6

**“so quickly.”** Paul was on his first missionary journey when he preached in Galatia, and we believe he wrote Galatians shortly after that journey ended and before the Jerusalem council. A piece of supporting evidence for that chronology is the phrase “so quickly” in Galatians 1:6. If Galatians was written from Antioch just before the Jerusalem council, then “so quickly” is chronologically accurate, because Paul would have been with the believers of Galatia less than a year before he wrote his epistle to them.

People who argue that Galatians was written later, say AD 50 or so (or even later), have to make “so quickly” into a much more flexible and relative phrase, referring to years later. But the justification for that interpretation does not seem to be as valid as understanding the phrase to be literal. Paul was harshly reproving the Galatians for turning away from the truth, and part of the power of his reproof was that they were turning “so quickly.” But if it had been years since Paul had visited the Galatians and taught them about the grace of God, then his saying they were deserting his doctrine “so quickly” would be seen as an exaggeration and would have considerably weakened the impact of what he was saying. In fact, it seems such an exaggeration would have so weakened Paul’s argument that it would have been better to leave out the phrase than state the exaggeration. Based on that logic, the phrase “so quickly” is a strong argument for Galatians being written before the Jerusalem council.

**“the one.”** This is God. God calls each person to Himself by way of the grace He offers through Jesus Christ. God has always called people to Himself (cf. Acts 2:39; Rom. 11:29; 1 Cor. 1:9; Phil. 3:14; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:11; 1 Pet. 5:10). Some commentators say it is Christ who calls, but God calls us through His Son. This is especially clear in this verse, which speaks of “the One” who calls us “by the grace of Christ,” i.e., by the grace associated with Jesus Christ. Ernest DeWitt Burton writes: “Paul’s general use of the verb *kaleō* [“to call”] must be regarded as a decisive objection to referring the phrase [“him who called you”] to Christ…or to Paul, and as a convincing reason for here referring it to God. …In fifteen passages in the letters ascribed to Paul, the writer attributes ‘calling’ to God …and never, except in the sense of ‘naming’ or ‘inviting to a feast,’ to anyone else.”[[4]](#footnote-30273)

**“grace of Christ.”** This genitive includes the genitive of relation and the genitive of origin. It refers to the grace related to Jesus Christ because it was he who made it available to us, and it refers to the grace that we have that he has given to us.

Gal 1:7

**“confusing you.”** The Greek word is *tarassō* (#5015 ταράσσω), and it literally refers to shaking something back and forth, agitating it, or stirring it up. Thus, it means to agitate or trouble, or “to cause one inward commotion, take away his calmness of mind, disturb his equanimity; to disquiet, make restless,”[[5]](#footnote-26159) disturb, throw into confusion.[[6]](#footnote-12400) There is no way to tell from the context if the people of Galatia were actually “troubled” by the conflict between the Judaizers teaching and Paul’s, but the fact that they were abandoning the grace of Christ to go back to the Law shows that they were indeed confused.

**“change.”** The Greek word translated “change” is *metastrephō* (#3344 μεταστρέφω), and BDAG defines it as “to cause a change in state or condition.”[[7]](#footnote-15172) It can denote turning something to its opposite.[[8]](#footnote-23326) Lightfoot writes: “Properly, ‘to reverse, to change to the opposite,’ and so [*metastrephō* is] stronger than *diastrepsai*, which is simply ‘to distort,’ ‘wrench.’”[[9]](#footnote-13816) In Galatia, certain Judaizers were trying to bring Christians back under the Law. This was a complete “change” from the gospel that Paul had preached which was not based upon the Law.

Paul’s concern is that the Judaizers were corrupting the truth of the gospel message by turning it into something it is not. The gospel Paul preached was that righteousness is counted to a person by their trust in Christ, not by observing the requirements of the Law. However, the Judaizers in Galatia were trying to promote a gospel that required such things as circumcision, ritualistic purity, dietary restrictions, and other commandments that Jews thought were necessary in order to be considered part of God’s people and an heir of the inheritance God promised to Abraham.

Paul preached a simple gospel message that salvation is granted based upon trusting in Christ, and the one who trusts in Christ is truly a child of Abraham, not the person who observes the Law (Gal. 3:7). If observing the Law was the basis upon which God could declare a person to be righteous in His sight, then Abraham has no basis by which to be righteous before God since the Law was given hundreds of years after him (Gal. 3:17).

Therefore, Paul is attacking the Judaizers because they are turning the basis of being declared righteous before God away from trusting in Christ and toward reliance upon obedience to the Law. Returning to the Law only would establish being under a curse (Gal. 3:10) and living in bondage (Gal. 5:1) because the Law could never justify a person before God (Gal. 3:18).

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law so that the promise of the inheritance of salvation given to Abraham could be available to everyone who believes, whether they are Jew or Gentile (Gal. 3:13, 28). This is the truth of the gospel that Paul is seeking to protect against the “false gospel” of the Judaizers (Gal. 1:6). Their efforts to try and undermine the very foundation of the gospel is a direct attack on God himself and his plan for redeeming humankind. The Law served a specific purpose, and that purpose was to make “transgressions” known (Gal. 3:19).

The gospel that Paul preached was that being declared righteous by God is based upon trust, not on the Law, which was merely a “guardian” that was meant to point people to the righteousness that is in Christ alone…always has been, always will be (Gal. 3:24).

Gal 1:8

**“let him be accursed.”** This phrase in Galatians 1:8 (and Gal. 1:9), is a divine passive, not a personal wish. There is an important difference. Paul is not saying, “I wish the man were cursed,” or “I want the person to be cursed.” Rather, he is saying, “The person will receive the consequences of his actions.” Paul knew that there were severe consequences for perverting the Gospel, and what he is saying is that they deserve the curse they will receive.

Paul’s remark is along the same lines as when Jesus confronted the religious leaders who were perverting the Word of God and pronounced seven “woes” on them (Matt. 23:13, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29— see commentary on Matt. 23:14 for reasons why we omit that verse as an almost certain addition to the text). Jesus then said to them: “Snakes! You offspring of vipers! How can you escape the judgment of Gehenna?” (Matt. 23:33). So Jesus, knowing the heinous sin of the religious leaders, knew the serious consequences of their sin, which was, for them, being thrown into the Lake of Fire. Some of Paul’s adversaries were likely not as ungodly as the religious leaders Jesus confronted, but they were sinful enough that their actions would bring a deserved curse upon them.

It is important that Christians not be naïve about people who pervert the Good News. Some of them are well-meaning but wrong, but others are the spiritual children of the Pharisees and are working for the Devil (cf. John 8:44). Godly people in the Bible, like Jesus and Paul, boldly confronted evil, and as distasteful as it is, Christians need to be prepared to do the same.

**“accursed.”** The Greek word is *anathema* (#331 ἀνάθεμα). In its broad sense, *anathema* was used of something that had been dedicated to God. As such, something that was *anathema* could be either blessed or cursed, depending on what God wanted to do with it—the thing itself was just *anathema*; dedicated to God. In the Hebrew OT, the concept of *anathema* was represented by the Hebrew word *herem* (#02764 חֵרֶם). Something *herem* (dedicated to God), as in the NT, could be either blessed or cursed, kept or destroyed. A field that was *herem* belonged to the Lord and would be maintained for His benefit (Lev. 27:21). On the other hand, if a person sacrificed to an idol god, he was *herem* and was then executed (Exod. 22:20). Cities that were devoted to God (*herem*) were destroyed (cf. Jericho; Josh. 6:17), and animals were killed and thus destroyed. When the Hebrew OT was translated into Greek about 250 BC in the version we know as the Septuagint, *anathema* was used of *herem* when the things that were dedicated were destroyed or ruined, but other words, such as *aphorizō* (set apart) were used when the dedication to God resulted in a blessing (cf. Lev. 27:21).

The New Testament hearkens back to the wider OT use of *herem*, however, and thus, Luke 21:5[[10]](#footnote-30760) uses *anathema* in the good sense of an acceptable offering to God without the implications of a curse. However, the other times *anathema* is used in the New Testament (Gal. 1:8, 9; Acts 23:14; Rom. 9:3; 1 Cor. 12:3; 16:22), it refers to something cursed, or handed over to God’s judgmental wrath. The word *anathema* has turned up in some ancient Greek sources, and in the Greek secular writings, something that was *anathema* was subject to destruction by the gods. Paul’s use of the word *anathema* here in Galatians 1:8 and 1:9, “dedicated to God,” in this context means under His curse. The sentence is a very hard, harsh statement, and shows how serious a sin it is to pervert the Word of God.

Some translations have the consequence of the curse instead of the curse itself in this verse. For example, the NIV84 has “eternally condemned,” while the NET and GW have “condemned to hell.” However, those interpretations are too harsh. We must keep in mind that some people who pervert the Word of God are Christians and have a guarantee of salvation through faith in Christ. We all know that just because a person has faith in Christ does not mean his doctrine is correct. Some very sincere people who have faith in Christ are nevertheless very wrong about their doctrine. These people will be blessed for their faith and have everlasting life, but the consequences of their error will be severe, although exactly how or when God will deal with such people is not discussed in the verse or context. In the future at the judgment, certainly, but there are no doubt consequences in this life also.

In light of the fact that some people who teach error are Christians, to translate this verse as “condemned to hell” or another similar translation is too harsh. It is better to leave the word “accursed” and understand it as being “delivered up to the judicial wrath of God.”[[11]](#footnote-29861) God knows people’s hearts, and is in a position to deal with people in ways that He sees fit, and the word *anathema* is perfect for that situation, because it means to dedicate to God for Him to do with as He sees fit.

Gal 1:9

**“contrary.”** The Greek preposition *para* (#3844 παρά) with the accusative case can mean “against, contrary to,” and that is the meaning here. God is the author of the true Gospel, but the Adversary is always generating ideas and theologies that are contrary to the truth of God. That means there are always competing theologies in the world, and it makes the promise “keep seeking and you will find” (Matt. 7:7) very important. If we will diligently seek with a humble heart, God will lead us to the truth.

Gal 1:10

**“Indeed.”** Although the Greek word is *gar* (usually translated “for”), R. C. H. Lenski writes, “In this instance γάρ cannot mean ‘for’ (our versions) as either stating a reason or offering an explanation… γάρ is but the confirmatory adverb which is here used in a question in order to point to what the previous statements make decidedly plain and thus make the question more urgent and the desired answer more inevitable.”[[12]](#footnote-32763) The NLT translates the *gar* as “obviously,” and many versions simply omit it.

Paul has just said that anyone who teaches another Good News than what he had taught was accursed. It is obvious that he is not trying to soften his message so it is acceptable to everyone. Rather, he is acting in his capacity as the apostle to whom was committed the information of the Sacred Secret. Thus, he says, “Indeed, am I now trying to gain the approval of people…?” Clearly not.

**“trying to gain the approval.”** The Greek is *peithō* (#3982 πείθω), which often means “to persuade,” (and is translated that way in the KJV), but it does not mean that in this context (how could someone persuade God?); it means “seek the favor of,” “try to please,” “try to gain the approval of.” This sentence has a harsh tone to it, but is necessary in order for Paul to continue his relationship with the Galatians. Other people were accusing Paul of not teaching the truth, and Paul is making his point very clearly. He is a servant (or “slave”) of Jesus Christ, and is trying to please him.

**“still.”** There has been a lot of theological discussion about the word “still” in this verse. The most obvious reference is to Paul’s earlier life as a Pharisee, when he advanced beyond the rest of his peers by being more zealous for the Law (Gal. 1:14). Now he does not care about that, but only acts to please the Lord.

Gal 1:11

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“of human origin.”** The Greek text of Galatians 1:11 reads, “according to man,” and in this context, that phrase means “of human origin.” That is clearly explained in the next phrase, where he writes: “For I did not receive it from *any* person...*I received it* by revelation.” Paul would have told that to the people when he was with them face to face, but now they are facing new challenges and being confused by Jews who are teaching a works-based salvation, so Paul reminds them that what he taught them was by revelation from Jesus Christ.

Gal 1:12

**“revelation.”** The Greek word translated as “revelation” is the compound word (noun) *apokalupsis* (#602 ἀποκάλυψις), from the preposition *apo* (away from), and the verb *kaluptō* (#2572 καλύπτω), which means “to cover,” or “to hide.” *Apokalupsis* means to lay bare, make naked, and hence is used of disclosing something, revealing something, and thus making something visible or known, and it is also used of an appearance or manifestation. The fact that here in Galatians 1:12 it is a singular noun is the reason that some versions say “a revelation” instead of just “revelation.” However, Paul did not get the Gospel he preached as a single revelation, but rather as a series of revelations over a period of time, and from what we know of the Epistles that were written after Galatians, he would receive more before his life and writing ended. Therefore, the translation “a revelation” makes the verse unclear. The singular “revelation” in this context is a collective singular, such as the word “fruit.” *Apokalupsis* is also the Greek title of the book of Revelation, which is the unveiling of the future for us to see ahead of time, including the Tribulation, Jesus Christ coming from heaven, the future judgments, and the Eternal Kingdom of God.

Genuine biblical “revelation” is not well understood in the Christian world, so it is important to explain a little about it. The English word “revelation” comes from the word “reveal,” which means “to make known.” As it is used in the Bible, the word “revelation” refers to something made known by a spiritual source, which may be God, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Devil, or demons. In its secular usage, “revelation” can refer to something that has a profound impact on a person or when someone learns something that helps him understand some aspect of life. For example, someone might say, “It was a revelation to me to learn that my headaches could be cured by getting more sleep.” However, that secular usage is not the way “revelation” is used in the Bible.

To better understand what “revelation” means in the Bible, it helps to know what it is not. “Revelation” is not what someone learns from reading the Bible. When the Bible was originally given, it was revelation to the prophet who wrote it down. When a person reads it, he learns, but that type of learning is not “revelation”; it is using our faculties of logic, memory, judgment, etc. “Revelation” is also not what someone feels very strongly about. When a person feels very strongly about something, there is a danger that some of those strong opinions will “leak over” into what he says comes from God. This is as true in regard to doctrine as it is for personal feelings and opinions. Lastly, revelation is not what someone knows from his five senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching). What a person observes through his senses may be accurate, but it is not “revelation.”

As it is used in the Bible, “revelation” is information that is revealed to someone by a spiritual source. The Bible places revelation into two categories: knowledge and wisdom. The manifestations of holy spirit that are revelation are “a message of knowledge” and “a message of wisdom” (see commentary on 1 Cor. 12:8). It is fitting that God categorizes all revelation as either knowledge or wisdom, because all information is either knowledge or wisdom. Knowledge is the “facts concerning the case,” and is information. “Wisdom” has many aspects and in today’s language can have several definitions. However, the first definition of wisdom in the first edition of *Webster’s Dictionary* (published in 1828) captures its meaning: “the right use or exercise of knowledge.” Knowledge is the facts of the case; wisdom is “what to do.” The actual source of any revelation a person receives is either God; Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 9:5; Acts 16:7; Gal. 1:12; 2 Cor. 12:9); the Devil (cf. Gen. 3:1-4; Matt. 4:1-11); or a demon (cf. Matt. 8:28-31; Mark 1:23-26; Luke 4:41; Acts 16:17). All revelation comes from one of these four spiritual sources. God and Jesus Christ both originate communication to people, and so do the Devil and his demons. Angels are not a “source” of revelation. They are messengers, bringing information from God or the Lord to people. Both the Hebrew word *mal’ak* and the Greek word *angelos* mean “messenger,” and angels deliver messages; there is no evidence in Scripture that they are the original source of any message they bring.

How is revelation communicated to people? When looking at the ways God, Jesus, the Devil, or demons can give a revelation message, the first major distinction we must recognize is that it will come internally (from inside the person) or externally (from outside the person). All revelation will either come to a person externally and thus usually be perceivable by others, or it will be internal, given directly to the person’s mind.

Revelation from God or the Lord Jesus that comes to us externally can come in a multiplicity of ways. Examples of how God has communicated a message of knowledge or wisdom externally include His speaking audibly (Deut. 4:12), sending an angel (Judg. 13:3-5; Luke 1:26-37), sending a prophet (2 Sam. 12:1-12), having Balaam’s donkey give the message (Num. 22:28-30), putting dew on a fleece (Judg. 6:36-40), and writing on a wall (Dan. 5:5).

Demons also come into concretion and give revelation to people. The Devil did so to Eve in the Garden of Eden and came to Jesus Christ when he was in the desert (Matt. 4:3). Demons come into concretion many times as ghosts and apparitions of all sorts, and this often happens with mediums and necromancers. Demons are also experts at manipulating physical objects to communicate a message, and thus all forms of divination are an abomination to God (Deut. 18:10-13). Crystal ball divination, tea leaf reading, and similar practices are all ways that demons communicate messages in the five-senses world.

Both God and the Devil give revelation “internally” also. In certain circumstances, demons can enter into people and communicate directly to their minds (this is often known as being “possessed,” but a better translation is “demonized,” or “afflicted by demons”). If a demon enters a person’s body and communicates with his mind, the individual will see visions, hear voices, or “just know” things. The person who has the demon may or may not know it. Psychics usually think they have a “gift,” but in actuality, there is no such gift. Psychics are “afflicted by demons” in the sense that they are generally inhabited by a demon or demons, but occasionally they receive information from a demon that manifests itself outside of them. In any case, psychics are tricked into thinking they have a gift because often their intentions may be good. But contact with demons is never “good,” because they blend truth with error just as the Devil did with Eve in the Garden, and they do good only to gain the opportunity to do evil.

God and Jesus Christ give much of the revelation to Christians via the gift of holy spirit. When an unsaved person becomes saved, the Lord Jesus gives him the gift of holy spirit (Acts 2:33, 38; Eph. 1:13), which then becomes an integrated part of him, filling him completely and enabling him to get revelation via the gift of holy spirit inside him. When a person has holy spirit, it is easier for God to communicate with the person, which is why in the Old Testament God put holy spirit on those with whom He wanted to communicate. Examples include: the 70 elders of Israel who helped Moses (Num. 11:17, 25); Othniel (Judg. 3:10); Gideon (Judg. 6:34); Jephthah (Judg. 11:29); Samson (Judg. 14:19); King Saul (1 Sam. 10:6); Amasai, (1 Chron. 12:18); King David (1 Chron. 28:12); Azariah (2 Chron. 15:1, 2); Jahaziel (2 Chron. 20:14); Zechariah (2 Chron. 24:20); John the Baptist (Luke 1:15); Elizabeth (Luke 1:41); and Zechariah (Luke 1:67); (cf. Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 1 Samuel 10:6, 10; 16:13; 2 Kings 2:9; 1 Chron. 12:18; 2 Chron. 20:14; Matthew 3:16; and Luke 2:25).

The way that revelation via the gift of holy spirit works is that a message of knowledge or wisdom originates with God or the Lord Jesus, who communicates to the holy spirit in the Christian, which then communicates with that Christian’s mind or body. The gift of holy spirit can communicate easily with the mind, just as the body can communicate with the mind.

Revelation can come to one’s mind or to one’s body. Revelation that comes to one’s mind comes as a thought, emotion, or senses experience (i.e., sight, sound, etc.). When revelation comes via holy spirit to one’s body, it comes as a feeling or sensation (pain, pressure, heat, cold, etc.). It is not always easy to tell whether a thought or feeling is from God or from one’s own mind or body. That is why the Bible tells us it takes “repeated use” (Heb. 5:14) to be able to accurately discern whether a thought is coming into our mind from God, or whether it is one of our own thoughts. As one matures in the Lord, he learns more ably to discern the revelation of God from his own thoughts, ideas, emotions, and feelings.

How revelation via the gift of holy spirit works can be charted as follows:

* God (or Jesus Christ) → holy spirit in you → your mind = a thought or emotion.
* God (or Jesus Christ) → holy spirit in you → your body = a feeling or sensation.

Once we understand that revelation usually comes as a thought or feeling we can understand why “repeated use,” or “practice,” is essential if we are going to reliably discern revelation from our own thoughts and feelings. Actually, a number of Bible versions have the word “practice” in Hebrews 5:14, including the ESV, NASB, RSV, and NRSV. The word “practice” needs to be properly understood. It is good in that it implies continual repetition, and that is what we should be doing, especially with speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, and prophecy, which are more directly under our control. The weakness of the word “practice” is that every time you operate the manifestations, you are not just “practicing,” but “in the game,” in touch with God and the Lord, and operating the power of God.

Revelation via holy spirit, a message of knowledge and a message of wisdom, comes in seven distinctive ways. You get information from the Lord the same way you gather information from the world around you. The Lord will give you revelation that you (1) see, (2) hear, (3) smell, (4) taste, or (5) touch, or sometimes you (6) “just know.” Also, the Lord may give you (7) an emotion.

When the Lord gives a person a vision, sound, smell, etc., via holy spirit, it may seem as real as if it were actually happening in the physical world, but it is happening only in the person’s mind. Other people around him are not experiencing what he is. For example, when Stephen saw heaven open and the Lord Jesus standing at God’s right hand (Acts 7:55-56), he “saw” it as clearly as if it had physically occurred. It was as real to him as his natural sight. Nevertheless, it was a revelation vision via the gift of holy spirit, and the others who were with Stephen did not see it. Similarly, when the Lord gives revelation smell, the one receiving the revelation will smell something, but others will not.

Once we understand that a message of knowledge and a message of wisdom come to us by (1) seeing, (2) hearing, (3) smelling, (4) tasting, (5) touching, (6) “just knowing” and (7) emotion, we can expand the chart explaining how revelation works.

* For revelation vision: God (or Jesus Christ) → holy spirit in you → your mind (the visual center) = you see a vision as if it were real.
* For revelation sound: God (or Jesus Christ) → holy spirit in you → your mind (the auditory center) = you hear a sound or voice as if it were real.

