

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – Paul’s Letter to the Galatians

(SB_Galatians_Lsn10_Chapter 5A)

Review of Chapters 1-4

Before we begin chapter 5 of Galatians, I think it is important to pause and review the flow of Paul’s letter. By doing so, we increase our understanding and retention of this letter, its purpose, the doctrines addressed and the context of the 1st Century with which Paul was dealing.

Chapter 1

The focus of this chapter is Paul’s defense of his apostleship through a personal testimony of his conversion and post-conversion experiences. Paul defends the authenticity of his status as an “Apostle” and highlights the fact that even though he did not seek confirmation from other apostles, he eventually received it. After spending at least three years in Arabia and Damascus, Paul makes his first trip to Jerusalem where he saw only Peter and James for a brief period of 15 days (Gal 1:18-19). Paul then spent an undefined period of time in the regions of Syria and Cilicia. He had a reputation in Judea; however, hardly anyone knew him (Gal 1:22-23).

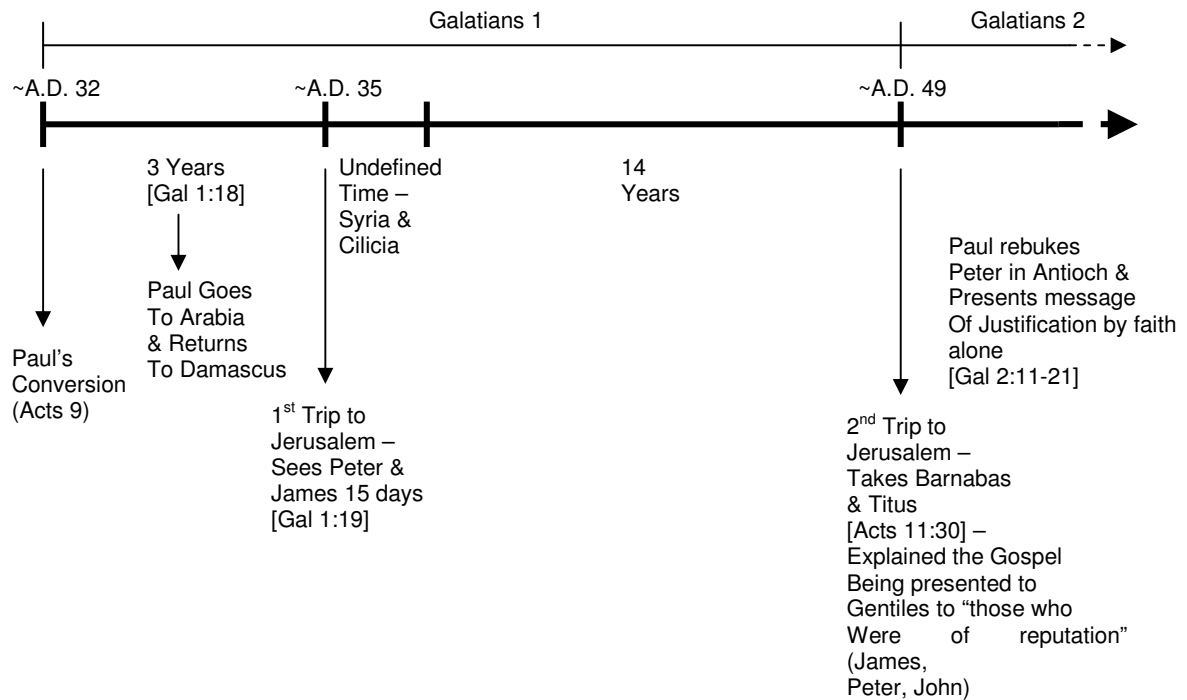
Chapter 2

Fourteen years after his first trip to Jerusalem (or after his conversion or after his undefined period in Syria and Cilicia), Paul took a trip to deliver a famine relief offering (Acts 11:30) to the believers in Jerusalem. On this trip, he took Barnabas and Titus with him. Titus was a Gentile believer; therefore, Titus would have provided direct evidence in person of the effect of Paul’s gospel that was being preached to Gentiles. James, Peter and John agreed that Paul and Barnabas should indeed take the gospel to the Gentiles while they (“who seemed to be pillars”) took the gospel to the “circumcision” (Gal 2:1-10).

Evidently, after this meeting in Jerusalem, Peter came to Antioch and was followed by some Jews “from James.” Until these Jews arrived, Peter ate and fellowshiped with the Gentiles. Once the Jews arrived, Peter withdrew from the Gentiles out of fear of those Jews who distorted the gospel and taught the necessity of circumcision. Even Barnabas got caught up in the hypocrisy (Gal 2:11-13).

Paul documents his address to this group (Gal 2:14-21) and in his address, Paul presents the basic thesis of the doctrine of Justification by Faith alone in Christ alone. He also defends this doctrine against the prevalent and recurring charge that it encourages or gives a license to sin. In these verses, Paul presents some of the most dramatic positional truths in writing for the first time in history. Never before could a believer say that they had been crucified with Christ and thus were motivated to live for God and be holy. When had that ever been the case?

Chronology of Galatians 1 & 2



Chapters 3 & 4

In this chapter, Paul deploys a very common literary structure found throughout Scripture that was used to develop the logical flow of an argument or position, i.e. the “chiastic” literary structure. Paul opens his statements by directing his attention to the Galatians and he challenges them to consider how they had become believers and received the Holy Spirit (Gal 3:1-5).

Paul begins to present his logic for his thesis of justification through faith alone in Christ alone in Galatians 3:6 and continues this argument through Galatians 4:31. As we’ve seen, that logic follows the structure below.

- A** Abraham – justified by grace through faith (3:6-14)
 - B** Law – the Mosaic Covenant did not annul God’s promise to Abraham (3:15-22)
 - C** Faith (the Promise) – the Seed, the promise, has come in fulfillment (3:23-25)
 - D** You [Galatians] are sons of God through faith (3:26)
 - C`** Faith – the means of our adoption as sons of God (3:27-4:7)
 - B`** Law – the Galatians, as sons, are returning to bondage as slaves (4:8-11)
 - A`** Abraham – two sons. One illustrates bondage and slavery and the Law. One illustrates freedom and life (4:21-31)

The “Heavenly Jerusalem”

At the end of chapter 4, Paul has concluded his argument in support of his thesis of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. In doing so, Paul draws an interesting parallel that we did not have the opportunity to explore in any depth in our previous lesson. He highlights our freedom in