Receiving revelation works the same basic way for all seven ways God gives it and getting revelation from demons works in a very similar way. When a demon inhabits a person’s mind and stimulates his visual center, the person will see a vision. If the demon feeds information to the auditory center of the brain, he will hear voices.

Revelation given via holy spirit is usually a very quick experience. It does not usually “hang around” so we can confirm it, study it, etc. God wants us to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and if we do, we are focused on Him and what He tells us. Revelation is usually a “still, small voice” (1 Kings 19:12-KJV, or as the NIV states, a “gentle whisper”), coming soft and fast, so we must become practiced in recognizing it.

The Bible has many examples of revelation. **Seeing:** 2 Kings 6:17 (Elisha’s servant saw the angel army). **Hearing:** 1 Samuel 9:15-16 (KJV), “Now the Lord had told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came, saying....” Many English translations leave out the part about Samuel’s ear, despite it being an important part of the biblical record and clearly stated in the Hebrew text (cf. Ezek. 9:1). **Taste:** 2 Kings 4:40: The prophets put some stew in their mouths and knew it was “death.” That is a good example of how revelation by taste works. In this case, God gave them a message of knowledge by taste. The prophets did not need a message of wisdom because once God showed them the stew was “death,” their human wisdom could guide them. **Touch:** Jeremiah 1:9, The LORD touched Jeremiah’s mouth. In Mark 5:30 Jesus felt the power leave when his garment was touched. Sometimes when a person is ministering healing to another, the minister will actually feel the other person’s pain by revelation. **Knowing:** Matthew 9:4, “And Jesus, perceiving their thoughts said....” Jesus “knew” their thoughts by revelation. There are times when the message of knowledge or wisdom we receive comes in the form of “just knowing” what is going on. **Emotion:** 1 Samuel 11:6, “And the spirit of God rushed upon Saul when he heard those words, and his anger burned exceedingly.” Just as sometimes revelation is “just knowing,” sometimes it comes as an emotion. Emotion is very important in the life of a godly Christian, and God can give us a revelation emotion, or augment an emotion we already have by revelation.

It takes great maturity to handle revelation well. There is nothing more exciting and more fulfilling than to know we are in touch with God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and that they are working in us. All of us need to keep in mind the Scriptural admonition that to whom much is given, much shall be required (Luke 12:48 KJV). When a person is given revelation, it is “much” in the eyes of God, and we should all be prepared to do much. Obviously, we are all examples for others, so living a holy and obedient life is fundamental. We should also be prepared to obey whatever God tells us. Revelation is not a game of “if we like it, we’ll do it.” We must be prepared to do whatever He tells us.

Mature Christians do not think “all,” or even most, of our thoughts, feelings, or emotions are from the Lord. As humans, we are “amazingly and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14), and God has equipped us to deal with life without His minute-by-minute guidance, especially on small matters (though He can and does help us with small matters). The Bible says we need to practice so we can know which thoughts and emotions are revelation and which are not, and there would be no such directive if all our thoughts and emotions were revelation.

When a Christian does receive revelation, he or she should be wise in speaking about it. Some people seem to need the approval of others, or think it will elevate them in the Christian community if they constantly say, “The Lord showed me…” or “The Lord told me….” But it is rarely the right thing to do, or wise, for a Christian to parade the revelation they have received in front of others. If the Lord really did give the person revelation, it will show up in the form of their living a joyful and victorious life, and people will be aware that the person is walking by revelation without them constantly telling others about it.

[For more information on the revelation manifestations, see commentary on 1 Cor. 12:8. For more information on the gift of holy spirit, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**“from Jesus Christ.”** The Greek is a genitive, “of Jesus Christ,” but it is clear from the context that this is a genitive of origin because Paul is telling how he received his information. He says it did not come from a person, nor was he taught it, as if in a school or under a specific tutor or teacher. Instead, he says he received it by revelation, and in that context, the revelation he received was “of Jesus,” or better in English, “from Jesus.” Thus, Paul got his information in a fashion somewhat similar to the way the apostle John got the book of Revelation. God taught it to Jesus, then Jesus taught it (Rev. 1:1). In John’s case, Jesus taught an angel who then taught John, but Jesus taught Paul directly, with no angel intermediary.

Gal 1:13

**“intensely.”** The Greek is *huperbolē* (#5236 ὑπερβολή), from which we get the English word “hyperbole,” or exaggeration. *Huperbolē* refers to something being done to an extreme degree, or even excess. English versions translate it various ways, trying to catch the essence: “an extreme degree” (HCSB); “violently” (ESV, NRSV); “savagely” (NET), “intensely” (NIV); “exceedingly” (YLT). The word “intensely” captures the essence of Paul’s attack on the Church (cf. Acts 8:1, which speaks of a great persecution of the Church).

**“destroy.”** The Greek word is *portheō* (#4199 πορθέω), and it means to overthrow something; to destroy it. Even though there are other Greek words for “destroy,” we felt that was the best translation here in Galatians 1:13. Paul was trying to “overthrow” the Church, but typically when we use the English word “overthrow,” it infers that the overthrower will take over the position of what was overthrown. For example, a revolutionary overthrows a government to replace it with something else. That would not be the case here. Paul was not trying to take over what the Church was doing, he already felt the Temple and the Jewish institutions were the proper way to serve God, and the Church was just a lie. He just wanted to destroy it.

Gal 1:15

**“who set me apart, *even* from my mother’s womb.”** Some translations such as the ESV read, “when he who had set me apart before I was born.” This makes it sound as if God knew Paul would become a Christian before he was ever born. In other words, that God predestined Paul’s salvation. However, this is not what the Greek text says. The Greek reads, “from my mother’s womb” not “before I was born.” That concept is simply not in the text.

Also, the text is not saying that Paul was called from the very time He was born, any more than it is saying that the Son of God was “revealed” in Paul from the time he was born. But God did have a plan for Paul and had an influence on Paul throughout his life, even before he accepted Christ and got born again. It was when Paul was an adult that he was called by grace. That happened to Paul when he was on the road to Damascus (Acts 9), and he accepted God’s call. Then, after Paul accepted Christ, he continued to grow in the Faith and God revealed His Son through Paul so that he “could proclaim the good news about him among the Gentiles.”

Paul was from the tribe of Benjamin and was circumcised on the eighth day (Phil. 3:5), meaning that his parents (from birth) raised him to be a faithful Jew. Jewish training for a boy such as Paul would likely have looked like this: “At five years old he comes to the reading of the Scripture, at ten to the Mishnah, at thirteen to the practice of the commandments, at fifteen to the Talmud, at eighteen to marriage, at twenty to pursue a calling.”[[13]](#footnote-27619) He was trained in the Hillel school of the Jews,[[14]](#footnote-28765) and he was a rabbi trained by Gamaliel in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3). Paul was able to do things for God’s kingdom that almost no one else could do because of his prior training and the hand of God on his life.

So, it seems that what Paul meant when he wrote “set apart from my mother’s womb,” was “my whole life” or “from birth.” God had his hand upon Paul his whole life and thus he was prepared for God’s work, and thanks to the grace of God in calling him, he was able to have a tremendous impact for the Kingdom of God.

Gal 1:16

**“I did not consult with flesh and blood.”** The phrase “flesh and blood” is an idiom for human, and here in Galatian 1:16 the idiom is used because it is more emphatic than simply saying, “people.” Ordinarily, we would think that Paul would write about what he did immediately after his conversion, not write about what he did not do. But Paul is trying to make the case that he did not get the Good News that he is proclaiming from people, but got it from the Lord, so he starts by saying he did not consult with flesh and blood.

Gal 1:17

**“but I went away into Arabia.”** This phrase goes together with “immediately” in Galatians 1:16, and refers to immediately after his conversion. After Paul’s conversion and a short time in Damascus he went to Arabia. The mention of just “Arabia” seems intentionally vague. Arabia was huge. It was the kingdom east of the Jordan River Valley, and at the time of Paul extended from the Red Sea to the Euphrates River, almost 500 miles from north to south, and extended into the desert to the east. Paul could have simply walked a day’s journey from Damascus (about 25 miles), or he could have gone hundreds of miles away. Similarly, there is no mention of what he did. It seems unlikely that he went there for missionary work, since his pattern after that was to usually go to synagogues, where he had some common ground for starting a conversation. It seems more likely that he went away to redirect his life, gather his thoughts, and commune with the Lord.

**“and returned again to Damascus.”** It would make sense that Paul would return from wherever it was that he went in Arabia to Damascus, and that he would write that in his letter to the Galatian believers. For one thing, he was still trying to present evidence to the Galatians that he had not gotten his doctrine from people such as the elders in Jerusalem. Thus, saying that after getting saved he went from Damascus to Arabia and then back to Damascus showed he had not gone to Jerusalem or any other place where his Good News could have come from—it came from the Lord himself.

Back in Damascus, Paul must have been aggressively preaching the Good News and stirring up the people because the unrest was enough to get the attention of the governor of the city who then wanted to arrest him. The disciples helped Paul escape by lowering him in a basket through a window in the wall (Acts 9:25; 2 Cor. 11:32-33). That event had to be before AD 40, because Aretas IV Philopatris, who is called “King Aretas” in 2 Corinthians 11:32, died in AD 40.

Gal 1:18

**“Then after three years.”** The Greek word “then” is *epeita* (#1899 ἔπειτα), and it means “next; afterward; then.” The text says, “after three years,” but that phrase is not as helpful as one might think. For one thing, we have to ask, “three years after what?” Although there is some debate amongst the scholars, the evidence is that in this part of Galatians, Paul keeps referring back to his meeting the Lord on the road to Damascus and his being healed of his temporary blindness and being baptized in Damascus. We must keep in mind that he was including this information in Galatians to convince his hearers of his apostolic mission and his receiving his Good News directly from the Lord, so he keeps referring back to that time to show that there are no gaps in his narrative during which he could have learned from other people.

Another reason the “three years” is less helpful than we might think is that it was common in biblical culture to count any part of a day as a full day or any part of a year as a full year, so “three years” could be three full years or it could be even less than two full years if it was a couple months in the first year, a full second year, and a couple months in the third year. However, it seems logical that Paul is trying to account for his time, and thus “three years” would most likely be two years and some more time rather than counting time in three distinct calendar years. In contrast to Galatians, when Luke writes Acts, he is not interested in detailing the early days of Paul, and so he writes about Paul’s experience in Damascus without the details of his coming and going from it. Luke simply says that after “many days” Paul went to Jerusalem (Acts 9:23), but those “many days” are the “three years” of Galatians 1:18, and Galatians includes a trip to Arabia, which Acts does not mention.

**“I went up to Jerusalem.”** This is the first visit of Paul to Jerusalem as a Christian, during which he met Peter and also James the Lord’s brother. This is Paul’s visit to Jerusalem that is written about by Luke in Acts 9:26-30. The records in Acts and Galatians seem different at first glance, but they have different purposes.

In Galatians, Paul is trying to assert his apostolic authority and that the source of his Good News is the Lord, not “flesh and blood,” and especially not the leaders in Jerusalem. So in Galatians, Paul writes that he went to see Peter and did not see any other apostles, but did meet James, the Lord’s brother. Thus, the focus of Paul’s writing in Galatians is that he did not meet with a group of leaders and he only stayed 15 days, not enough time to become anyone’s disciple.

In contrast, in Acts, Luke is trying to show how Paul got introduced to the Christian Church in Judea, and what that entailed. The Christians in Judea did not want to see Paul and were afraid of him, and it took Barnabas to introduce Paul to the Church. Barnabas took Paul to “the apostles,” but it seems that none of them were there except Peter and also James, who was likely known as an apostle by that time (and Barnabas himself is called an apostle (Acts 14:14)). Whereas Galatians does not mention Paul meeting with any “ordinary Christians,” on that first trip, and focuses on leaders who might have discipled Paul, Acts mentions how during his short time in Jerusalem, Paul not only met with ordinary Christians, but debated with the Jews, and had to leave Jerusalem because his life was in danger. From Judea, Paul went back to Tarsus, his hometown, and stayed there until Barnabas came and got him and the two of them went to Antioch in Syria (Acts 11:25). From Antioch, Paul and Barnabas took money for the famine relief back to Jerusalem (Acts 11:30), and that is Paul’s second trip to Jerusalem and the trip that Paul writes about in Galatians 2:1-10. The time from Paul’s conversion and his Damascus experience until his going to Jerusalem for the famine relief (Acts 11:25; Gal. 2:1-10) was 14 years.

**“become acquainted with.”** The Greek word is *historeō* (#2477 ἱστορέω), and it means, “to enquire into, examine, investigate; to find out or learn; to get to know by visiting; to become acquainted with.” Paul had never met Peter before, so the translation “become acquainted with” fits the time and context (cf. CJB, NASB, NIV, Rotherham, Williams, Moffatt, Goodspeed).

**“Cephas.”** The Aramaic name for “Peter.” Paul likely used Peter’s Aramaic name because he was contending with Jewish opponents in Galatia, who were happy to seize any opportunity to show how Paul had moved away from his Jewish roots, and Paul was trying to show he was not just an iconoclast.

**“15 days.”** The mention of “15 days” is Paul’s continuing to shore up his argument that he received his Good News from the Lord. He went to Jerusalem to “become acquainted with” Peter, not to “be taught” by him, and Paul certainly could not have become a disciple of Peter in 15 days. Besides that, the things that Paul was writing in his epistle to the Galatians (almost certainly AD 48) were not what Peter was teaching at that early time in the Christian Church before Peter even went to Cornelius and the Gentiles (cf. Acts 9:26-30 is before Acts 10 when Peter went to the Gentiles).

No doubt, Paul had many questions about the man, Jesus Christ, that Peter could answer, and learning about the living Christ from Peter himself would have been an awesome experience. Paul also met James, the Lord’s brother, while in Jerusalem and James would have been able to fill in some information about Jesus’ earthly life before he started his ministry that Peter could not have known firsthand. Besides Peter and James, Paul did not meet with any other leaders on that visit to Jerusalem.

Gal 1:19

**“James the Lord’s brother.”** This was not the apostle James, the brother of John, but a half-brother of Jesus, a natural son of Joseph and Mary. He began to follow Jesus only after Jesus was raised from the dead, but rose to prominence in the early church and by Acts 15 was the leader of the congregation in Jerusalem.

Gal 1:20

**“(In what I am writing to you…).”** This verse clearly displays Paul’s love for the Galatians and his passionate desire that they believe the truth of what he was saying. This is the figure of speech interjectio (“interjection”), a form of parenthesis thrown into the text to express feeling.[[15]](#footnote-18220) In this case, the apostle Paul has deep feelings for the Galatians, many of whom have been turned against him (Cf. Gal. 1:6; 3:1; etc.), and so he pleads with a volume that leaps off the page, “in the sight of God, I am not lying!” The addition is unnecessary to the context, and so it is parenthetical. If the addition were a necessary part of the context and not parenthetical, the figure is called ecphonesis or (“exclamation”).[[16]](#footnote-18448)

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. It is the figure of speech asterismos,[[17]](#footnote-16626) and it adds special emphasis here for two reasons. The first is that this is the only place in Galatians where it occurs, and the second is that the verse itself is already the figure interjectio, and so to place an asterismos inside the interjectio adds special emphasis.

[For more on “Look,” see commentary on Matt. 1:20.]

[See Word Study: “Asterismos.”]

Gal 1:21

**“Syria and Cilicia.”** On his first trip to Jerusalem, when Paul was there for 15 days and spent time with Peter in Jerusalem, the Hellenistic Jews tried to kill him (Acts 9:26-29). Paul was stubborn enough to stay in the fight at Jerusalem at the risk of his life, but the Lord was gracious to him and appeared to him in a vision and told him to leave (Acts 22:17-21), so the believers took him to Caesarea (the port of Israel) and sent him back home to Tarsus (Acts 9:30). On his trip to Tarsus the boat would have almost certainly followed the coastline, as most did, and thus he would have stopped in Syria, and then gotten off in Cilicia, the province where Tarsus was located.

Gal 1:22

**“my face was still unknown.”** Even though Paul had spent 15 days in Judea (Gal. 1:18), he did not meet many of the believers there, and none of the leaders except Peter and James, the Lord’s brother (Gal. 1:18-19). Thus, although he visited Judea and then went back to Cilicia, where his home in Tarsus was located, the people in Judea still would not have recognized him.

Gal 1:24

**“and they glorified God because of me.”** When a person turns to Christ, or a believer stands strong and faithful in a difficult situation, it encourages and strengthens others. Every Christian should strive to stand strong for many reasons: it is the right thing to do, it blesses God and Christ, it results in rewards at the Judgment, and it strengthens and encourages others. Proverbs 25:26 says, “Like a spring *that has been* trampled *in,* and *like* a ruined fountain is a righteous person who wavers in the presence of a wicked person.” In the ancient Near East having drinkable water could mean the difference between life and death. Sometimes an uncaring herdsman would let his animals trample in the water or ruin it by going to the bathroom in it, and then people who came to get water would find it undrinkable, which was more than just a disappointment, it was dangerous and even life-threatening. Similarly, people who give in to evil and ungodliness end up hurting themselves and others.

**Galatians Chapter 2**

Gal 2:2

**“by revelation.”** The Greek is *kata apokalupsis* (κατά ἀποκάλυψις), which more literally is “according to revelation,” or “in accord with revelation,” but we would simply say “by revelation” (cf. BBE, GNV, KJV, NKJV, Rotherham, RSV, RV, YLT). That the trip Paul is referring to was “by revelation” fits best with this referring to Paul’s journey with Barnabas to Jerusalem with the offering to help the believers in Judea during the famine (Acts 11:28-30).

The Greek has no indefinite article (“a”), so the verse can be understood to say either “a revelation” (cf. CJB, ESV, NAB, NASB, NIV), or just “revelation;” as the versions that read “by revelation” understand the text. The context is what determines the meaning and whether we would use an “a” in the English translation. The translation “a revelation” indicates that someone (most scholars would say Paul) had a revelation that led Paul to go to Jerusalem, whereas the translation “by revelation” just says that there was one or more than one revelation to go to Jerusalem.

In this case, the remoter context and scope of Scripture on how God works with His people suggests that there was a series of revelations that resulted in Paul’s going to Jerusalem, and thus the translation “by revelation” is more accurate than “a revelation.” To begin with, the prophet Agabus had a revelation that there would be a famine (Acts 11:28). Then, although the text of Acts does not specifically say so, there would have been much prayer and likely some revelation about what to do about the famine, including, once it was determined that an offering should be taken, who should take the money to Jerusalem, a task with no small amount of risk. Then finally, Paul would have certainly sought the Lord on his own behalf and asked the Lord for guidance about whether to go or not, because the last time he was in Jerusalem, he had to leave because the Jews were trying to kill him (Acts 9:29-30).

In contrast to the famine relief trip, Paul’s trip to Jerusalem for the Jerusalem council is never said to be by revelation. Jews had come from Jerusalem to Antioch and were teaching the Gentiles they had to be circumcised to be saved (Acts 15:1-2). There was a huge debate about the issue, and the people of Antioch decided to send Paul, Barnabas, and some others to Jerusalem to decide about the matter. The text specifically says that they were sent on their way “by the congregation” (*ekklēsia*; most versions read “by the church”; Acts 15:3), not by revelation. Although there may have been a revelation about the trip, the text is silent on the matter and does not give revelation as a reason for the trip to Jerusalem.

If the Jerusalem council was the trip mentioned in Galatians 2:1-10, the Galatians would have known that the reason for Paul’s going to Jerusalem was the debate over circumcision. Thus, Paul saying that his trip was due to a revelation would have caused the Galatians to feel, and rightfully so, that Paul was misrepresenting his reason for going to Jerusalem.

In conclusion, there is a debate about whether Paul’s trip to Jerusalem in Galatians 2:1-10 refers to Paul’s famine relief trip of Acts 11:28-30, or his Jerusalem council trip of Acts 15. But when Acts and Galatians are carefully compared, the evidence strongly supports Galatians 2:1-10 being Paul’s famine relief trip.

[For more about what “revelation” is, see commentaries on Gal. 1:12 and 1 Cor. 12:8.]

**“held in high regard.”** The Greek verb is *dokeō* (#1380 δοκέω), and when it is intransitive, as here, it means “to seem or appear to be,” “to be recognized as something,” or “to have a reputation for something.” Thus, this verse is saying that there were people in the church at Jerusalem who “seemed to be” or “were reputed to be” pillars (cf. Gal. 2:9). God is not saying these people were pillars but that they “seemed to be” or were “regarded to be” pillars.

It is important that we see what God is trying to tell us here because He is really emphasizing it. The word *dokeō* appears four times in eight verses, all of them referring to the leaders in Jerusalem. If we hear what God is saying, He is not acknowledging James and the others as the true leaders of the Church, but rather saying that they had a reputation for being the leaders, and/or seemed like the leaders. Hendriksen says that the word *dokeō* “implies a degree of resentment.”[[18]](#footnote-14525) However, we must remember that Galatians is not Paul’s words, but the words of Jesus Christ. It was God and Jesus who were stating in Galatians that those people who had taken the reins of leadership only seemed to be leaders.

We know from Acts and the Epistles that Jesus Christ was working powerfully in Paul, giving him revelation of the Good News to the Church of God. By the time Paul went to Jerusalem “14 years after” his conversion (Paul’s conversion is the most probable starting point of the 14 years), it would have almost certainly been between AD 44 and AD 47. Galatians itself was likely written in AD 48, and so by then, the “leaders” at Jerusalem were God’s true leaders by reputation only. That is not to say that they did not do good things for God, only that when it came to God’s program for the Christian Church and bringing Jews and Gentiles into One Body, and moving away from the regulations of the Law, they had not caught that vision; they were stuck in their old ways.

The majority of the commentators correctly assess that the Jews, who were contending with Paul about things like making Gentile converts without them being circumcised, wanted James and Peter to side with them in the argument, and thus elevated them over Paul as the “real leaders.” In that sense, James, Peter, etc., were “of reputation,” and “held in high regard.” However, most of the commentators are blind to the fact that James, Peter, and the other leaders in Jerusalem thought they themselves were God’s chosen leaders for the Christian Church even though they had missed what God and Jesus were doing in the Church through Paul’s ministry.

We need to be aware that the “James” in Galatians 2:9 is not the apostle James who was the brother of the apostle John (Matt. 4:21), but was James the brother of Jesus. James did not believe that his half-brother Jesus was the promised Messiah until after Jesus was raised from the dead. He did not believe by the Feast of Tabernacles, less than a year before Jesus’ death (John 7:5), and the evidence is that he still did not believe when Jesus was dying on the cross, which is why Jesus told the apostle John to take care of Jesus’ mother Mary (John 19:27). Historians have concluded that after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his family and showed them that he was the Messiah, and then Mary and her sons became part of the group that waited in Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14). James is not mentioned as any kind of leader in the church at Jerusalem until Acts 12:17, after the apostle James was killed. It is quite possible that the persecution of Herod Agrippa (Acts 12) was so severe that all the apostles left Jerusalem, and Jesus’ half-brother James became a ranking elder. By the council in Acts 15, he seemed to be leading the Jerusalem church.

By the time Galatians was written, Paul was receiving the revelation to the Church and writing Church Epistles, while the church at Jerusalem was still focused on the Law (Gal. 2:2ff; Acts 21:20). We need to pay close attention to Galatians 2:6, because it tells us that the leaders in Jerusalem who were held in high regard had been the genuine leaders in the past, but not now. God says this by saying they had once been held in high regard: “whatever they were at one time….” In other words, at one time, years ago perhaps, they had been true leaders, but now they were only regarded as leaders by the people. That rings true to what we read in the Bible. There is no doubt that people like Peter had been the true leaders of the Church. But for whatever reason, as the Christian Church developed and God moved powerfully to include the Gentiles, James, Peter, and the other leaders in Jerusalem, resisted God. That is understandable because they were proud of their Jewish heritage and loved the Temple and the way it centralized religion and worship, but the fact that their actions are understandable does not make them right. God was including the Gentiles and moving away from the Temple, and the Church leaders needed to respond to that but did not.

The Jews who held to the Law ignored and refuted Paul’s teaching and God’s move to establish the Christian Church and move away from Israel as the “chosen people.” By the time Paul went to Jerusalem as per Galatians 2:1, though James, Peter, and John were there, false brothers had infiltrated the Church (Gal. 2:4), and the leaders there only seemed important and seemed to be pillars (Gal. 2:2, 6, 9). It is possible that later, when Peter interacted with Paul at Antioch (cf. Gal. 2:11-21), he “saw the light” and moved away from Jerusalem. In fact, it is possible that all the original apostles did. It is even possible that they were mostly gone by Acts 12, because only Peter is mentioned at the council in Acts 15, and by the time Paul came to Jerusalem in Acts 21, only James is specifically mentioned. Thankfully, the Jews in Jerusalem gave Paul and Barnabas official permission to go to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:9), which they did.

**“not running, or had not run, in vain.”** This is a Semitic idiom, where “running” refers to the efforts he was making. Paul was referring to meeting with the pillars of the Church to ensure that his past work and the work he was engaged in would be fruitful. Paul would have continued his work with or without the support of the leaders of the Church in Jerusalem, but if they opposed his message and thought it in error, that would have hindered the effect of Paul’s work. As it turned out through the lifetime of Paul and the centuries to follow, Paul’s message of salvation by grace through trust in Christ did get watered down and changed, and by the time the Roman Catholic church was dominant in Europe and elsewhere, the message that salvation was by grace through trust was basically lost until the protestant revolution.

**“in vain.”** That is, that Paul’s preaching and teaching would have been worthless; no one would have believed it if Peter and James and the leadership in Jerusalem had stood against it.

Gal 2:4

**“And *that issue came up*.”** The issue of circumcision. These false brothers who pushed circumcision (and likely other parts of the Law as well, cf. Gal. 2:12) did not win the battle this time in Jerusalem, but they did not give up and were back in Antioch and then at the Jerusalem Council to press their point again (Acts 15:1, 5). Maintaining the truth requires constant vigilance and involves a constant battle. That the issue of circumcision came up here in Jerusalem is good evidence that Galatians was written prior to the Jerusalem Council because if it was after the Council it seems Paul would have said something about the Judaisers not obeying the Church leadership.

**“the false brothers.”** In a modern context this would be “false brothers and sisters,” but in the biblical context of this time period the testimony of women did not have much, if any, weight, and women were kept apart from men in religious settings in general. For example, there was no testimony of any women in the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), and there may not have even been any women there. In this context, it is more likely that “brothers” does not include women, especially so here because the discussion is about circumcision, a male-oriented and culturally sensitive issue.

**“*who were* secretly brought in.”** The Bible does not say who “brought in” the false brothers, but the text seems to indicate that someone or some people should have been more diligent about who they let into the inner circle of the Church.

**“secretly to spy on our freedom.”** The false brothers had an evil agenda from the start. They were not open to learning; they came in to spy out the freedom in Christ that Paul’s disciples had, specifically “so they could bring us into slavery.” Being forced to keep parts of the Law when it is unnecessary and restrictive is a form of slavery, and the Bible calls it out as such.

Gal 2:6

**“held in high regard.”** See commentary on Galatians 2:2.

**“added nothing to my message.”** The Greek reads, “added nothing to me,” but the context is what Paul was teaching and so “to my message” seems to be the correct thought. Some commentaries think it refers to the apostles adding things for Paul to do in his ministry, but if that is included in the meaning, it seems to be a minor part.

Gal 2:9

**“held in high regard.”** See commentary on Galatians 2:2.

Gal 2:10

**“continue to remember.”** That the verb “remember” here in Galatians 2:10 is in the present tense active voice shows that it is communicating a continuing remembrance. In other words, “keep the poor in mind,” don’t let this be a one-time thing. This exhortation is especially powerful at this time because this trip mentioned in Galatians 2:1-10 is Paul’s second trip to Jerusalem for the famine relief (Acts 11:28-30), so there were a lot of poor and needy people at that time.

Gal 2:11

**“But when Cephas came to Antioch.”** The date of Peter’s going to Antioch is not known and the time is debated, but logically (and many commentators agree) it seems it was between the time that Paul and Barnabas returned from their first itinerary to Cyprus and Galatia, but before the Jerusalem council. During that time, Paul spent a lot of time evangelizing and teaching in Antioch (Acts 14:28). Peter apparently came to visit and was there when people came from James and temporarily convinced him not to eat with the Gentiles (Gal. 2:1-5).

**“I opposed him to his face.”** This is a powerful object lesson. Paul is setting the example as to how people who know the truth of the Good News of Jesus Christ should react when people try to pervert and change it. Paul confronted Peter to the face in Antioch, and when Paul was in Jerusalem and encountered Judaizers who wanted to circumcise Titus, he “did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the Good News could continue” (Gal. 2:5). It is not stated, but it is likely that Paul’s confrontation of Peter changed Peter. When Peter showed up at the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, he spoke against the legalism of the Jews and talked about trust (“faith”) and grace being given to the Gentiles (Acts 15:7-11), in contrast to James, who added requirements for the Gentiles from the Jewish law (Acts 15:19-21).

The people of Galatia should have been acting like Paul and standing up for the truth. Instead, they were “quickly deserting” the Good News (Gal. 1:6). Although they had begun in the spirit, they were trying to be completed by the flesh (Gal. 3:3) and were “turning back” to the weak and inferior basic principles (Gal. 4:9). Paul’s example should be a demonstration to them, and to every Christian, how important it is to take a stand for the truth if the Word of God is going to live. Christians dare not forget that the truth is always under attack. As Paul wrote to Titus: “For there are many who are rebellious, *who are* empty talkers and deceivers, especially those from among the Circumcised, whose mouths must be stopped, who are overthrowing whole houses by teaching things that they should not *teach*...” (Titus 1:10-11). Truth resides in God and will always be, but truth can be overthrown and disappear from people’s lives, leaving them to live in lies and bondage. Fighting for truth is not necessarily fun, but it is honorable, will ultimately help people, and will be richly rewarded.

Gal 2:12

**“being afraid.”** If there is any good news about Peter being afraid of the Jews, it is that it shows that even the best of us are human. We all have weaknesses and fears, and we often give into them and do not do what is right. That is why the Bible constantly encourages us to love and forgive one another and have long-suffering and patience with one another. If there is going to be love, kindness, and trust in the Body of Christ, we must forgive others of their weaknesses and mistakes, even as we want to be forgiven for ours.

Nevertheless, we must ask: why would Peter, such a powerful man of God in so many circumstances, be afraid of the Jews? Two things come right to the surface: reputation and income. By this time Peter had no doubt divested himself of his fishing business and was living off of the giving of the believers. But as any minister who lives off other people’s giving knows, people will only give if they think the minister is living rightly before God. Furthermore, Peter was a man of great influence in the early church, and that influence was important to Peter and to the work of the Church. The Jews who came from James had the ability to hurt Peter’s reputation and his income, and he felt that acutely enough to be afraid of what they could do.

In contrast to Peter, Paul was not influenced by the Judaizers, and he stood against them. The Judaizers could have done their best to tarnish Paul’s reputation, but he was more concerned with pleasing Christ than saving his own reputation—which is an attitude that every Christian should aspire to have. Earlier in Galatians he wrote: “Indeed, am I now trying to gain the approval of people, or of God? Or am I seeking to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10). Also, however, Peter had decided to minister to the Jews, and they could be easily influenced by Jews who came from James. In contrast, Paul had gone to the Gentiles, and they were not nearly as likely to be influenced by Judaizers (cf. Gal. 2:9).

Also, money was not the issue with Paul that it was for Peter. Although Paul had the right to live off the giving of others, he also worked for a living as he traveled and taught (Acts 18:2-3; 20:34; 1 Cor. 4:12; 1 Thess. 2:9), so his income was not threatened. While it is certainly acceptable for ministers of the Good News to live off the Good News, they must always be honest with themselves, the people, and the Lord and not let money fears influence how they minister and teach. To truly serve Christ, Christians must be willing to give up things like money, reputation, and comfort to what is right in the sight of God. As Jesus said, “If anyone wants to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will find it. ...For the Son of Man is about to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each *person* according to what he has done” (Matt. 16:24, 25, 27).

Gal 2:14

**“I said to Cephas before *them* all.”** Ordinarily, you reprove, correct, or teach a leader privately, like Paul did when he first went to Antioch to meet with Peter and James (Gal. 2:2; cf. Matt. 18:15). Paul no doubt knew that, so the fact that he reproved Peter in front of the congregation shows that Paul had spoken earlier to Peter, and almost certainly also to the Jews who came from James. However, over time things were getting worse and more harmful, and even Barnabas was affected (Gal. 2:13). So Paul reproves Peter—the most influential Jew—in front of the congregation, a practice that Paul would later write about reproving leaders (1 Tim. 5:19-20).

**“how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?”** We stop Paul’s quotation here at the end of verse 14. The NIV takes the quote all the way down through Gal. 2:21, however, it seems unlikely that Paul meant to record this much of the conversation to Peter.

Gal 2:15

**“Gentile sinners.”** The national attitude of the Jews was such that they considered all Gentiles sinners, just as the Greeks considered all non-Greeks “barbarians.” The Galatian Christians would recognize that Paul was speaking of the natural prejudice in the Jewish culture, and not saying that all Gentiles were actually sinners.

Gal 2:16

**“knowing that a person is not declared righteous by the works of the law but through trust in Jesus Christ.”** The Greek text here is stronger than the English. The words translated “but” are *ean mē*, and properly mean “except.” Thus, the Greek carries the strong sense: “…a man is not declared righteous by the works of the law; a man is not declared righteous except through trust in Jesus Christ…” Being declared righteous by God is a judicial decision. It does not mean that we do not sin or that our sin does not matter; it does matter. See commentary on Romans 3:20.

**“trust in Jesus Christ.”** This is the objective genitive. See commentary on Romans 3:22.

Gal 2:18

**“…I demonstrate that I am a transgressor.”** If the Christian rebuilds the Law in his life, then by doing so he proves that he was a transgressor by tearing it down (i.e., not living by it) in the first place. We are either justified by works or by faith, not by both.

Gal 2:19

**“For through law I died to law, in order that I could live for God.”** This is a very difficult verse. Lightfoot[[19]](#footnote-20876) seems to understand it well. First, in the Greek text there is no definite article with “law.” It is not “the Law,” but just “law.” Thus, “law” in this verse does not refer specifically to the Mosaic Law, but to law in general, including rules, regulations, and even what we refer to as moral law. To understand why “through law I died to law,” we must understand the progression one is in once there is a law. First, law creates sin (“sin is not reckoned where there is no law” Rom. 5:13). Second, law creates in me a knowledge or awareness of sin (“I would not have known what sin was except through the law” Rom. 7:7). Third, I sin. We all have a sin nature, and perfect obedience is impossible, so we sin (Rom. 3:23; 8:3). Fourth, law punishes sin. In fact, the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Law creates and reveals sin, but then provides no remedy for it. Man is hopelessly lost with no way to keep the law. How can we escape? The only way is to throw off the law altogether (die to law) and be justified through Christ. We are not justified in God’s sight by law, we are justified by faith apart from law. That is what the context says happens.

**Galatians Chapter 3**

Gal 3:1

**“senseless.”** For a study of “Fool” and related words, see Word Study: “Fool.”

Gal 3:2

**“did you receive the spirit by the works of the law, or by trusting what you heard?”** This question is the figure of speech eironia (irony; sarcasm), because the Galatians obviously knew the answer. The question was not asked to gain information but rather to make his point.

**“receive the spirit.”** When a person gets saved, he receives the gift of holy spirit (Acts 2:38), which is his guarantee of salvation and everlasting life (Eph. 1:13-14).

**“trusting what you heard.”** This is a difficult genitive, and scholars are in considerable disagreement about it, calling it an objective genitive, a subjective genitive, a genitive of possession, etc. For one thing, the Greek word *akoē* (#189 ἀκοή) can mean either “hearing or listening to” or “that which is heard or listened to,” i.e., the message or the news. Thus, “listening with trust” and “the news about trust” (and more) are possible meanings of the phrase. R. C. H. Lenski refers to it as a genitive of possession: being made to hear what belongs to the Faith (the Christian Faith).[[20]](#footnote-19723) Kenneth Wuest says it is the message announcing the Faith, which is close to Meyer, who says it is the news concerning the Faith.[[21]](#footnote-13592) Expositor’s says “listening in faith” (listening with trust).[[22]](#footnote-24157) Some say it is trust in the news announced.

For our translation, we felt the context was very helpful because it refers to God working in the life of a believer, and how does that happen? By people trusting Him and what they hear. Of course, it is true that a person can hear but not trust what they hear, and thus not receive the message and end up being rejected (Heb. 4:2), but the Galatians did initially receive the message and trust it, and Paul is reminding them of that. If they initially were brought into the Christian Faith by trusting what they heard, surely they would not now have to maintain their salvation by works.

Gal 3:3

**“senseless.”** See Word Study: “Fool.”

Gal 3:4

**“suffered.”** The Greek word is *paschō* (#3958 πάσχω), and it means to have an experience of something; which can be a good experience or a bad experience. Often the experience is bad, and *paschō* gets translated “suffer,” or some similar word. *Paschō* means “suffer” in nearly all its other uses in the New Testament, and the Judaizers were pressuring the people to change the Gospel and live under the Law. The Galatians had stood against the persecution successfully, but would they now cave in and try to live by the Law?

Gal 3:5

**“by trusting what you heard.”** See commentary on Galatians 3:2.

Gal 3:7

**“those who rely on trust.”** The Greek literally reads “those of faith” (οἱ ἐκ πίστεως, *hoi ek pisteōs*). James Dunn points out that the wording of the Greek is almost certainly purposeful, because it contrasts those “of faith” with those “of the circumcision” (Gal. 2:12), and those “of the works of the law” (Gal. 3:10). Dunn writes, “the ‘they’ is emphatic, even exclusive: they and not others; ...faith is the decisive factor in determining and characterizing this sonship. The implication, then, is that ‘those of faith’ are those whose identity is grounded in faith, and whose relationship with God grows out of faith, is characterized and determined by believing and trusting (the promise of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ), without reference to any works of the law.”[[23]](#footnote-21089)

William Hendriksen also writes about how being “of faith” means to be a person whose basis for life is their ongoing trust (faith). He writes, “To be ‘of faith’ means to be characterized or controlled by faith, to have trust in God as one’s guiding principle.[[24]](#footnote-22235)

Richard Longenecker uses the phrase “rely on faith” and translates Galatians 3:7 as, “You know, then, that those who rely on faith are the sons of Abraham.” He then goes on to comment on his translation. “The [Greek] preposition *ek* denotes source or basis for…. Here, however, the word *pistis* (‘faith’) signals a subjective response to the objective factors of what Christ has done and the proclamation of the message. Being, therefore, set in a subjective context, *ek* here should be taken as “rely on,” for faith is not the objective basis for human redemption but man’s subjective response to what has been done by Christ and proclaimed by his messengers.”[[25]](#footnote-13366)

Other English Bibles express the idea of “rely on trust” but with slightly different wording. For example, the CJB reads “those who live by trusting and being faithful,” while the NLT says, “those who put their faith in God.” The AMP is somewhat similar and says, “the people who live by faith.” Some other versions shorten the text and just read, “those who believe,” that is, they continue to believe day after day (cf. CEB, NET, NIV84, NRSV). Many versions are more strictly literal but are less clear, and read “those of faith” (cf. ESV, LSV; cf. KJV, LSB, NASB, REB). A clearer reading than that is “those who have faith” (cf. BSB, CSB, GWORD, NAB, NIV2011).

E. Huxtable expounds upon the meaning of “faith” (“trust”) by comparing it to Abraham and moving forward from him to the general principle. And so, starting with Abraham, Huxtable writes: “He knew nothing of Levitical Law. He walked by faith. ...It was a grand, simple trust in God. It was shown in his forsaking the idols of his forefathers and worshiping the one spiritual God, in his leaving his home and going, he knew not whither in obedience to a divine voice, in his willingness to sacrifice his son, in his hope of a future inheritance. Such a faith is a personal reliance, leading to active obedience and encouraged by confident anticipation. Abraham's faith is the model faith for us. For us, faith is to rely on Christ, to be loyal to Christ, to hope in Christ.[[26]](#footnote-26840)

In defining that “trust” (“faith”) refers to a person’s “reliance” on Christ, and thus ultimately on God, Huxtable and Longenecker capture the essence of what Paul is saying: those who “rely on trust” are the children of Abraham now, and in the future.

Gal 3:8

**“declare the Gentiles righteous by trust.”** Being declared righteous by God is a judicial decision. It does not mean that we do not sin or that our sin does not matter; it does matter.

[For more on “righteousness” and being declared righteous, see commentaries on Rom. 3:20 and 3:22.]

**“through you.”** This is part of a quotation from Genesis 12:3 where God tells Abraham that “All the nations will be blessed through you.” The word “through” is translated from the Greek preposition *en* (“in”) and is used in the sense of “sphere” and “relation” to Abraham. It can be translated, “in connection with” or even sometimes, “in union with” (see commentary on Rom. 6:3; Eph. 1:3; and Col. 1:17). The important connotation of the preposition *en* in this verse is that it marks a close association with something. The statement, “All the nations will be blessed through you” is made because it was God’s direct promise to Abraham that “in connection with” him everyone on earth (specifically, the “nations,” not just Israel), would be blessed. Paul discloses in Galatians 3:14 that God was, in fact, referring to a specific descendant of Abraham, the Christ (cf. Gen. 22:18), through whom all the nations would be blessed. And so, it would be through Abraham’s seed (“descendant”) that all the nations would receive these promised blessings.

Gal 3:9

**“rely on trust.”** For the reason for the translation “rely on trust,” see commentary on Galatians 3:7

Gal 3:11

**“declared righteous.”** Being declared righteous by God is a judicial decision. It does not mean that we do not sin or that our sin does not matter; it does matter. See commentary on Romans 3:20.

Gal 3:13

**“for us.”** This is the preposition *huper*, which is often in these cases translated “on behalf of” or “for.” We were under the curse of the Law, and thus destined to be the subjects of its penalty, which is death. However, Jesus Christ became the curse for us and instead of us, and died, hung on a tree, fulfilling the Law and ending the curse for those people who accept him as Lord and thus come into union with him. When he died, we died with him (Rom. 6:5-8).

Gal 3:14

**“so that.”** It is truly God’s way, and God’s irony, which makes no sense to the world, that the greatest blessing, the promise of salvation and the power of the gift of holy spirit, would come by way of the greatest sacrifice, shame, and degradation: Christ becoming a cursed thing for us. The greatest curse brought the greatest blessing.

The two purpose clauses in the verse, both starting with the Greek word *hina*, “so that,” are coordinate, they make two different points, based on the fact that Christ had “become a curse for us.”

**“the blessing of Abraham.”** Abraham was promised the land (Gen. 13:14-17; 15:7), but that is not primarily the blessing spoken of here. The blessing in this verse is the one spoken of in Galatians 3:8, five verses earlier, that the Gentiles would be saved by faith. That was one of the great promises foretold in Genesis 12:3, “All the nations will be blessed through you” (see commentary on Gal. 3:8). We should keep in mind, however, that the result of everlasting life through faith was that we would get to participate in what God promised Abraham, which was the land (cf. also Gal. 3:18, where “the inheritance” would involve the land).

**“through trust.”** When a person trusts in Jesus, he gets “born again” (1 Pet. 1:3, 23), and what is born inside him is the gift of holy spirit. That is why this verse says we get the promise of the spirit by trust. When a person trusts in Jesus Christ, he gets born again and has the guarantee of salvation, and also receives the gift of holy spirit.

[For more on faith, see commentary on Eph. 2:8.]

**“the spirit that was promised.”** The Greek text reads, “the promise of the spirit,” and this is a genitive of apposition, and means, “the promise, that is to say, the spirit,” or more colloquially, “the spirit that was promised.” The gift of holy spirit that we have today was promised in the Old Testament in verses such as Isaiah 32:15 and Joel 2:28. The Old Testament prophets and Jesus foretold its coming, saying it would be a new spirit that would be “poured out” (i.e., given in fullness) into all the believers (Ezek. 11:19-20; 36:26-27; Joel 2:28, 29; John 14:17; cf. Isa. 32:15; 44:3-5; Ezek. 37:12-14; 39:29; John 15:26; 16:13). That the gift of holy spirit we have today was promised in the Old Testament and by Christ explains why in Acts and the Church Epistles it is referred to as the promised holy spirit (cf. Acts 2:33, Gal. 3:14, Eph. 1:13).

If we were to expand Gal. 3:14 to include the concepts in it, we could end up with something like: “Jesus became a curse instead of us, so that via our union with Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham, that anyone could be declared righteous in the sight of God by trust (and be saved!), might come to the Gentiles, and so that by trust we might receive the gift of holy spirit that had been promised.”

[For more on the Holy Spirit in contrast to “the gift of holy spirit,” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For more on “the promised holy spirit” used in Acts and the Church Epistles, see commentaries on Eph. 1:13 and John 7:39.]

Gal 3:15

**“Brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“speaking in human terms.”** The Greek of Galatians 3:15 more literally reads, “according to man,” meaning according to a human way of thinking or acting. The reference is in regard to how human covenants work.

Gal 3:16

**“It.”** The pronoun “It” refers to Scripture. The implied subject of the verb *legō* (“speak”) can refer either to Scripture or to God, who spoke the promises to Abraham. “It” was chosen for clarity and to be consistent with the established convention for other OT citations.

Gal 3:17

**“430 years.”** The time between when God initially promised the land to Abraham (Gen. 12:2-4) and the giving of the Law to Moses, which occurred the same year as the Exodus, was 430 years. This means that Israel could not have been enslaved in Egypt for 400 years, as most people believe. Israel was likely in slavery in Egypt for 100-120 years.

[For more on the 430 years and Israel’s slavery in Egypt, see commentary on Exod. 12:40.]

**“does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.”** Although the statement is wordy, the meaning is clear: God made a promise to Abraham.

Gal 3:18

**“the inheritance.”** The inheritance is the inheritance that God promised Abraham, which includes the land.

Gal 3:19

**“because of transgressions.”** The Law was not added in order that transgressions would come. See commentary on Romans 5:20. Hence, the word *charin* (#5484 χάριν), should be translated as “because,” as most versions do. The word can also be used to show purpose, “indicating the goal,”[[27]](#footnote-15992) and could be translated “for the sake of.” But we feel, along with most translators, *charin* here is “indicating the reason,”[[28]](#footnote-21553) that the Law was added “on account of” transgressions.

**“until the seed for whom the promise was intended should come.”** The promise to Abraham was ultimately intended for the “seed,” which according to Galatians 3:16, is Jesus Christ. The translation of this phrase is difficult because the verb *epangellō* (#1861 ἐπαγγέλλω), basically, “to promise,” is not crystal clear. The idea is that God made a promise that applies to the “seed,” who is Christ. That is why the huge majority of the English versions read something like, “until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made” (NASB). That translation is fine as long as we understand that God made a promise to Jesus Christ, who did not exist yet except in the plan of God. Because Jesus Christ had not been born yet, the translation “until the seed for whom the promise was intended should come” seems much clearer.[[29]](#footnote-14412)

Other versions and commentators pick up on the same problem and strive to make the sense of the verse clearer. The NIV reads, “until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.” The Phillips New Testament reads: “until the arrival of the ‘seed’ to whom the promise referred.”

**“given through angels by the hand of a mediator.”** There were times when angels brought the Word of God to people (cf. Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2). Furthermore, sometimes these angels representing God are referred to as “God” (see commentary on Gen. 16:7 and Matt. 8:5). In this case, the Word came from God through angels to Moses, who was the mediator.

Gal 3:20

**“but God is *only* one.”** Paul has been describing the purpose of the Law as that which was meant to lead people to faith in Christ (Gal. 3:19). Then, Paul specifies that the Law was given through angels and administered by a mediator (Gal. 3:20). Paul is alluding to Moses as the mediator to whom the Law was given, since he was the intermediary between Israel and God (Exod. 34:27). Therefore, Paul’s aim here is to point out the circumstances under which the Law was given (i.e., through a mediator), which required an agreement between God and the people, and that agreement was why the Law was a “covenant.” The covenant agreement between God and the people of Israel is laid out in Exodus 24:3-8, and we now know that covenant as the “Old Covenant,” because Christ ratified a New Covenant when he died and shed his blood.

In contrast to the Old Covenant, in which Moses was the mediator between two parties, God gave the promise directly to Abraham and required no agreement on Abraham’s part. On the basis of this difference, Paul follows up with a question in Gal. 3:21, “Is the law then contrary to the promises of God?” The answer is clearly “No.” But Paul’s point is that while the Law was established through angels and a mediator, indicating that a “go-between” emissary was used and a commitment from the people was required, the promise was “hand-delivered” directly from God. This more intimate, unmediated encounter establishes that the promise was a superior, unilateral, unconditional covenant that God made with Abraham. It had been in force for hundreds of years when the Law was given and so the Abrahamic covenant was not overwritten by the mutually agreed-upon two-party covenant that God made with Israel.

Gal 3:21

**“Is the law then contrary to the promises of God?”** Paul answers with an emphatic “No” to this question, but why? In the context, Paul has already shown that the Law shows what behaviors are wrong (ungodly) (Gal. 3:19) and was a guardian/tutor until Christ (Gal. 3:24-25). But the Law could not give life (Gal. 3:21). So the Law was not “contrary to” or “against” the promises, it simply had a totally different purpose than the promises. The promise could give life, whereas the Law pointed out our sins and shortcomings and thus made it obvious why we were not good enough on our own to earn everlasting life (Rom. 3:19-20). On the positive side, however, the Law helped us stay alive to receive the promises, but the law was not designed to do, and could not do, what the promise could do. The role of law in God’s plan is different from the role of the promise.

Gal 3:22

**“the promise”** is a metonymy for that which God promised.

[See Word Study: “Metonymy.”]

**“based on trust in Jesus Christ.”** This is in contrast to the law, which was not “based on” trust.

Gal 3:23

**“the coming of the trust.”** See Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 4:297.

Gal 3:24

**“declared righteous.”** Being declared righteous by God is a judicial decision. It does not mean that we do not sin or that our sin does not matter; it does matter. Also, many Bible versions read, “justified by faith” instead of “declared righteous by trust.” The words “justified” and “righteous” are translated from the same Greek words, and there are a lot of disadvantages to using the two different words, “righteousness” and “justification,” when the Greek is the same (see commentary on Rom. 3:22).

[For more on “righteousness” and being declared righteous, see commentaries on Rom. 3:20 and 3:22.]

Gal 3:27

**“have put on Christ.”** In this context, putting on Christ (as a garment) occurs at the time of salvation and the New Birth, when the believer gets “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). The idea of “putting on” Christ or the attributes of Christ has two distinct meanings in the Church Epistles, although they are related to one another. One meaning is that believers “put on” (or “are clothed with” Christ at the time they are saved. We see that meaning here in Galatians 3:27 and in Colossians 3:10. The other meaning is that the believers, having “put on” Christ spiritually as part of the New Birth, are to “put on” Christ in their lives, that is, think and act like him. Thus, there are uses of “put on” Christ (or the new self) that refer to changing one’s thoughts, attitudes, and behavior and being like Christ in one’s life (cf. Rom. 13:14; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:12).

Gal 3:28

**“There is neither Jew nor Greek.”** Galatians 3:28 is also stated in part in Romans 10:12, which says, “since there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is *Lord* of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.”

Gal 3:29

**“of what was promised.”** The Greek phrase is *kata epangelia* (κατά ἐπαγγελία), and it is traditionally translated, “according to the promise.” However, more newly discovered epigraphical evidence from the Greco-Roman world at the time of Paul, which the older lexicons such as Bullinger and Thayer had no access to, shows us that the phrase is not saying that we are heirs “according to the promise,” as if there was a promise that we would be heirs (e.g., “I promise you will be an heir”). Rather, the Greek idiom means that we are heirs of what was promised (“I promise the land, and you will inherit it”). Thus, N.T. Wright translates the phrase as “You stand to inherit the promise.”[[30]](#footnote-30134) Richard Longenecker gets the sense of the phrase as “heirs of God’s covenantal promise.”[[31]](#footnote-30687) James Dunn gets the sense of the whole passage in Galatians:

The claim of Gal. 3:7, “Know then that those from faith, they are Abraham’s sons,” had been startling. Now Paul has completed his attempt to justify it, with an argument outrageous in its bold simplicity. To believe “into Christ Jesus” (Gal. 2:16), to be “baptized into Christ” (Gal. 3:27), was to become so identified with Christ as to share in his status, not only before God (“sons of God”— Gal. 3:26), but also in relation to Abraham, as Abraham’s seed, and therefore participant in the promise given to Abraham and his seed (Gal. 3:16).[[32]](#footnote-17724)

The Christian, whether Jew or non-Jew, gets to share in the promise that God made to Abraham because he is saved and is “in Christ.”

**Galatians Chapter 4**

Gal 4:1

**“Now I say.”** This is the equivalent of “What I am saying is….” Paul is further expounding what he has just taught in chapter 3.

Gal 4:3

**“by.”** The passive verb “enslaved” together with the preposition *hupo* is “to be enslaved by.”[[33]](#footnote-18096)

**“the elemental spirits of the world.”** In this context, the emphasis of the phrase “elemental spirits” is the elementary teachings such as the Law that kept people in bondage to “doing things” in order to please God instead of just focusing on trust in Christ to be declared righteous by God.

[For more on “elemental spirits,” see commentary on Col. 2:8.]

Gal 4:4

**“the fullness of the time.”** The phrase means, the full or complete time, i.e., the proper time. God had been at work in history for many centuries preparing for His Son and the spread of the Good News. The almost universal knowledge of the Greek language made it easy to spread the Gospel, even via letters, and preserve it in scrolls, and shortly thereafter, books. The world was prepared for the Gospel in written form. Roman roads and Roman law helped the spread of the Gospel in spite of the world’s intolerance of it. What happened to Paul was a good example: his Roman citizenship and Roman justice helped him in most of his travels, including Philippi (Acts 16:37-40), Corinth (Acts 18:15), in Jerusalem (Acts 22:25), in Caesarea (Acts 25:12), and in Rome, where he was released after two years (Acts 28:30). The world was prepared for people to travel with the Gospel and teach it everywhere. Throughout the Roman Empire there were miserable conditions, tyranny, oppression, slavery, and profligate behavior. Centuries of war, destruction, and enslavement of the losers, had devastated the empire. Entertainment had become murder. The world was ready for a Savior. Greek and Roman philosophy had proven itself powerless to stop the downward spiral of the human mind, soul, and spirit, and Greco-Roman religion was “powerless, and worse than powerless, in checking their bad propensities.”[[34]](#footnote-20548) The world was ready for enlightenment and true purpose. There are other things, of course, and we cannot hope to understand all the things God had in mind when He said that it was the proper time for His Son to come into the world.

**“God sent his Son.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over 40 times in the New Testament and can have different meanings in different contexts.

[For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see commentary on John 6:57.]

Gal 4:5

**“in order to ... so that.”** The two “in order that” clauses show that the prior condition to being adopted was that Christ redeemed those who were under the law. Without Christ paying the redemption price, no adoption would be possible.

**“redeem.”** It is good to remember that “redeem” means to buy back, and the Greek word can also be understood and translated as “ransom.” We were under the law and slaves to sin, but Jesus Christ ransomed us from that by dying in our place (Rom. 5:8). Because of that great work, people can now be born-again sons of God by trust (“faith”) in Christ.

**“adoption.”** Galatians 4:1-5 makes it clear that God made this “adoption” available only after Christ redeemed us by his substitutionary death, which paid for our sins. Thus, this “adoption” was not available until Christ died, and is one thing that sets the Christian Church apart from Israel and people who believed in the Old Testament, such as Abraham and Sarah. They believed God and were declared righteous in God’s sight, but they never received “adoption.” That blessing was not conferred upon believers until after Christ ascended into heaven.

[For more on adoption, see commentary on Eph. 1:5.]

Gal 4:6

**“because you are sons, God sent.”** Galatians 4:6 is not saying a person had to be a “son of God,” i.e., a born-again believer, in order to get the “spirit of His Son.” Ephesians 1:13-14 (and other places as well) make it clear that at the time a person is saved, born again, they get the gift of holy spirit. Galatians 4:6 is simply stating the fact that because a person is a son (or daughter) of God, they have the spirit, God sent it to them.

**“sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts.”** This is an unusual phrase and has great depth of meaning, it has a primary meaning and also other implied meanings. The primary meaning is that the believer has “the spirit of the Son,” that is, the gift of holy spirit. When a person is born again, they receive the gift of holy spirit and become a child of God, which is why they can say “Abba,” Father (Acts 2:38. Also, see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:3).

But God never meant our relationship with Him to be a cold, factual, and forensic relationship, i.e., that He is our Father and we are His children by birth but despite that, He is distant and hard to understand. God wants us to have intimacy and fellowship with Him and other Christians, so the text says that God sent “the spirit of his Son into our hearts.” Factually, the spirit is “in us,” not just “in our hearts,” but biblically the “heart” is the seat and center of our intellectual and moral life. So the idea that God sent the gift of holy spirit into our hearts communicates that that spirit is then at work to change our hearts and make us more like Him (cf. Gal. 5:17; Phil. 2:13). Furthermore, the Greek word *pneuma* (#4151 πνεῦμα) has many meanings, including “thoughts” and “attitude.” The gift of holy spirit that God created in us when we were born again, and our thankfulness to God and Christ, and our desire to please them, leads us to strive to think like Christ thought and have the attitude toward life that he had and thus truly appreciate that God is indeed our “Abba,” our Father.

We also should keep in mind that each believer having the gift of holy spirit (Acts 2:38), here called the “spirit of the Son,” was brand new and started on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). It is called “the spirit of the Son” for several reasons: Christ received it from God and gave it to humankind (Acts 2:33), so it is “the spirit of (or “from”) the Son, Also, it brings the characteristics of Christ into the believer, which is why Colossians 1:27 says it is “Christ in you.” Also, it was made available by the sinless life and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, and it is because of his work that God could give it to believers.

[For more on the gift of holy spirit, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For more on the biblical usages of the word “spirit” see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

**“‘Abba! Father!’”** The Greek text preserves the Aramaic transliteration, *abba*, which is the word “father” (the Aramaic is in the vocative voice, as if calling out to God), and then the noun, *patēr* (#3962 πατήρ, pronounced pä-'tair), which means “father.” It is often taught in Christian circles that *abba* is a term of special endearment for “father,” but that is not technically correct. *Abba* is the standard word for “father” in the Aramaic language. However, before Jesus introduced God as the “Father,” and before Christians became children of God via the New Birth, the Jews would have considered it inappropriate, presumptuous, and even wrong to call God, “Father.”

In the Old Testament, the holiness of God kept Him separate from people, which is why even the High Priest could only go into His presence in the Holy of Holies one day each year, and even then only when covered by a blood sacrifice and with enough incense burning that it would have been difficult or impossible to see clearly in that dark room. So although the word *abba* does not in and of itself convey a special closeness, when we call God “Father” in any language, it reveals a closeness in the relationship that had not existed before the time of Christ.

As for the phrase, “*Abba!* Father!” there are several ideas as to what it means and how to translate it. The first and perhaps the most simple is that because Jesus, speaking Aramaic, called God, “*Abba*,” and because the apostles and Paul were Hebrews, the term *Abba* came into the vocabulary of the early Church as an expression of their new-found closeness to God. In that sense, “*Abba*” would express their closeness to God and *patēr* would be the explanation of what *Abba* meant, which was needed by those Gentiles who were newly introduced to the Christian Faith. Understanding the phrase that way, the translation in the REV, “‘Abba! Father!’” is a good rendition. This explanation also fits with what we see in the New Testament. For example, when “Abba, Father” appears in Mark 14:36 in Jesus’ prayer to God in the Garden of Gethsemane, we know that Jesus did not call God “*Abba*” in his native Aramaic and then translate it into Greek. In his Gospel, Mark added *patēr* after the word *Abba* as an explanation for his audience, which by then included a large number of Greeks.

There are also scholars who agree that because Jesus used *abba* of his Father, the term *abba* came to be used by the early Church. However, they think that when people were teaching or describing Jesus’ relationship to God, they would use the term *abba*, and then immediately follow it with *patēr* so the audience would understand. Then, over time as the stories were retold, the phrase “*Abba*, Father” came into Christianity as a kind of liturgical formula, and it was sometimes used in prayers. Even today some Christians start their prayers with, “*Abba*, Father.” According to this explanation, the translation, “*Abba*, Father” would be correct, and the doubling of the word “Father,” especially expressing it in different languages, would be the result of the people’s love for, and emotion about, God.

It is difficult to say which of these two understandings about “*Abba*, Father” is correct as it applies here in Galatians, but since it seems clear that in Christ’s prayer in Gethsemane he would have not have said, “*Abba*, Father,” but rather just “*Abba*,” and that “Father” was added later as an explanation, we believe that is good evidence for continuing that pattern in Galatians 4:6 and Romans 8:15.

**“Father.”** See commentary on Romans 8:15.

Gal 4:7

**“if.”** Although the KJV reads “heir of God through Christ,” the best texts omit Christ and the reason for its addition is clear. Saying we are heirs “through God” leaves much for the reader to ponder. We are heirs through “*the work of*” God, “*the son of God*,” etc.

**“an heir through *what* God *has done*.”** The idea is that we are an heir “through God” that is, through what God has done. That is, we are heirs by way of the work of God. The meaning is not that God is the medium “through whom” we became an heir, but rather that God acted and did things in such a way that we could become heirs. The idea of being an heir and having an inheritance comes forward into Galatians 4:7 from Galatians 3:16-18, 29. God made promises to Abraham that he and his offspring (“seed”) would inherit certain things, such as the “Promised Land.” Now, through the work of Christ, every believer becomes a child of Abraham through the work of “the seed,” Christ, and so Galatians 3:29 can say, “Now if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, *and* heirs of what was promised.”

Gal 4:8

**“by nature are not gods.”** Cf. Wuest.[[35]](#footnote-14898)

Gal 4:9

**“are turning.”** See Robertson, *Word Pictures*, 4:303.

**“elemental spirits.”** See commentary on Colossians 2:8.

Gal 4:11

**“in vain.”** The Greek word translated as “vain” is *eikē* (#1500 εἰκῆ), and it means “empty, worthless,” and so translations include, “my hard work for you has been for nothing” (CEB) or “my work among you has been wasted” (CJB).

It is possible to become a Christian but then do nothing with it and lose out on rewards in the future kingdom of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 3:13-15). However, that does not seem to be what Paul is writing about here in Galatians 4:11. The wording of Galatians 4:11 makes it part of the debate about whether salvation is permanent or if it can be forfeited. In this case, the weight of evidence favors “vain” referring to salvation not being permanent. If salvation is permanent there is no way that the text, reading it literally, can be saying that Paul’s efforts are “in vain,” i.e., “with no results, wasted.” After all, if salvation is permanent, the saved person will be resurrected and will live forever, which clearly would be of benefit to the individual. And so, if salvation was permanent, then it would seem completely mistaken for Paul to say that his work was “in vain.” But the fact that there are eternal consequences to unbelief, Paul makes the sobering claim that if Galatians turn away from the Lord in unbelief, then his work in their life and their prior faith would be for nothing.

To further prove this point, in the context, Paul’s concern is not that the Galatians would stop sinning so that they could earn rewards at the judgment seat, which Paul does teach in other places (cf. 1 Cor. 3:13-15). Rather, Paul’s concern is that they would not become “slaves” to the elemental spirits again (Gal. 4:9). Paul is referring to their previous state when they “did not know God” (Gal. 4:8) and he is encouraging them not to turn away from Christ and backslide back into that earlier state. So, the context of Galatians 4:11 is not about losing or keeping rewards, but about keeping or forfeiting salvation.

[For more on Christian salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.”]

Gal 4:12

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

Gal 4:13

**“physical illness.”** Lit. “sickness of the flesh.” The Greek word *astheneia*, (#769 ἀσθένεια) means “weakness, illness.” Therefore, Paul is describing a physical illness he had. Paul preached where he did in Galatia for the first time because of an infirmity. Many people have guessed about what this infirmity was, but the simple fact is that we do not know.

Some commentators have suggested that the translation should be, “despite my bodily illness,” instead of “because of my bodily illness.” Lenski points out that all the texts have the phrase with the accusative, and thus “because of” is correct.[[36]](#footnote-24961) He points out that the proposal to have “despite…” is “due to the supposition that when Paul came from Paphos and landed at Perga and then continued on to Pisidian Antioch in Galatia, he had not intended to stop here but purposed to go on past this country [of Galatia]. But whither did he intend to go?” Lenski then shows how the geography is such that it seems clear that Paul always intended to go to Galatia, but likely not as fast as he was seemingly forced to go by his illness, which was likely helped by the higher altitudes of central Galatia. If he had not been sick, he may have stayed on and around the coast longer.

Some people believe that this sickness Paul refers to is the “thorn in the flesh” of 2 Corinthians 12:7. That cannot be, because Paul’s “thorn” was permanent, while the sickness he mentions in Galatians got better. This record in Galatians should teach us a powerful lesson: we should not be ashamed of any sickness or weakness in our physical body. Our bodies are flesh, and people get sick. Getting sick is not a “bad witness”; it is a sign we are human. Certainly, we need to use wisdom when it comes to diet and exercise, but even the most fit people get sick. Christ never tells us that Christians will have perfectly healthy bodies; he tells us that in the future we will have a body like his powerful body (Phil. 3:21).

**“the first time.”** Paul was on his first missionary journey when he preached in Galatia, and we believe he wrote Galatians shortly after that journey ended and before the Jerusalem council. If that is the case, what does Paul mean by the “first” time? After Paul preached in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:14-50), he was driven out of the area and turned east. But then he retraced his steps and went back to the area of Antioch a second time (Acts 14:21). Another, but perhaps less likely way to understand “the first time” of Galatians 4:13 is in contrast with “have I [now] become your enemy” in Gal. 4:16. Paul’s first encounter with the Galatians was a warm welcome, but now he is being treated as an enemy.

A piece of supporting evidence that Paul’s first journey included both his first and second trips to the cities of Galatia (if that is what Gal. 4:13 implies) is “so quickly” in Galatians 1:6. (See commentary on Gal. 1:6).

Gal 4:14

**“was a temptation to you in my bodily condition.”** Paul’s sickness in Galatia is mentioned nowhere but here. It was a temptation to the Galatians, because no one wants to attend to a sick stranger, and less so if the stranger heals others but is not healed himself. They were tempted to avoid him. Exactly what the physical problem Paul had has been debated for centuries, but remains unknown.

**“treat with contempt.”** From *exoutheneō* (#1848 ἐξουθενέω). See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:20.

Gal 4:16

**“have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?”** Paul here challenges the Galatians like he already has several times in the letter. The Galatians were “deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ” (Gal. 1:6), that is they were deserting Paul. Paul, for his part, openly challenged the Galatians in what they believed and how they behaved. For example, Paul wrote, “O senseless Galatians, who has bewitched you...Are you so senseless?” (Gal. 3:1, 3). That kind of honest talk usually has one of two results. Either the audience responds to the reproof and returns to correct thinking, or they blame the writer and accuse him or her of being arrogant, judgmental, etc. Paul wants to know where the Galatians stand concerning him. Is Paul now their enemy? That honest and direct question demands an answer.

Gal 4:17

**“They earnestly pursue you.”** The “they” in this verse goes all the way back to Galatians 1:7, where we learn that there were some people who were confusing the Galatians, desiring to turn the Good News of Christ upside down. They show up again in verses such as Galatians 5:7 and 6:12. It is distasteful to have to be constantly vigilant against false teaching, but we have to be, because there are well-meaning but false teachers in the Church in our time just as there were in Paul’s time.

**“Cut you off.”** The Judaizers wanted to isolate the Galatians from Paul and his companions, and thus from Christ (Gal. 5:4).

Gal 4:19

**“formed in you.”** This is speaking of saved people who then have to make the effort to think and act like Christ. So Paul is saying, “I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,” that is, until you are not babies in the Lord anymore, but are mature in Christ.

Gal 4:21

**“do you not hear *what* the law *says*?”** This is a great example of the word “law” referring to the Torah (the five books of Moses), and likely even referring to all the God-inspired scriptures that make up the Old Testament. The Old Testament never openly says that Isaac and Ishmael, two of the children of Abraham and Sarah—they had eight sons total—were an allegory, but here we learn that in the understanding of what happened in the Old Testament and the way God dealt with the boys, He was painting a picture which centuries later would be used to illustrate that people have a choice to live under the law or live under God’s grace and promises.

Gal 4:22

**“one by the slave woman and one by the free woman.”** The slave woman was Hagar, and the record of her giving birth is in Genesis 16. The free woman is Sarah, and she gives birth in Genesis 21:1-3.

Gal 4:23

**“according to the flesh.”** Abraham had a promise from God that he would be the father of many nations. When Sarah got too old to have children, Abraham relied on an old Mesopotamian custom that allowed the husband to have sexual intercourse with a slave or servant, and the child would be considered the child of the barren couple. Thus, Abraham had Ishmael through Hagar (Gen. 16). Nevertheless, God clarified His promise, making it clear that Sarah would have a son (Gen. 17:16). This took faith in God and His promise, because Sarah was now beyond the age of childbearing (Gen. 17:17; 18:11).

Gal 4:24

**“are *now* being treated as an allegory.”** The record of Sarah and Hagar is not an allegory, it is literal. What Paul is saying is that he is taking the literal record of Sarah and Hagar and allegorizing it to make a point, and using that literal record as a lens through which to view the Abrahamic covenant and the Law.

**“One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children into slavery.”** The covenant made on Mount Sinai is the Mosaic Covenant, the Law, and it cannot perfect people, but makes our sins obvious. It places people in slavery to sin.

Gal 4:25

**“in Arabia.”** This verse is literal. The actual Mount Sinai is not on the Sinai Peninsula, as is traditionally believed, but is in biblical Midian, which is southwestern Arabia. That fact explains why archaeologists have not found any evidence of the Exodus in the Sinai Peninsula.

Gal 4:27

**“the children of the desolate *woman* are more than of the one who has the husband.”** The Greek text literally reads, “many are the children of the desolate one more than the one who has the husband.”

Gal 4:28

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

Gal 4:29

**“one who was born according to the flesh persecuted the one *born* according to the spirit.”** The one born by the efforts of the flesh was Ishmael, and he persecuted Isaac (Gen. 21:9), who was born due to the promise of God and by a miracle, since Sarah was beyond the age of childbearing (Gen. 18:9-14).

Gal 4:30

**“Send away.”** The quote here in Galatians 4:30 is from Genesis 21:10, and the Greek and Hebrew words, while indicating resolve, do not necessarily indicate that Abraham was being mean or harsh to Hagar, it was just that she was being resolutely told to leave.

**“share the inheritance.”** The Greek text literally reads, “will not inherit.”

Gal 4:31

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**Galatians Chapter 5**

Gal 5:1

**“a yoke of slavery.”** Here in Galatians 5:1, the Law of Moses is being compared to slavery. The Law revealed that we are sinners, and righteousness could not come by the Law (Gal. 2:21; 3:21).

In other places Paul spoke well of the Law, and the Law has its proper place (Rom. 7:12; 1 Tim. 1:8). There is much in the Law that is holy and good, and it certainly shows us much of what God expects of us in living righteously before Him, which is why it could be a guardian-tutor until Christ (Gal. 3:24). However, in this context in which the Law is directly opposed to the freedom we have in Christ, and especially in light of the fact that the Judaizers were teaching people had to keep the works of the Law such as circumcision to be righteous in the eyes of God, the Law enslaves people to a winless task. No one could actually be righteous before God by doing the Law, no matter how perfectly, so trying to be righteous by works of the Law only produced slavery to it.

Gal 5:2

**“if you get yourselves circumcised.”** The Jewish believers in Galatia would already be circumcised, so Paul is addressing the Gentile Christians in Galatia. To the Jews, circumcision was a major “boundary marker” of who was “in” the accepted people of God, and who was not in that accepted group. Later, water baptism served the same purpose for many Christians—that if a person was not baptized in water they were not a Christian.

**“Christ will be of no benefit to you.”** The context of Galatians 5:2 is the key to understanding this phrase. Paul is not saying that there is no benefit in being a Christian. Of course there is. Everlasting life is of inestimable value, and there is great value in the fullness of the manifestation of holy spirit (1 Cor. 12:7-10). No one loses their everlasting life or the power of the spirit by going back to the Law.

But in this context, Paul is saying that the freedom that Christ accomplished for the believer, which is getting away from the regulations of the Law that were fruitless and a burden, is of no benefit if the believer goes back to those regulations. This becomes clear in the next verse, Galatians 5:3, because if a person wants to try to add to their righteousness and their being acceptable to God by doing the works of the Law, they have to do the whole Law, which clearly is a burden and never made anyone righteous anyway (Gal. 2:21; 3:21).

Gal 5:3

**“every man who gets himself circumcised.”** There was pressure on the non-Jewish converts to be circumcised. The Jews in the area had already been circumcised.

**“he is obligated to do the whole law.”** Anyone who thinks that by doing some of the Mosaic Law he will be more righteous or acceptable to God misses the point of the Law. Deuteronomy 6:25 shows us that God considers the whole Law one huge command, not a bunch of single commands. A person who becomes righteous by trust in Christ, but then thinks there is more to be done and that, for example, by circumcision he will be somehow more acceptable to God, misses the point. If any part of the Law must be obeyed to be righteous, then the whole Law must be obeyed to be righteous. But the Judaizers and false teachers generally never start by suggesting a person keep the whole Law; instead start out by getting people to give in on one point, and then later on keep pressuring for more. Paul warns about going down the slippery slope to believing in righteousness by works or in being more approved by God by doing works, saying, “a little yeast leavens the whole loaf” in Galatians 5:9.

Gal 5:4

**“seeking to be declared righteous.”** For an understanding of the translation “righteous,” see commentary on Romans 3:22.[[37]](#footnote-15946)

**“cut yourselves off.”** This is the translation of the Greek verb, *katargeō* (#2673 καταργέω), which is used more than 25 times in the NT, and has many meanings, differing according to the context. As to this verse, Lenski writes: “The basic idea is, “to make idle, inactive” so that nothing results; the preposition [*apo*] adds the idea that this action removes “away from Christ,” separates us from him...the AV [KJV] translates the sense...well.”[[38]](#footnote-15328) The King James Version says, “Christ is become of no effect unto you.” Darby translates the verse: “Ye are deprived of all profit from the Christ as separated *from him*....”

The verb is in the passive voice, letting us know that being separated from Christ, or having Christ become of no profit, has happened to the Galatians. However, it is clear that they have done this to themselves by the decisions they have made, and God has had to respect their free will decisions. Thus, the Moffat Bible has captured the sense of the verse very well: “You are for justification by the Law? Then you are done with Christ, you have deserted grace.” The NRSV gets the sense well, and keeps the play on words in the translation as well: “You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ.”

It is important to translate *katargeō* properly here, although the translation considered “proper” cannot be divorced from the inherent bias of the translator. We firmly believe that once a person has confessed Jesus as Lord (Rom. 10:9) and is “born again,” he has a guarantee of salvation and his everlasting life is never in doubt (see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:3, 23).

Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon notes that *katargeō* can, in some contexts, mean to be severed from, separated from, discharged from, or loosed from. Since a Christian’s salvation is never in doubt, we cannot be “separated from,” or “cut off from,” or “severed from” Christ in an absolute sense, but we can be in a practical sense. While “cut yourselves off from” could introduce ambiguity, it best conveys the practical sense of separation.

There is another factor to consider in the translation, however, and that is the wordplay that is occurring in the context. Paul is addressing legalism and being in bondage to the Law, but he is using the example of circumcision—the cutting off of the foreskin. So in Galatians 5:2 he says if a person lets himself be circumcised (“cut off,” so to speak), then he will be cut off from Christ, and thus the work of Christ in freeing us from the Law will be of no effect. The REV makes the verse quite clear and preserves the wordplay by saying the Galatians had cut themselves off from Christ.

It is possible to be a Christian and lose sight of the work of Christ and what he has done for us. We are righteous in Christ, holy in Christ, redeemed in Christ, etc., all because of our faith in Christ, not our “goodness” or obedience to the Law. If we begin to rely on the Law or good works again, we are “cut off” from all the success we have in Christ, we separate ourselves from the benefits of Christ, and, like those under the Law, are doomed to feel that we are constant failures because human efforts will never attain the standards of God. It is not that we lose our salvation or are “cut off” from the Body of Christ if we return to the Law, but we lose the value of the work of Christ—it is as if he never came and accomplished anything on the cross.

[For more on the meaning and significance of being “in Christ,” see commentary on Eph. 1:3.]

**“You have fallen away from grace.”** This does not mean the person is unsaved or that Jesus no longer gives grace to the Christian. The subject of Galatians in this context is being righteous by trusting Christ or being righteous by works. People who seek to be righteous in the sight of God by doing the works of the Law have walked away from the grace and freedom they could have lived in by simple trust in Christ. Thus, Galatians 5:4 is similar to the statement Paul made in Galatians 5:2 that if a person got circumcised, Christ would not be of benefit to them. The person who has “fallen away from grace” has separated themselves from the wonderful grace of Christ and the freedom and blessings associated with that grace, such as not having to live by the Law. The Church is full of Christians who worry about whether God loves them and/or whether they are saved, and living like that is not freedom, and it is not living in grace. Christ died for us when we were enemies, and now that we are God’s family, we are declared “righteous” in God’s eyes. To not understand that, and to try to become more acceptable to God by doing works, especially the works of the Mosaic Law, is to fall away from grace. Paul makes the point in the very next phrase, in Galatians 5:5, that it is by the spirit and by trust that we wait for the fullness of what God has for us; we do not get there by works. Then, in Galatians 5:6, Paul reiterates that the works of the Law, illustrated by circumcision versus uncircumcision, have no “strength” (the Greek word translated “value” in Galatians 5:6 is “strength” in the Greek) to make one acceptable to God. What matters is trust in Christ, working through love.

Gal 5:5

**“the spirit.”** The word “the” is pulled from the context. Paul has been speaking of the spirit, and that context continues here.

**“based on trust.”** This is the same phrase in the Greek text as is used in Galatians 3:12 and 3:22. The phrase “based on trust” is in contrast to what has been the subject of the controversy in this section, which is circumcision and righteousness by the works of the Law. No one is saved by doing works, and doing works does not produce an eagerness for the Lord to come because we constantly fall short when we try to base our righteousness (or God’s love for us) on our works. In this context, we eagerly wait with hope based on our trust because we trust God and in His promises. A concise reading of the Greek would be “by spirit, from (*ek*) trust.” Christians who know what God says is in store for them in the future and trust that God will do what He says, eagerly wait for it to happen. Their eagerness is based on their trust. People who do not know what God promises in the future, or question or doubt that it will really happen, do not have trust and therefore are not eager for the future promises to be fulfilled.

**“the righteousness for which we hope.”** The Greek text is more literally, “the hope of righteousness,” and it is a genitive of apposition, i.e., “the hope, that is to say, righteousness.” In the REV and some other versions, the genitive of apposition has been translated in a way that makes it easier to understand (cf. NIV). Although every Christian is declared righteous now, that is not the “righteousness for which we hope.” The “righteousness” we hope for is our complete salvation when Christ returns, that is, the fullness of obtaining all that we have in Christ. That includes getting our new body (Phil. 3:21), being with Christ and other saved people, and getting the inheritance and rewards that have been promised, and all that will happen when Christ returns and our salvation is complete. At that time the spiritual righteousness we have now will be much more visible and complete, and today we hope for that more complete righteousness, which will come in the future when Christ comes.

Gal 5:6

**“in *union with* Christ Jesus.”** On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), being “born again” of God’s spirit first became available, and Christians became part of the Body of Christ and identified with him (crucified with him, died with him, buried with him, and raised with him). Today, Christians are “in Christ” (“in union with Christ”) by virtue of being part of the Body of Christ, and it is important that we also are “in Christ,” that is, “in union with Christ” because we obey him and lead godly lives. When we read a phrase such as “in Christ” or “in him,” we must pay careful attention to the context to see if it refers to our spiritual union due to being part of the Body of Christ, or whether it refers to our being in union with Christ because of our obedience and godliness, or if both meanings apply in that given context. A lot of the blessings that Christians enjoy today are due to the fact that we are in union with Jesus Christ.

[For more on being in union with Christ, see commentary on Eph. 1:3. For more information on the Christian’s identification with Christ, see commentary on Rom. 6:5.]

**“has any value.”** The Greek is more literally, “is strong for anything,” that is, has the strength to help the person be righteous and accepted by God. But to simply use the literal, “is strong,” would be confusing to the English reader; thus, the REV, like some other English versions, reads, “has any value.” Paul is continuing his argument, started in Galatians 5:2, that the works of the Law do not have any value or benefit in helping a person be approved before God. In fact, believing that they do and trying to add the Law to trust in Christ just makes a person a slave to the Law (Gal. 5:1).

**“trust working through love.”** Cf. NIV; BDAG’s translation. Literally, the phrase reads, “trust working itself through love.” The translation comes from energeō (#1754 ἐνεργέω) in the middle voice. The middle voice means the action is brought on itself, hence, trust works on itself. This is important because for trust to count, it need not perform works external to itself—trust works itself out. Properly translated, this verse says that true trust inside a Christian will express itself in love.

Roman Catholic doctrine takes the verb “working” as being in the passive voice,[[39]](#footnote-28273) which would mean that the only thing that matters is trust “having been worked” by love. If this were the case, trust would not be complete in itself but would need love and good works to give it its form. Roman Catholics teach that love is what makes trust work. However, this interpretation does not fit with the context. First, the verse itself is stating that outward works (circumcision) do not count for anything. Second, the thesis of the entire book of Galatians is that works will not gain salvation, but trust alone is necessary (e.g., Gal. 2:16; 3:2-11, 22-26).

Gal 5:7

**“Who hindered you.”** This is a rhetorical question. Paul knew exactly who was hindering the Galatians, but he is asking the question to get the Galatian believers to carefully consider the people who were teaching another gospel, and the gospel they were presenting. Sadly, it was other Christians—Christians who were caught up in works salvation and getting personal value by works—who were talking the Galatians out of the doctrine of salvation by grace.

Gal 5:8

**“the one who calls you.”** The One who calls believers to Himself and to salvation is God. In the Greek text, the verb “calls” is in the present tense because God is constantly calling, and believers are saved when they answer the call and confess Christ as Lord (Rom. 10:9).

Gal 5:9

**“A little yeast.”** The Bible does not tell us what the yeast is. Some scholars say it is the doctrine being promoted by the Judaizers, while others say it is the Judaizers themselves, who have infiltrated the fellowships in Galatia. However, the weight of evidence and logic supports it being the doctrine.

That the doctrine is the “yeast” Paul has in mind fits the context very well, and flows with the statement Paul is making. The Bible student must keep in mind that there were no verse breaks in the original text. That means that what Paul wrote was: “Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion *is* not from the one who calls you. ‘A little yeast leavens the whole lump of dough.’ I have confidence in you in the Lord that you will not think otherwise….” This whole section is about truth and false doctrine. It starts with “obeying the truth,” then speaks of the “persuasion” coming from the false teachers, then the warning proverb that “a little yeast leavens the whole loaf,” then Paul’s statement that the Galatians will “not think otherwise” than the truth that Paul had taught.

Going back to Galatians 5:3, we can see the context presents the false doctrine of works as “a little yeast.” If a person starts to keep a part of the Law, such as circumcision, which would be “a little yeast,” the person ends up having to keep the whole Law, and the entire lump of doctrine becomes affected as works more and more replaces the truth of trust in Christ being all that is needed. Also, in Galatians 5:6, Paul reiterates that what matters is the right doctrine, trust working through love.

R. C. H. Lenski makes a very good argument that the yeast refers to the doctrine. He writes: “To say that the Judaistic doctrine was not a small bit of yeast but a great mass of doctrine, the whole of which opposed the whole gospel, and that, therefore, doctrine cannot be referred to, overlooks what Paul is saying. He is not placing the one doctrinal system over against the other, but is issuing a warning: *Principiis obsta*, resist the beginnings. …Paul refers to the little leaven that had already been injected, the fact that the Galatians had begun to observe times (Gal. 4:10), although they had not as yet yielded to circumcision.”[[40]](#footnote-28434) Richard Longenecker concurs with Lenski and says the leaven is the “false theology that was perverting the Galatian church.”[[41]](#footnote-30611)

Lenski goes on to assert that Paul would not be saying a few teachers could corrupt the entire church because, for one thing, we have no idea how many Judaizers there were, and furthermore, the only way they could corrupt the church was by teaching false doctrine. Besides, the Galatians cannot get rid of the Jewish Christians. They are there, and they believe what they believe—every church of any size has people who do not believe what the pastors are teaching. But while the Galatians cannot oust from the church every person who wishes to follow the Law, they can take a stand against any false teaching that goes on in the congregation, and Paul is warning them to do just that, and saying if they let a little false doctrine in, it will eventually affect the whole doctrine of Christ.

Gal 5:10

**“in the Lord.”** See Word Study: “In the Lord.”

**“whoever he is.”** This is a very important point that should not be missed. Although there was certainly more than one false teacher in Galatia, each person will stand before God’s throne of judgment on their own. People sin as individuals and will be judged as individuals. The Bible warns us not to follow a crowd into sin: “Do not follow the majority to do evil” (Exod. 23:2). The warning is important because so many people “follow the crowd” and do evil that they would never do if they were on their own. People allow themselves to be persuaded by the group, and there is a false sense of safety when doing something—even something that the person knows is wrong—if lots of other people are doing it. The wise Christian is never fooled. Sinning is never “safe,” no matter how many people are doing it. We sin as individuals and we will be judged on the Day of Judgment as individuals. The wise Christian avoids sin and also people who arrogantly ignore God’s commands and regularly sin.

Gal 5:11

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“if I still preach circumcision.”** In this case, “circumcision” is a reference to the Law. Because circumcision was such a central part of the Law, in this context “circumcision” is being put by synecdoche (the part for the whole) for all the Law: circumcision, Sabbath laws, food laws, cleanliness laws, etc. Paul could have written, “If I still preach the Law, why am I still being persecuted [by the Jews]?”

**“In that case the stumbling block of the cross has been removed.”** If Paul still preached circumcision, then the stumbling block of the cross would be removed. Why? Because circumcision is the heart of works-based salvation, that is, “if you do such and such work, then you will be saved.” Works-based salvation is the opposite of grace-based salvation in which the believer does not have to do any work to be saved. Salvation is accomplished by grace and offered by grace, and all the believer has to do is accept it by acknowledging it by believing it and confessing it (Rom. 10:9).

The “stumbling block” of the cross is that Jesus, a supposed criminal, died on the cross for people’s sins so they would not have to work for salvation or pay for those sins themselves. It was an abomination to the Jews to think that a man cursed of God could be the Messiah and purchase salvation (“cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree,” Gal. 3:13; Deut. 21:23), and also that the Law they so delighted in would no longer be valid for salvation. To the Gentiles, that a man who was not able to save himself from torture and a horrendous death was somehow able to save others was foolishness. Works-based salvation removed free grace from the equation and thus removed the “stumbling block” of the cross. Works-based salvation teaches that if the individual does not get to help purchase their own salvation, well, that is “an affront to all notions of proper self-pride and self-help... If I myself can make some small contribution, something even so small as the acceptance of circumcision, then my self-esteem is uninjured.”[[42]](#footnote-26090)

Gal 5:12

**“I wish.”** The Greek word *ophelon* (#3785 ὄφελον) is used to express a fruitless wish. This is the figure of speech hyperbole, exaggeration.

Gal 5:13

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“serve.”** The Greek is the verb *douleuō* (#1398 δουλεύω) from the noun *doulos*, slave. It means to perform the duties of a slave, or serve as, or like, a slave. One can so love another that he pushes himself, serving like a slave, but out of love, and that is the meaning in this context. It would not be wrong to translate this verse, “but through love, serve one another as slaves,” or even, as the NRSV, “through love become slaves to one another.”

**“through love serve.”** The English is a little awkward, but the phrase is accurate. The essence is, it is “through,” or “by means of” our love for others that we can best serve them. Serving people without love is not really “serving” at all, it is just going through the motions.

**“one another.”** It is important to understand the impact of the commands in the New Testament Epistles that concern “one another.” The “one another” does not refer to every person on earth, although Christians certainly are to be good to everyone. The “one another” commands are commands to especially love and be good to fellow Christians, and this is well recognized by scholars and commentators. Thus, the commands to serve one another are similar to the command in Galatians 6:10, which says to be good to everyone, but “especially good” to the household of the Faith, that is, to fellow Christians. The “one another” commands were spoken in the context of the Christian community, and the “one another” refers to other Christians.

The Body of Christ would be much better off both individually and collectively if Christians would obey God’s command to give other Christians special love and blessings. Sometimes the Devil, aided by our unbelieving society, tricks us into believing that it is somehow better or more noble to prefer non-Christians over Christians in some of our choices. Furthermore, sometimes we just don’t take the time to find out how to specifically help other Christians in our day-to-day dealings. But that goes against the teaching of Christ. His new commandment was that we are to love fellow Christians with an elevated and special love, just as he loved us (John 13:34). To do that will take our time and energy, but it is clearly what Christ commanded.

There are many verses with specific commands about being focused on our fellow believers and how we can help and bless them rather than being focused on ourselves and our wants, needs, and concerns. Jesus was certainly focused on others: “For even the Messiah did not please himself” (Rom. 15:3). We need to be focused on others as well, and especially so toward our fellow Christians.

For example, we are to “be at peace with one another” (Mark 9:50); “love one another” (John 13:34); “have family affection toward one another” (Rom. 12:10); build up one another (Rom. 14:19); welcome one another (Rom. 15:7); admonish one another (Rom. 15:14; Col. 3:16); serve one another (Gal. 5:13; 1 Pet. 4:10); bear with one another (Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:13); be kind to one another (Eph. 4:32); submit to one another (Eph. 5:21); teach one another (Col. 3:16); encourage one another (1 Thess. 4:18; 5:11; Heb. 3:13); spur one another onward (Heb. 10:24); pray for one another (James 5:16); show hospitality to one another (1 Pet. 4:9); and be humble toward one another (1 Pet. 5:5).

We are to love our fellow Christians, and that love is expressed in many different, but visible, ways. If we are focused on “one another,” that is, on building up the Christian community, we will find life to be much more rewarding than if we are just concerned about ourselves. For example, the specific command to “love one another” occurs 13 times in the New Testament.

[For more on “love one another,” see commentary on John 13:34.]

Closely related to fellow Christians being referred to as “one another” is that Christians are part of the family of God with God as the Father, Jesus Christ as our brother (Heb. 2:11-12), and Christians as children of God by New Birth and therefore brothers and sisters, and we are supposed to be especially supportive of our Christian family.

Gal 5:14

“**Love your neighbor as yourself.”** This is part of the second greatest commandment, and it is from Leviticus 19:18. The first and greatest commandment and the second greatest commandment are quoted by Jesus in Matthew 22:37-39 and Mark 12:29-31 (see commentary on Matt. 22:36). It is somewhat surprising that neither one of the two greatest commandments in the Mosaic Law was part of the Ten Commandments. The command to love God is in Deuteronomy 6:5, and the command to love your neighbor is in Leviticus 19:18.

**“neighbor.”** On who is our neighbor, see commentary on Luke 10:27.

Gal 5:15

**“if you bite and devour one another.”** This is almost certainly not a baseless assumption, but this kind of destructive behavior would have been going on in Galatia. It is the product of works-based salvation. If salvation is by works, including circumcision, then believers have a basis for judging and criticizing one another on the basis of those works. This is true for any supposedly necessary work: circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, dress codes, mandatory acts such as confession and church attendance, etc. Sadly, as the Christian Church said “free grace” with their lips, they contradicted it with their regulations and behavior. Human laws and regulations replace free grace and then people bite and devour one another concerning those regulations. Thus, the Christians sometimes become like the Jews, of whom Jesus (and Isaiah) said, “These people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (Matt. 15:8; Isa. 29:13).

Gal 5:16

**“walk by the spirit.”** The word “walk” is a Semitic idiom, meaning “live by.”[[43]](#footnote-28385) The Greek text simply has “*pneuma*” (spirit) in the dative case, *pneumati* (πνεύματι), which in this case would mean, “by spirit” or more fully, “by way of the spirit.”

The word “spirit” refers to the new divine nature that is born inside each Christian at the time he is saved. This is clear because it is contrasted with “flesh,” which in this case mainly refers to the old nature and the impulses produced by it, although the actual flesh has influences also, such as hunger or sleep, which may need to be interrupted in order to fully do the will of God. God created people in such a way that their will can control their behavior, and the good Christian learns to live by the new, godly nature created inside him.

**“you will absolutely not gratify the desires of the flesh.”** This phrase is primarily speaking of the sin nature in people, which generates ungodly desires in them (see commentary on Galatians 5:17, “the flesh”).

Gal 5:17

**“the flesh.”** The Greek is *sarx* (#4561 σάρξ) and translated literally as “flesh,” however, in the NT the word “flesh” has a number of different meanings. It can simply refer to the flesh, the physical skin and muscle of both man and animals (Luke 24:39); the physical body as a whole (Acts 2:26); or a living creature (Matt. 24:22). It can also refer to our animal nature and weakness as humans without any suggestion of depravity (Mark 14:38). This can manifest itself when we are tired, hungry, etc. It is not sin to sleep or eat, but we can give in to what our “flesh” desires when we should not, and that can become sin.

However, here in Galatians 5:16-26, the word “flesh” has a different meaning than just the physical flesh. In this context, it refers to our sin nature, and by extension to our flesh bodies driven by our natural desires of the flesh and our sin nature as well. The word “flesh” mostly points to our sin nature (note the context), but can also involve just our fleshly desires. The sin nature is directly opposed to the new nature in the Christian believer, the godly nature, and the sin nature is a primary and motivating reason that all Christians wrestle with sin and ungodliness.

[For more on our inherent sin nature, see commentary on Rom. 7:17.]

The Greek has a *gar* (#1063 γάρ) in the second phrase, and is most often translated “for” and understood to communicate a reason for something. However, there are other uses of *gar*, and this case is what some scholars refer to as the “confirmatory gar,” which confirms and clarifies what has already been stated. Also, in many cases it is left untranslated, as done in the REV (cf. CJB, HCSB, NAB, NIV, NLT).

**“with the result that.”** The spirit and the flesh oppose each other, battling within us, with the result that we do not do what we want. The last clause in this verse is *hina* (#2443 ἵνα), “so that,” with the verb *thelō* (#2309 θέλω), “to want” in the subjunctive mood; this construction forms a result clause, which expresses the unintentional consequences of an action (see Word Study: “Hina”). It is the result of our internal struggle between our flesh and our spirit that we do not do what we want. E. W. Bullinger noted that the new, holy, nature of the Christian “necessitates conflict with the Old Nature: and this conflict is, therefore, the best assurance that we are ‘in Christ.’”[[44]](#footnote-24189) Bullinger felt that the best assurance a person had of being a Christian was the constant struggle between the desire to do evil and the desire to do good that raged within him, and testified that non-Christians who do not have a new holy nature have no such struggle. Although it is certainly true that some Christians have a huge internal struggle between doing good and evil, many non-Christians who are raised in moral environments struggle with good and evil, and many Christians have given in to their evil impulses for so long they no longer acutely feel any internal battle between good and evil.

There are three “desires” or “wills” involved here. The flesh, the spirit, and “you.” We may desire something, but if it is worldly, we will not be able to participate without becoming slaves to the flesh (God has designed life so that people cannot give themselves over to worldly pleasure without consequences). We may want the fruit of the spirit (joy, peace, etc.) without disciplining ourselves to walk by the spirit. That will not happen either. We have to realize we need to get to the point where we want what the spirit wants if we are to be truly successful and blessed in this life and the next.

Gal 5:18

**“the law.”** Although the definite article “the” is not in the text, it is implied from the other uses of the phrase “under law” in Galatians as the primary focus of what Paul was saying (cf. Gal. 3:23; 4:4, 5, 21; and 5:18). On the other hand, because “law” does not have the article, it expands the meaning of the verse beyond “the Law” of Moses, to all kinds of law that is in opposition to the things of the spirit.

Gal 5:19

**“the works of the flesh.”** We should note that the works of the flesh are selfish and “me centered,” while the fruit of the spirit is selfless, giving, and “other person centered.”

**“obvious”** as many versions. Open to all. Lenski even says “public.”[[45]](#footnote-15770) Not that someone involved in the works of the flesh works them “obviously, in the open,” but that the works themselves openly declare the flesh and its desires.

**“[adultery.]”** Although in the KJV, it was a late textual addition and is not included in most modern versions or the REV.

**“sexual immorality.”** Sexual immorality is a subject covered in quite a few verses in the New Testament. The Greek word is *porneia* (#4202 πορνεία, pronounced por-'nā-ah). There are a number of sexual sins included in the concept of *porneia*, but the most basic is sexual intercourse outside of marriage. The ten-volume *TDNT*[[46]](#footnote-14709) has 17 pages on *porneia* and related words. This extensive work shows that the meaning of *porneia* usually meant illicit sexual intercourse, but over time was broadened to include illicit sexual behavior of all types. There are, however, other biblical words that more tightly define other ungodly sexual behaviors. For example, though *porneia* is sometimes used of adultery in the New Testament, there is another word that specifically refers to adultery. The basic meaning of “sexual intercourse outside of marriage” never left the word *porneia*, even when it was broadened culturally to include other sexual misconduct. The narrower meaning of *porneia* is reflected in versions like the *KJV* that use “fornication” instead of something more inclusive like “sexual immorality,” but the broader definition of *porneia* in the New Testament usually makes “sexual immorality” a preferred translation.

A study of the Greek Old Testament [the Septuagint] shows that Greek-speaking people used the word *porneia* in its standard sense of sexual intercourse between a man and a woman who were not married to each other. A study of the New Testament gives the same evidence, that the usual or standard use of *porneia* was fornication or adultery, not other types of sexual misconduct. Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 list *porneia* when speaking of reasons for divorce. In John 8:41, the Pharisees upbraid Christ by saying, “We were not born from sexual immorality [*porneia*],” referring to the fact that Mary was thought to have had intercourse before she was married. 1 Corinthians 5:1 uses the word *porneia* for the sexual contact between a man and his father’s wife. In lists where sexual sin of all kinds is being cited as wrong, “*porneia*” is often included with other more specific sins.

In summary, *porneia* primarily means illicit sexual intercourse between a man and woman, but includes other kinds of immoral sexual behavior as well.

**“impurity.”** The Greek word translated “impurity” here in Galatians 5:19 is *akatharsia* (#167 ἀκαθαρσία), and it refers to being “unclean” before God. For example, in the Levitical law, it referred to being ritually “unclean” before God. In this context, it refers to being morally unclean. God, the Creator, sets the standards, and He (via Jesus Christ) will be the judge on Judgment Day. In the Old Testament, God set the standard for what it was to be “clean” or “unclean” before Him, and in the New Testament God sets the standards for moral behavior.

Society wants us to believe that “the majority” sets the standards for morality, or it is even said that because everyone has a right to live the way they want to, a minority can set the standard for what is right and moral behavior. That kind of thinking is extremely dangerous. God gives everlasting life, and God will give rewards or punishments on the Day of Judgment. He tells us how to live morally clean and godly before Him, and if we ignore that, we do so to our peril.

*Akatharsia* is “a state of moral corruption; immorality, vileness, especially of sexual sins”;[[47]](#footnote-14435) “in a moral sense, the impurity of lustful, luxurious, profligate living; used of impure motives in 1 Thess. 2:3.[[48]](#footnote-22997) Although *akatharsia* is a general term and includes many kinds of moral uncleanness, in this context where it follows sexual sin, it has that special emphasis here.

**“unrestrained behavior.”** The Greek *aselgeia* (#766 ἀσέλγεια ) means without social or moral restraint: giving oneself a license to do whatever one wants at the time. Lenski says “unbridled conduct.”[[49]](#footnote-22837) See commentary on Jude 1:4.

Gal 5:20

**“sorcery.”** The Greek word is *pharmakeia* (#5331 φαρμακεία), and its primary meaning in this context is “sorcery” or “witchcraft.” However, the word was also used for the use of drugs for good or for harm (hence the English word “pharmacy”). The use of drugs was tied to witchcraft because they were so often used in potions and poisons. The context and use of *pharmakeia* in the New Testament show us that sorcery or witchcraft is the primary meaning here in Galatians, although the undertone of using drugs still exists in the word.

Sorcery and witchcraft of all kinds are forbidden in the Bible. Merrill Unger’s excellent definition of magic shows why: it is “the art of bringing about results beyond man’s power through the enlistment of supernatural agencies. Its wicked and illegitimate nature at once appears when it is realized that the supernatural agencies used are evil spirits.”[[50]](#footnote-22326) The use of drugs in sorcery was to accomplish malevolent ends, not for recreational use. The recreational use of drugs is akin to the recreational use of alcohol and becoming drunk, which is also a work of the flesh (see commentary on Galatians 5:21, “drunkenness”).

**“hostility.”** Hostility, or active hatred, involves ignoring God’s commands to be loving and forgiving. We know that it is possible (and commanded!) to love our enemies, so the person who ignores that command, and ignores the command to forgive, is ignoring the commitment they made to make Christ their Lord. The person who has this burning hatred inside them and makes no effort to control or change it does not have live in the age to come (1 John 3:15).

**“selfish ambition.”** The Greek is *eritheia* (#2052 ἐριθεία). In Aristotle, it “denotes a self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means.”[[51]](#footnote-31887) It contains tones of selfish ambition, strife, rivalry, etc. Those who attempt to get ahead unfairly, and build rivalries, show this. For a more complete understanding, see commentary on Romans 2:8, “selfishly ambitious.”

**“dissensions.”** The state of being in factious opposition.

Gal 5:21

**“drunkenness.”** The Greek word is *methē* (#3178 μέθη), and it means drunkenness or intoxication. Getting drunk or being intoxicated, which includes intoxication via recreational drugs, is a work of the flesh and not part of the fruit of the spirit. The Bible says that God’s people are to be clear-headed and thus able to think clearly and act righteously for Him (cf. 1 Thess. 5:6; 1 Tim. 3:2, 11; 1 Pet. 1:13; 4:7). In order for Christians to love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, we have to be available to do God’s work at a moment’s notice and also consistently be good examples to other people. Being drunk or “stoned” on marijuana or other mind-affecting drugs just for the sake of recreation or pleasure is not commensurate with the lifestyle of an obedient and committed Christian.

[For more on being drunk or “high” on drugs, see commentary on Eph. 5:18, “drunk.”]

**“[murder.]”** We do not have “murder” in the REV. There are Greek manuscripts that include it between “envy” and “drunkenness,” but the textual evidence from very early and excellent texts and witnesses leads us to conclude that it was added to the Greek text. It was added quite early, and likely because of a scribe remembering Romans 1:29 and harmonizing the two readings.[[52]](#footnote-19229)

**“orgies.”** The Greek word translated “orgies” is *kōmos* (#2970 κῶμος), and it was not strictly an orgy in the English sense of the word, although the modern English use of orgy captures the sense as well or better than any other modern English word.

A *kōmos* originally was a disorderly and often violent nighttime procession of drunken men in honor of Bacchus (Greek: Dionysus), the Roman god of wine. They ate and drank and then marched through the streets singing, shouting, fighting, having sex with willing (and perhaps unwilling) women, and in general causing trouble. At various times in the Roman Empire, the *kōmos* was made illegal due to the damage and harm that was generally caused.

In time, the word *kōmos* came to be used of riotous drinking parties of which sex was a part, even though the partying crowd did not march through the streets. A close, but less violent, parallel to the *kōmos* might be Mardi Gras in New Orleans, where most everyone is drunk, loud, and there is plenty of sex and unrestrained behavior. If there were an English word for a loud, drunken (and today we could add drugs), wild, and unrestrained party, modern translations would most likely use that word instead of orgy.

**“those who practice such things.”** In this context, the word “practice” means to be deeply involved in something. The phrase that is later in the verse, “will not inherit the Kingdom of God,” means the person will not have everlasting life, and the reason for that is tied to the word “practice.” Everyone sins, in fact it is impossible to live without sinning (cf. Ecc. 7:20; Rom. 3:23). But Galatians 5:19-21 is not speaking about committing occasional sins, or unintentional sins—if that were the case, then very few people would be saved. But Galatians 5:19-21 is speaking about people who “practice” sin, that is, they consciously and consistently make a lifestyle of sin, and by doing that, they go back on their word to make Jesus their Lord and they abandon their trust in him. Those people have no trust in Jesus Christ.

To understand salvation, it is vital to understand the relationship between trust and salvation. Christians are saved by trusting in Christ (Rom. 10:9-10; 3:22, 27-31). But salvation being a result of trust is nothing new. It started in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. Although the word “trust” is not used in the context of their sin and the Fall, what happened was indeed a battle over “who do you trust?” God said not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and if they ate, they would die (Gen. 2:16-17). The Devil said if they ate from the tree, they would NOT die, but instead they would be like God (Gen. 3:4-5). Who did Adam and Eve trust? They abandoned their trust in God and trusted the Devil. They ate from the tree, and the result was death in this life and potential death in the next.

Fast forward some 2,000 years to Abraham. Abraham was a good man, but like all humans, he sinned. But what does the Bible say? “And he believed [or “trusted”] Yahweh, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:6; cf. Rom. 4:1-3, 9; Gal. 3:6-7). It is important to understand that the Old Testament use of “righteous” is basically equivalent to the New Testament use of “saved.” The Old Testament almost always used “saved” to refer to temporal rescue on this earth—being rescued or delivered from immediate danger—but used “righteous” and “righteousness” to refer to a right standing before God that would result in everlasting life. Thus, the righteous will live on the earth forever (Ps. 37:29), but the wicked will vanish like smoke (Ps. 37:10, 20).

Trusting in God, which is credited to the individual as righteousness that results in everlasting life, is throughout the Bible. The Israelites would be “righteous” (i.e., “saved”) if they were careful to obey the Law (Deut. 6:25). The righteous will stand (i.e., do well) on the Day of Judgment, but the wicked will not (Ps. 1:3-6). The righteous will not be moved (i.e., taken from the earth; Ps. 55:22; 112:6). The righteous are enrolled in the Book of Life (Ps. 69:28). The righteous flourish and are planted in the house of Yahweh (Ps. 92:12, 13). Righteousness delivers from death, meaning everlasting death (Prov. 10:2). The righteous person who continues to live righteously will live forever (Ezek. 3:21). On the Day of Judgment people will see the difference between the righteous and the wicked: the wicked will be burned up while the righteous will be healed (Mal. 3:17-4:2).

As we see from the above Scriptures (and many others that could be referenced), trust in God and Jesus is credited as “righteousness,” which results in everlasting life. Jesus taught his disciples to trust in God and in him (John 14:1). Christians are saved by their trust in Christ, and every day people who have sin in their lives get saved by trusting Christ and taking him as their Lord. No one has to get rid of the sin in their lives before they get saved, and no one can get rid of all the sin in their lives after being saved. People are saved by trust and stay saved by trust, but it is trust in God and Jesus, not trust in yourself that you are “good enough” to be saved. Paul wrote that those who rely on trust are the children of Abraham (Gal. 3:7, 9), and Peter wrote that it is trust that guards us for salvation (1 Pet. 1:5), and that the goal or outcome of trust was salvation (1 Pet. 1:9).

A vital thing to keep in mind when reading lists such as the ones in Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; and Ephesians 5:5 is that it is not the sin in and of itself that is the reason for the person forfeiting their salvation and not having an inheritance in the Kingdom of God. In other words, these are not lists that “If you do these works, you will not be saved.” The works are given to illustrate the kinds of things that people who have rejected Christ do. The person first rejects Christ in their heart, and then they practice (make a lifestyle) of sin. If you do not understand that fact, you will get trapped into thinking that people are saved by works. No! A person can reject Christ in their heart and forfeit their salvation, all while looking very religious indeed. The Pharisees and Sadducees looked very religious, but Jesus said they were children of the Devil (John 8:44). Generally, however, if a person rejects Christ in their heart, then they will slip into a lifestyle of godlessness.

It is also important to keep in mind that the heart is always changing. The heart can grow darker and darker, or it can grow more and more full of life and light. The doorway to the heart is the mind. That is why Philippians 4:8 says, “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is righteous, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if there is anything virtuous, and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” What the mind dwells on and the body acts on eventually seeps down into the heart, and the heart changes. The person who does not reject Christ at first, but begins to live a godless lifestyle and think about godless things, may soon find themselves abrogating their trust in Christ to participate in the sensually attractive things of the flesh. Thus, Proverbs says, “More than anything else you protect, guard your heart, because from it *flow* the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23).

In the Roman world, as today, many temptations could pull a person away from their trust in Christ and turn them to the practice of sensual pleasures and/or fulfilling the natural desires of the flesh. So Paul says, “I warn you, just as I warned you before,” not to “practice” sin, and in Galatians 5:19-21, Paul gives examples of the kinds of sin that a person can get so caught up in that they abandon their trust in Christ.

**“will not inherit the Kingdom of God.”** The phrase “will not inherit the Kingdom of God” means the person will not have everlasting life. The Greek word translated “inherit” is *klēronomeō* (#2816 κληρονομέω), and it means to receive as an inheritance, or to receive a part of an inheritance. We know the meaning of “inherit the Kingdom of God” because that phrase, and others similar to it, are used in other places in the Bible. For example, “inherit the Kingdom” is used in Matthew 25:34 and 1 Corinthians 15:50, and in those places it clearly means to have everlasting life. “The inheritance” is the future earth (cf. Matt. 5:5), which is the Kingdom of God, and God will rule the earth through His vice-regent, the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are many phrases similar to “inherit the Kingdom” that refer to attaining everlasting life, including “inherit life in the age to come” (Matt. 19:29; Mark 10:17; Luke 10:25; 18:18); “inherit salvation” (Heb. 1:14); and “inherit these things,” i.e., the New heaven and earth (Rev. 21:7). Also, “inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5), which according to the Old Testament prophecies meant inheriting the future earth, which was part of the Kingdom of God (Ps. 37:9-11, 18-20, 34); “inherit the world” (Rom. 4:13); “the inheritance” (Acts 20:32; Col. 3:24); “the promise of the inheritance in the age *to come*” (Heb. 9:15); “the inheritance of the holy ones” (Col. 1:12); “our [the Christian’s] inheritance” (Eph. 1:14); “His glorious inheritance *that will be shared* among the holy ones” (Eph. 1:18); and “an inheritance *that is* imperishable and undefiled and unfading” (1 Pet. 1:4). All of these different phrases use the word “inherit” and indicate that “the inheritance” is the future earth that people who have everlasting life will enjoy.

Galatians 5:19-21 is similar to other places in the New Testament that are associated with a person forfeiting their salvation (cf. 1 Cor. 15:2; Gal. 4:11; Col. 1:22-23; 1 Thess. 3:5; 2 Pet. 2:20). It is possible that Galatians has the longest list because it was the first of Paul’s epistles and thus was likely in the hands of later believers who were in Corinth, Colossae, etc. We must keep in mind that Paul is writing this letter to the Galatian church, and therefore to believers, and was warning them that whoever makes a practice of sin (Gal. 5:19-21) will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Paul is encouraging them to “walk by the spirit” (Gal. 5:16) and “keep in step with the spirit” (Gal. 5:25). If Paul had no worries at all that practicing habitual sin could lead some to forfeit their salvation, then it seems he would not have “warned” them about not inheriting the Kingdom of God, so Paul’s warning them implies their ability to forfeit their salvation.

Forfeiting one’s salvation does not happen in the instant a Christian sins; rather, a person would have to lose their trust in Christ, which is demonstrated by “practicing” sin. This is a vital distinction to make. Paul is not saying “sinners” will not be saved, but it is those who make a “practice” of sin who will not be saved. We all sin, and we must never forget that Jesus Christ came to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). So, Paul is not contradicting himself by teaching that sin forfeits salvation; rather, he is teaching that unrepentant sin, which is a sign of unbelief, can cause one to forfeit their salvation. People are saved by trust without having to “clean up their act” first (Rom. 10:9), and then their salvation is maintained through trust (1 Pet. 1:5, 9; Gal. 3:6, 7, 9). But it is not trust in oneself; it is trust in Christ and what he did and can do.

True faith is demonstrated by good works (James 2:14-26; Gal. 5:22-23), and conversely, habitual bad works without any good works demonstrate that one is not really trusting in Christ. Galatians 5:21 emphasizes the seriousness of sin. Paul is warning the Galatians that just because they have trusted in Christ and are righteous by that faith, it does not mean they cannot forfeit their salvation by continually practicing sin, because practicing sin demonstrates that one is not truly trusting in Christ. Let us trust in Christ and be saved.

[For more on Christian salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on salvation vs. rewards, and rewards in the Kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.” For more on “inheritance” being a reward, see commentary on Acts 7:5.]

Gal 5:22

**“fruit of the spirit.”** It is worth noting that the fruit of the spirit are “other person centered,” while the works of the flesh are selfish and “me centered.”

This list refers to the “fruit,” the things that are produced in us as we live according to the new nature that has been created inside us (see commentary on Gal. 5:16). Producing the fruit of the spirit requires active cooperation between the human will and the new, divine nature. The divine nature cannot grow the fruit of the spirit on its own, the will is simply too powerful. People who want to be unloving, impatient, or without self-control will not be forced to have those qualities by the spirit of God that is born within them. On the other hand, the new nature of holy spirit is constantly at work to produce fruit in the person (Phil. 2:13), and so if a Christian truly desires to develop the fruit of the spirit, even though it may be difficult depending on his or her basic disposition and/or the way he or she was raised, it can be done.

The list of the fruit is the figure of speech asyndeton; a list without a final “and.”[[53]](#footnote-32348) In contrast to the figure of speech polysyndeton, which places an “and” between each item in the list and by that literary device emphasizes each thing in the list, the figure asyndeton does not have the standard “and” between the last two items of the list. This means that the reader goes through the list as if he were on a playground slide, sliding past the things on the list and getting to the conclusion, which is what the asyndeton is emphasizing; in this case, “There is no law against such things.”

Among other things, the fact that the list is an asyndeton lets us know there are other “fruit” of the spirit that are not on the list. For example, although “patience” is on the list, “endurance” (*hupomonē*) is not. Neither is “humility,” certainly a fruit of the spirit, and the list of godly fruit that are produced in the life of a committed Christian could be multiplied. The figure asyndeton shows us that the point of this list is not to give us every fruit of the spirit, but rather to give us an idea of some of them, especially in contrast to the works of the flesh, the list in the previous verses.

**“love.”** The Greek word is *agapē* (#26 ἀγάπη). Love is difficult to specifically define. It is the very nature of God, for God is love (1 John 4:7-12, 16). Love is known from the action it prompts (John 3:16; 1 Cor. 13:1-8). Christian love is not an impulse from the feelings, nor does it always run with natural inclinations, nor is it lavished only upon those things that are naturally liked or naturally found lovely or beautiful.

*Agapē* love is an exercise of the will in deliberate choice, and is why God can command us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44; Exod. 23:1-5). *Agapē* love is commanded, showing that it is related to obedience, commitment, and action and not necessarily feeling and emotion. “Loving” someone is to obey God on another’s behalf, seeking his or her long-term blessing and profit. Love energizes faith (Gal. 5:6), and empowers us to give and keep on giving. There can be a cost to genuine love. Love is the distinctive character of the Christian life in relation to the brethren and to all humanity. The “loving” thing to do may not always be easy, and true love is not “mushy.” For example, punishing criminals to keep society safe is loving, and asking someone to leave your Christian fellowship because they persist in flagrant sin is loving, but never easy. (1 Cor. 5:1-5). Christians are to be known for their love to one another (John 13:35).

**“joy.”** The Greek word is *chara* (#5479 χαρά). Biblically, “joy” has two meanings. As it is defined in the Bible and most English dictionaries, it can refer to a feeling, an emotion that wells up within us when something wonderful happens to us. The Bible has many examples of that “feeling of joy,” the emotion that can accompany something good happening to us (Matt. 2:10; 13:44; Luke 15:7; 24:52; John 16:21; Acts 12:14; 2 Cor. 7:13; 2 Tim. 1:4; Phlm. 1:7; 3 John 1:4). However, the problem with that emotional kind of joy is we cannot feel it whenever we want to. It has to happen to us, and it does not happen very often.

The second meaning of “joy” refers to an inner light and lightness, an inner effervescence or bubbling. This kind of joy is a quality of life, not simply an emotion. It is grounded in our relationship with God and comes from knowing and believing Him, and what He has given us, and what He promises us in the future. It is excited by the acquisition of good or the expectation of good. The “goods” we possess now are the gift of holy spirit, the wonderful Word of God, and many other blessings from God. The goods we will possess include forever being with Christ in Paradise. These things cannot be taken from us by trials of this life, and for that reason, true joy is not extinguished by the cares of this world. Joy should be visible so that others can be won by it. Joy was evidenced in Christ’s life and walk (John 15:11). Joy gives us a sound basis for optimism; it helps us look at the future that is desirable and possible (Heb. 12:2). It strengthens us for the work we are called to do (Neh. 8:10). God commands us to have joy, which He can do because it comes from believing His Word and focusing on Him and His promises (1 Thess. 5:16; Phil. 3:1). Joy comes from a choice of our will, based upon how we think about our circumstances. Joy can result from the way we choose to interpret the things that happen to us, especially painful things. The apostles rejoiced after being beaten that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus (Acts 5:41). Joy is related to an attitude of thanksgiving.

God expects us to learn life lessons from the world around us, and we can learn a great “joy lesson” from the moon. When the moon looks fully at the sun (a full moon), it is lit up with light and shines brilliant white in the night sky. However, when the moon looks at the earth (a lunar eclipse), it is dark, depressing, and usually has a red tint to it as if it were angry. We are like the moon. When we look at the earth and focus our attention on the things of this life, we become dark-minded, depressed, and/or angry. However, when we look at the Son and focus our attention on the things of God, we become full of light (joy) and shine into the lives of those around us. Let us learn from the moon to focus our attention on the Son. We will have an inner joy that will give us strength for life in this difficult world, and we will shine blessings into the people around us.

**“peace.”** The Greek word is *eirēnē* (#1515 εἰρήνη). Peace is peace, quietness, rest, tranquility. It is an inner quietness born of strength, exemption from the rage and havoc of conflict or war, internal or external. It is associated with the elimination of one’s enemies. As influenced by the Hebrew word *shalom*, which was the ancient Jewish salutation and formula of well-wishing, it includes the concept of total well-being including security, safety, harmony, prosperity, and happiness. True peace includes the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through trust in Christ and so fearing nothing from God. Peace is not the state of being undisturbed simply because you do not care what happens. Rather, it is the state of quietness that comes from knowing that there will be a righteous end to life and the world. God is a God of peace (2 Cor. 13:11). Christians have peace with God (Rom. 5:1). “You [God] will keep in perfect peace the one whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you” (Isa. 26:3). The peace of God will guard your heart (Phil. 4:7).

**“patience.”** “Patience” is from the Greek *makrothumia* (#3115 μακροθυμία): *makro* (“long”), and *thumia* (“passion, anger”), and it is the ability to hold back anger for a long time. It is to persevere patiently and bravely; to be patient in bearing the offenses and injuries of others; to be mild and slow in avenging; slow to anger, slow to punish. It is that quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation that does not hastily retaliate or promptly punish. It is to be what happens in difficult circumstances with people instead of getting angry too quickly. It is associated with mercy and is used of God. However, it is not being a “doormat,” and simply allowing yourself to be used or abused. Similarly, true patience is not being “too spiritual” or “too holy” to get angry at people, nor is it tolerating sin indefinitely.

In contrast to patience, “endurance” (*hupomonē*; #5281 ὑπομονή) is the quality that does not surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial; it is the opposite of despondency and is associated with hope (1 Thess. 1:3). Interestingly, while *makrothumia* (patience or longsuffering with people) is used of God, *hupomonē*, (endurance) is not. This may be due to the fact that God has to put up with people who have free will, but He never has to put up with the same trials from things and life in general that people do. Patience (*makrothumia*) and endurance (*hupomonē*) occur together in Colossians 1:11; 2 Corinthians 6:4, 6; 2 Timothy 3:10; James 5:10-11. Longsuffering is an important quality of Christian leaders (2 Tim. 4:2), and it is an important part of the process of leading people to Christ (Rom. 2:4).

Somewhat similar to *makrothumia* is the Greek word *anochē* (a noun: #463 ἀνοχή), which most Greek lexicons define as forbearance, tolerance, clemency, patience. It refers to enduring, putting up with something, being patient, and holding oneself back. See commentary on Romans 2:4, “restraint.”

**“kindness.”** The Greek word is *chrēstotēs* (#5544 χρηστότης). A generous, warm-hearted, friendly nature. It is sweet, mild, and full of graciousness. It is a virtue that pervades and penetrates the whole nature, that mellows anything harsh or austere. Christ’s yoke is “kind” (*chrēstotēs*, not “easy” as many translations have), because there is nothing harsh, sharp, or galling about it (Matt. 11:30). You can put on Christ’s yoke without worrying about getting painful blisters, splinters, etc.

“Kindness” is willingly ready to do good, and it expresses itself in deeds toward another. It springs from an inner disposition to benefit others, but is engaged and aroused by their need. True kindness must be distinguished from sentimentality: it can be easy to feel sorry for someone who has gotten themselves into a mess, and begin to “caretake” them, which actually weakens them. In many situations, what a person really needs to become strong is to repent and get busy restoring their own life with the help of the Lord. Those who offer kindness always need to be aware of the line that differentiates kindness from caretaking. God is kind, even to the unthankful (Luke 6:35), and God’s kindness leads people to repentance (Rom. 2:4; 2x). It is the responsibility of every believer to be kind to others (Eph. 4:32). Love is kind (1 Cor. 13:4).

**“goodness.”** The Greek word is *agathōsunē* (#19 ἀγαθωσύνη). “Goodness” is uprightness in heart and life, a moral excellence. The person who exhibits the fruit “goodness” is upright and honorable, and is acceptable to God. “Goodness” can be called the “fruit with teeth,” because goodness, while it has a lot in common with “kindness,” very clearly also contains the idea that it is a *good* thing to uphold standards, enforce the law, and punish wrongdoers. The grammarian Richard Trench writes: “A man may display his *agathōsunē*, his zeal for goodness and truth, in rebuking, correcting, and chastising.”[[54]](#footnote-14906) If there is no “goodness” in the Christian’s life, evil continues without fear of consequences. “Goodness” is usually associated with activity rather than inner nature, although the good actions spring from the good heart: “The good man brings out good things from the good treasure of his heart” (Luke 6:45).

Goodness is not self-absorbed or comfort-oriented. Many “good” tasks are uncomfortable to perform. “Goodness” is anchored in God and in His revelation to man. In the Scripture, “good” is often contrasted with “evil” and it is the Word of God that must define that which is good and that which is evil. Moral relativism leaves both “good” and “evil” up to the feelings and inclinations of the individual. In a system without Godly standards, all kinds of “good” things become “evil.” In this kind of system, holding people accountable becomes evil (you may hurt their “self-esteem”), punishment of any kind becomes evil (they were not really at fault, but were victims of society), saying that someone is wrong becomes evil (why be so narrow-minded), etc. Also, without godly standards, many “evil” things become “good” (taking advantage of another’s mistake, such as getting too much change back on a purchase but not telling the cashier; living together without being married; not returning something you find even if you could locate the owner if you tried; etc.)

**“faithfulness.”** The Greek word is *pistis* (#4102 πίστις). The word *pistis* can mean “faith” or “faithfulness,” and here “faithfulness” is the better translation. Faith is trust, and we are to trust God, and thus believe His promises. Faithfulness means continued faith or perseverance. It is a steadfast adherence to God and His will. We trust God because God is trust*worthy*, but more than that, we are to continue in that faith day after day, thus being “faithful” toward Him. Many people have “faith” for a short time. The true fruit of the new nature is being full of faith day after day after day. Those given a trust must be faithful (1 Cor. 4:2).

Gal 5:23

**“meekness.”** The Greek word is *praotēs* (#4236 πραότης). The quality of humility that recognizes one’s own frailty and neediness, causing a willingness to listen to reproof and correction, as well as to help others without unduly asserting one’s authority or overpowering others. Meekness is a submissive attitude toward the will of God. It is coachability, the ability to take coaching, teaching, and even reproof from others without any resistance or temptation to seek revenge and retaliation. Meekness is first and foremost toward God. It is that temper of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting. It must be clearly understood that godly meekness is a mental posture of power, not weakness. The common assumption is that meekness is synonymous with “mousy” or “cowardly,” but the Lord was “meek” because he had the infinite resources of God at His command (Matt. 11:29). Someone who is meek can afford to be so because his strength and confidence allows him to listen to others. Moses was the meekest man on earth at his time, but his walk was a walk of powerful signs and wonders (Num. 12:3). Meekness is a way of being, opposed to boldness of manner, and is to be the default manner for leaders in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 4:21; 2 Cor. 10:1).

**“self-control.”** The Greek word is *egkrateia* (#1466 ἐγκράτεια). Self-control is mastery over oneself. The root word is *kratos,* which means power in action; strength exerted, and the derivation of *egkrateia* may be *en kratos*, or power within, thus the power over oneself and one’s desires.[[55]](#footnote-16613) As used by the Greeks, *egkrateia*, self-control, is the virtue of one who masters his desires and passions, especially his sensual appetites. God designed the human will to control the human mind and body. The concept of “self-control” implies that there is a standard to conform to, and the Word of God provides that standard. Godly self-control is not trying to reform the flesh by self-discipline (although self-discipline is important), or overcoming sinful tendencies by outward religious practices. True self-control comes from a combination of free will decisions and the new nature inside that is trying to reproduce itself outwardly. It is, after all, a “fruit of the spirit,” not a “fruit of the will.” A commitment to self-control without being motivated by love for others feeds prideful ambition and self-glorification. Christians are not to live like unbelievers who indulge the flesh (Eph. 2:3). Christians are to control themselves (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

Gal 5:24

**“belong to Christ.”** The Greek is an idiom. See commentary on Galatians 3:29.

Gal 5:25

**“Since.”** Even as the NIV, NJB. The word “if” can be understood as “since” if the condition is not in doubt.

**“we must.”** The verb στοιχῶμεν (#4748 *stoichōmen*) is in the subjunctive and is being used to express an exhortation, proposal, or request (commonly called a “hortatory subjunctive”). Paul is claiming that in order for a believer to live by the spirit, it must be matched by their keeping “in step with the spirit.”

**“keep in step with.”** Although many versions say “walk,” this is not the standard word for walk, which has the cultural connotation of “live by,” but rather it means “to march in a line” (as in the military), to march in rank and file, “to be in line with a person or thing considered as standard for one’s conduct, hold to, agree with, follow, conform.[[56]](#footnote-25405)” In other words, the spirit is setting the pace and moving forward, and now it is up to us to match its pace and keep in line.

Gal 5:26

**“conceited.”** The Greek is a compound word, *kenodoxia* (#2754 κενοδοξία), from *kenos* (empty), and *doxa* (glory, magnificence, splendor). It is vain or empty glory. Thinking we have merit when we do not; “glorying [bragging, boasting] without reason, conceited, vain-glorious, eager for empty glory.”[[57]](#footnote-19991)

**Galatians Chapter 6**

Gal 6:1

**“Brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“gets.”** Punctiliar aorist, “gets to be.”[[58]](#footnote-22558)

**“transgression.”** The Greek is *paraptōma* (#3900 παράπτωμα) which means to “misstep,” “to fall by the wayside.” This “misstep” is not necessarily intentional, although it can be. Thus, in life, “transgressions,” are much more common than “sins.” Meanings of *paraptōma* include: “faults,” “deviations from truth,” “lapse,” “error,” “mistake,” “wrongdoing.”

Gal 6:2

**“burdens.”** The Greek word translated “burdens” is *baros* (#922 βάρος), which refers to a physical load, but also can refer to a hardship produced by the load. It refers to a hardship that is regarded as particularly burdensome and exhausting. In Matthew 20:12 *baros* refers not to difficulties in general but to the specific hardship of working for the entire day. In a number of languages, hardship resulting from work may be expressed in terms of the effect upon the workers, for example, “to get tired from working” or “to become weak as the result of working.”[[59]](#footnote-28049) Because of the context of Galatians 6:5, the meaning “hardship” makes more sense than the burden itself.

People carry their own loads, but other Christians are to help with those loads and with the hardships produced by them. It is often unclear how much of a person’s burden a Christian should carry. Each situation stands on its own, but some general principles apply. Just as in medicine a person who breaks a leg has to use crutches, but if the crutches are used beyond when they are needed, the leg atrophies and becomes weak. We bear one another’s hardships, but not to the point the person becomes weak. Help that we offer to others keeps them from breaking under their load, but does not weaken them. Many people are lazy and would love for others to carry their burden, but doing that only produces more weakness and laziness, it does not help the person.

Gal 6:5

**“will have.”** Each person will (future) have to bear their own load. There are loads that each of us has that cannot be shared and must be carried alone. Cf. RSV.

Gal 6:6

**“share fully.”** This verse has been hotly debated by commentators. Many of them think that the verse is telling those instructed to “share with,” i.e., give to, those who instruct them. This is clearly expressed in the New Living Translation, which is a very free translation: “Those who are taught the Word of God should provide for their teachers, sharing all good things with them.” However, there are some serious problems with this interpretation.

First, if Paul was asking for the believers to pay their teachers, the verse is worded in a very unclear and unusual manner. The word *koinōneō* (#2841 κοινωνέω) would not be the natural way to say that the people should give to ministers. It seems totally unlikely that Paul, having reproved the Galatians for their return to the flesh, would, at the close of the epistle, ask for money. Nevertheless, money is such a “sacred cow,” to so many people, and there are so many commentaries that say that the verse means that people should pay their ministers, that we feel it is appropriate to quote extensively from commentaries that make the point that this verse is not about money.

“The word *koinwnein* contains the key to the true meaning of the verse. Our versions [i.e., the KJV, RV, ASV, etc.] understand it here, and in Romans 12:13, Phil. 4:15, in the sense of *communicating* [giving] to others; but I find no warrant for this in Greek usage. In Romans 15:27 it signifies distinctly to *receive* a share, and elsewhere to become a partner and share in common with others (1 Tim. 5:22; 1 Pet. 4:13; 2 John 11; Heb. 2:14). Here in like manner it enjoins upon the leaders of the Churches the duty of admitting all the members to participation in any spiritual blessing they enjoy. It continues, in fact, the protest against the arrogant pretensions and selfish exclusiveness of the Judaizing leaders.”[[60]](#footnote-27971)

R. C. H. Lenski writes:

The verb *koinonew* is seemingly not properly understood [by most commentators]. When this is regarded as meaning “communicate,” “all good things” become material, and somehow or other it is thought that Paul says that pupils should reward or pay their teachers… This idea is also put into *koinonia*, the noun which is thought to mean “contribution” in Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13; Heb. 13:16; and this view has gotten into some of the dictionaries [lexicons]. The noun always = fellowship, and in the case of alms a fellowship that is exercised by means of alms. …The verb means … to be or to make participant, the latter, however, in the sense “to share something with somebody, thereby not making him a fellow with oneself, but *oneself* a fellow with *him*. … The one who instructs has the good things; the one being instructed is to proceed to participate in them, in “all” of them. The riches are with the teacher of the Word, the poverty is with the pupil, and the pupil is to institute “fellowship” with the teacher so that he, the pupil, may be enriched. … With those [teachers] who have the burdens and with those who have these good things we should keep fellowship, making *ourselves* fellow with *them*.

This is just about the opposite of the common view. … Could Paul tell the Galatians in this letter that they owed material contributions to him and his helpers? Could he do such a thing with no further word of explanation? Paul never took money for his work. When he speaks of this subject in 1 Cor. 9 he does so with the fullest and clearest explanation. See the same thought in 2 Cor. 11:7-12….

We ought also not to forget the Judaizers who also came as teachers, on whose greediness 2 Cor. 11:20 enlightens us. When such greedy fellows were working in Galatia, Paul could scarcely write the Galatians to share “in all good things” (material) with their teachers. …We need not discuss “the one instructing.” Paul had not left the Galatian churches in an unorganized state; he had them elect elders and pastors who were qualified to teach. … “In all good things” that were possessed by their instructors, Paul and his assistants among them, the Galatians should ever cultivate fellowship for their own enrichment. Then all would, indeed, be well with them. Pay for these teachers? There is no reason to mention it in this epistle. Sowing for the flesh and sowing for the spirit deal with a subject that is far greater, namely with the desire for all good spiritual things in which the Galatians should seek to share.”[[61]](#footnote-26598)

Lenski translates the verse: “Moreover, let him who is being instructed in the Word be partaker with the one instructing him in all good things.”

Kenneth S. Wuest translates the verse: “Moreover, let the one who is being taught the Word, constantly be holding fellowship with the one who is teaching in all good things.” Wuest writes:

The word *communicate* [in the KJV] means “to share, to be a partner in a thing with a person,” here “to hold fellowship with another person.” … The one who is taught should hold fellowship with his teachers in all good things. What the good things are is defined by the context. … the good things of verse 6 refer to spiritual things, since they are contrasted to the evil things just spoken of.

Now, the Judaizers had precipitated a situation in the Galatian churches in which those who followed their teaching broke fellowship with the true teachers of the Word. Paul is exhorting these to resume their fellowship with their former teachers and share with them in the blessing of grace which their teachers were enjoying.

…The interpretation that makes the one taught assume the responsibility for the financial welfare of his teacher is not possible in this instance of the use of the word *koinoneo*. This is the word Paul uses in Phil. 4:15, where he speaks of the obligation of the one taught to make the financial needs of his teacher his own, thus sharing his earthly goods inasmuch as the teacher has shared with him his heavenly blessing. But Paul does not use it so here, and for the following reasons: *First*, the context which speaks both of the evil (Gal. 6:1-5) and the morally good (Gal. 6:9-10) is against the interpretation that financial support is in the apostle’s mind here. *Second*, the context defines the good things as being of a spiritual, not a material nature. *Third*, it would be the height of folly for Paul to inject such a delicate subject as the pocket book of the saint … into the already discordant atmosphere of the Galatian churches. … *Fourth*, if Paul were exhorting the saints to contribute financially to the support of their former teachers, the Judaizers would be quick to say that the apostle was attempting to win the Galatian saints back to grace for financial reasons…. He [Paul] would not lay himself open to this charge by such an unwise act.”[[62]](#footnote-21217)

The one comment we would make about Wuest is that when Paul used the term *koinōneō* in Philippians 4:15, he did not expect that it would communicate the meaning of money, but rather he said, “no church fellowshipped with me in regard to giving and receiving.” Thus, even in Philippians 4:15, “fellowship” was defined in the context as fellowship in the financial arena. Vincent agrees with the commentators above, stating that *koinōneō* means “hold fellowship with … not impart to.”[[63]](#footnote-31278)

The point of Galatians 6:6 is that the true teachers have the “all good things” and the pupils are to fellowship with them, participating in all the good things that the teachers have. The context then follows suit. God is not mocked, if we sow sparingly (by not having fellowship with those who have all good things) then we will reap sparingly (we will not partake of those good things). If we sow to the flesh (circumcision) we will reap corruption, if we sow to the spirit (freedom in Christ), we reap everlasting life (“life” in the more powerful sense of “life indeed,” not just being alive).

Gal 6:7

**“mocked.”** The verb *muktērizō* (#3456 μυκτηρίζω), “mocked,” is literally, to turn up the nose at, treat with contempt; thus, it is to mock.

Gal 6:8

**“For the one who sows to his own flesh.”** Galatians 6:8 is a general statement about sowing and reaping. It is not in the context of getting saved, but in the context of helping others (Gal. 6:2), sharing with others (Gal. 6:6), and doing good (Gal. 6:9-10). The verse is saying that selfish people reap corruption while people who sow to the spirit reap “life”—life in the age to come. This verse is not making the point that the way to salvation is by “sowing to the spirit,” because salvation comes by faith in Christ, it is making the point that being selfish results in deterioration and corruption, while sowing to the spirit results in the opposite of that, real life, and not just here and now, but including a rich life in the age to come.

[For more on rewards in the coming Kingdom of Christ, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

**“corruption.”** The meaning of the Greek word depends on the context, which is certainly the case here. In this context, the word “corruption” is used in a general manner. If a person sows to the flesh, it can result in many types of corruption, including mental and/or physical deterioration, corruption, depravity, ruin, and if they are unsaved, eventually their total destruction in Gehenna. Given the wide range of meaning, “corruption” is a good translation.

**“life in the age *to come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[For commentary on this phrase, see Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

Gal 6:10

**“while.”** There is some debate about whether the verse should read, “while” we have opportunity, or “as” (i.e., “when”) we have opportunity. The Greek can go either way. We believe that God is pointing out that we always have opportunity to do good (you can always pray for someone) so let us be doing good. The verse does not seem to be saying that we should be waiting for an “opportunity” to arise and then do good. However, when a special opportunity for good arises, and those occasions do occur, then we can and should take advantage of those times also.

**“let us do good.”** It is easy to say, “do good,” like so many English translations, but the Greek actually uses the word “work,” *ergazomai* (#2038 ἐργάζομαι). *Ergazomai* denotes a form of labor that is to be performed. Doing “good” often involves actual “work,” but the meaning here is that doing “good” is like a labor of work that we should seek to accomplish. We must be willing to “work” to help others, not just “do” good when it is convenient for us. Also, it is helpful to know when reading the Bible that “doing good” is also being “righteous,” that is, acting in a right manner toward God and other people.

[For “righteousness” having the meaning of doing what is right or just (“justice”), see commentary on Matt. 5:6. For more on the meaning of “righteousness” and that word family, see commentary on Rom. 3:22.]

**“especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”** Christians are to do good to everyone, but we are to be especially good to other Christians, and the Bible says this in many verses (cf. 1 Pet. 3:8). For example, the Bible tells us in many different verses to be good to “one another,” meaning to fellow Christians. This makes perfect sense in light of the spiritual battle, because Christians are always under spiritual attack from unseen forces and often under attack from physical forces in the world. Christians need to support and help each other.

[For more on “one another” referring to other Christians, see commentary on Gal. 5:13.]

Gal 6:11

**“with my own hand.”** It was common for Paul and other Romans to use an “amanuensis,” a professional scribe, to take dictation and write down the body of a letter. Then, at the end of the letter, the author would write some form of closing in his personal handwriting, but because he was not a professional scribe, that ending often had larger letters and was not as clean and neat. We do the same kind of thing when we type a business letter but sign our name. It was Paul’s practice to end his epistle in his own handwriting (2 Thess. 3:17; cf. 1 Cor. 16:21; Col. 4:18; Phlm. 1:19). Paul’s own handwriting at the end of Galatians had big letters. The way verse 11 is worded, however, it is possible but not likely that Paul wrote the entire epistle by himself, and the entire epistle had large letters.

Skeptics say Paul did not write the epistles that bear his name, but that is just unsubstantiated speculation. There is no “proof” Paul did not write the Pauline epistles. Paul signed his epistles personally. It was his handwriting. Furthermore, the people who carried Paul’s epistles to the local churches could testify that Paul wrote the epistle, and people in those churches were able to authenticate that these epistles had come from his hands. There is no reason that an epistle bearing the name of Paul but written by anyone other than Paul would have been accepted by the Church.

Other evidence also supports that Paul wrote his epistles. For example, Saint Clement of Rome was a leading figure in the church at Rome and the first Apostolic Father of the Church. Little is known of his life, but according to the Church Father, Tertullian (AD 160-220), he was consecrated by Peter (it cannot be determined if he is the Clement of Phil. 4:3). Clement wrote to the Corinthian Church in AD 97 and urged them to pay attention to the epistle that Paul had sent them. This is early and solid evidence that Paul did indeed write the epistles that bear his name.

Also, if the epistles were written later than the life of Paul, some of the content would not have made sense to the Christians who received them. Many of the names and titles of people who are mentioned would have been forgotten. Furthermore, when Paul lists someone as being with him when he wrote, such as “Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy” (1 Thess. 1:1), those people would all have been dead too, making the letter not just a forgery in the name of the author, but an obvious forgery in its content. The same would be true of the greetings that Paul sends to and from people at the end of most epistles—those people would be dead too, and thus could not send or receive greetings.

We do not like fakes and frauds today, and the situation was the same in biblical times. In fact, because of the persecutions and personal risk of being a Christian, it is likely that members of the early Church would have reacted even more strongly to a letter sent in Paul’s name by someone who was not Paul than we would react today. When the evidence is weighed, it shows Paul did indeed write the epistles that bear his name.

Gal 6:12

**“make a good showing.”** Not, as the NIV84, a good impression, but rather to show off, an ostentatious display of their religion in a way people could see it.

**“are trying to compel.”** Present active.

Gal 6:15

**“neither…nor.”** Great example of the power of an ellipsis. The “is everything” is demanded by the context, but in ellipsis, the words that are present receive the emphasis. Thus, the phrase would read like: “For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a NEW CREATION is everything.”

Gal 6:16

**“standard.”** The word “standard” is the Greek word *kanōn* (#2583 κανών) from which we get the “Canon” of Scripture. Originally, a *kanōn* was a rod for measuring, then other meanings developed:[[64]](#footnote-32419)

1. **a means to determine the quality of someth., *rule, standard***
2. **set of directions or formulation for an activity, *assignment, formulation*** for public service. Others (incl. NRSV, REB) emphasize the geographical component and render *sphere (of action), province, limit.*
3. In the second century in the Christian church κ. came to stand for revealed truth, ***rule of faith*.**

We felt that the term “rule” did not communicate properly. It wasn’t about circumcision or uncircumcision being important; instead, the emphasis was on the new creation. It wasn’t a “rule” but rather a new standard.

**“upon the Israel of God.”** The term “Israel of God” occurs only here, so we must define the term from the vocabulary itself, from the context, and from the scope of Galatians, indeed, from the scope of the message of the Epistles. A careful reading of the verse shows that the “Israel of God” are those who keep in line with the standard that neither being a Jew nor being a Gentile means anything, but the new creation means everything; thus, in this Age of Grace it refers to those who have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and not relied on the flesh for righteousness.

It was clear in the Old Testament that Israel was the chosen people of God (but the term “Israel of God” was never used), but as a nation, they rejected the Messiah and are unsaved (cf. Rom. 10:1-3). The true “Israel” are those who choose God even as God chose them.

Some versions translate the Greek *kai* (“and, even”) as “and” in this verse, as if there was a separate group called the “Israel of God” apart from those people in the first part of the verse. The KJV is an example of such a translation: “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace *be* on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.” It makes no sense that there is a separate group of people who are called the “Israel of God,” and who occur only in this verse and are not defined anywhere else in the Bible. How would we ever know who they were? It makes much more sense that the *kai* is connecting the Israel of God with the group who keeps in line with the standard that there is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision in Christ. Thus, the REV has: “And as many as will keep in line with this standard, peace and mercy be upon them—upon the Israel of God.” The RSV deals with the *kai* another way, by not translating it at all: “Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God.” Leaving the *kai* untranslated is often done, depending on the context and specific use of the *kai*. Not translating the *kai* makes the Israel of God those who “walk by this rule.”

It makes perfect sense that Paul would use the phrase “Israel of God” to describe Christians here at the end of Galatians. Much of the book had been spent on issues that the Jews brought up, and Paul’s teaching that the Jews and Gentiles were now one body and not still divided into two groups. Thus, in the context of the book, it makes sense that Paul would use the phrase “Israel of God” to refer to the Church as a parting reminder to both the Jews and Gentiles that now there is only one favored group, the Body of Christ, the “Israel of God.”

Gal 6:17

**“From now on let no one cause trouble for me.”** Paul was not saying that from now on he did not want to be troubled by people, but rather that his fighting with the Galatians about law and grace was done. The issue was settled.

**“the marks.”** The Greek word “stigmata” can refer to marks, tattoos, or brands. Slaves were sometimes branded, but usually only when they were runaways or rebellious. Also, sometimes devotees of a pagan Temple branded themselves, but does this fit Paul? Probably not. Sometimes men in the army tattooed the name of their commander on their flesh, but that was self-inflicted and probably not what is being referred to here. The best way to translate seems to understand that the “marks” were real, scars from past floggings, and there were some parallels in the Greco-Roman world with which people could identify. The idea that the “stigmata” were the same as the scars of Christ is a modern idea with no biblical foundation.

Gal 6:18

**“your spirit.”** This use of “spirit” here in Galatians 6:18 is a synecdoche for “you,” with the emphasis on the spiritual side of life. Paul could have said “your body,” and meant “you,” or “your soul” and meant you, but the fact that he said “spirit” emphasizes the spiritual side of life, and the things that “spirit” can mean such as attitude. It is not our “spirit” that needs grace, we need grace.

[See Word Study: “Synecdoche.”]

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

1. Cf. Kenneth S. Wuest, New Testament, “from among the dead,” 439. [↑](#footnote-ref-19277)
2. Richard N. Longenecker, Galatians [WBC]; F. F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Galatians [NIGTC], 70ff., 136ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-29688)
3. From the textual note on the NET Bible, 1st ed. [↑](#footnote-ref-28207)
4. Ernest DeWitt Burton, The Epistle to the Galatians [ICC], 19-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-30273)
5. BDAG Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “ταράσσω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-26159)
6. Friberg, Analytical Lexicon, s.v. “ταράσσω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12400)
7. BDAG, s.v. “μεταστρέφω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15172)
8. Friberg, s.v. μεταστρέφω. [↑](#footnote-ref-23326)
9. J. B. Lightfoot, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians. [↑](#footnote-ref-13816)
10. in some Greek texts; cf. the texts by Lachmann and by Tischendorf. [↑](#footnote-ref-30760)
11. Longenecker, Galatians [WBC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-29861)
12. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians, 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-32763)
13. Rabbi Judah b. Tema, in Mishnah Avot 5.21, trans. Herbert Danby, The Mishnah (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 458. [↑](#footnote-ref-27619)
14. John Mcray, Paul: his Life and Teaching, 44-45. [↑](#footnote-ref-28765)
15. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 478, “interjectio.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18220)
16. Bullinger, 927, “ecphonesis.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18448)
17. Bullinger, 926, “asterismos.” [↑](#footnote-ref-16626)
18. W. Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Galatians, 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-14525)
19. J. B. Lightfoot, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians, 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-20876)
20. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians, 126. [↑](#footnote-ref-19723)
21. Kenneth S. Wuest, Word Studies: Galatians, 85; Heinrich A. W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Galatians, 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-13592)
22. Frank E. Gaebelein, Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-24157)
23. James D. G. Dunn, The Epistle to the Galatians [BNTC], 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-21089)
24. William Hendriksen, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-22235)
25. Richard N. Longenecker, Galatians [WBC], 107, 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-13366)
26. E. Huxtable, “Galatians,” in The Pulpit Commentary: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians[/em], ed. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, vol. 20, 174. [↑](#footnote-ref-26840)
27. BDAG, s.v. “χάριν,” definiton a. [↑](#footnote-ref-15992)
28. BDAG, s.v. “χάριν,” definition b. [↑](#footnote-ref-21553)
29. Cf. Longenecker, Galatians, vol. 41 [WBC], 136-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-14412)
30. N.T. Wright, The Kingdom New Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-30134)
31. Longenecker, Galatians [WBC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-30687)
32. James Dunn, Epistle to the Galatians [BTNC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-17724)
33. Ann Nyland, The Source New Testament, 360n4. [↑](#footnote-ref-18096)
34. Conybeare, Life and Epistles of St. Paul, 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-20548)
35. Kenneth S. Wuest, Word Studies: Galatians, 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-14898)
36. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians, 218. [↑](#footnote-ref-24961)
37. Cf. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, 4:309. [↑](#footnote-ref-15946)
38. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians, 257. [↑](#footnote-ref-15328)
39. See discussion in Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians, 261-63. [↑](#footnote-ref-28273)
40. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians, 266-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-28434)
41. Longenecker, Galatians [WBC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-30611)
42. F. F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Galatians [NIGTC], 379. [↑](#footnote-ref-26090)
43. Cf. Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “περιπατέω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-28385)
44. Bullinger, The Giver and His Gifts, 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-24189)
45. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians, 284. [↑](#footnote-ref-15770)
46. Bromiley, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-14709)
47. BDAG, s.v. “ἀκαθαρσία.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14435)
48. Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “ἀκαθαρσία.” [↑](#footnote-ref-22997)
49. Lenski, Galatians, 284. [↑](#footnote-ref-22837)
50. Merrill Unger, Biblical Demonology, 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-22326)
51. BDAG, s.v. “ἐριθεία.” [↑](#footnote-ref-31887)
52. Bruce M. Metzger, Textual Commentary , 597-98. [↑](#footnote-ref-19229)
53. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 137-148, “asyndeton.” [↑](#footnote-ref-32348)
54. Richard Chenevix Trench, Synonyms of the New Testament, 235. [↑](#footnote-ref-14906)
55. Kittel, Theological Dictionary, s.v. “self-control.” [↑](#footnote-ref-16613)
56. BDAG, s.v. “στοιχέω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-25405)
57. Thayer. [↑](#footnote-ref-19991)
58. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians, 297. [↑](#footnote-ref-22558)
59. Louw and Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, s.v. “βάρος.” [↑](#footnote-ref-28049)
60. W. R. Nicoll, Expositor’s Greek Testament, 3:189. [↑](#footnote-ref-27971)
61. Lenski, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians, 302-304. [↑](#footnote-ref-26598)
62. Wuest, Word Studies: Galatians, 169-171. [↑](#footnote-ref-21217)
63. Marvin R. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament, 4:174, s.v. “κοινωνέω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-31278)
64. Cf. BDAG, s.v. “κανών.” [↑](#footnote-ref-32419)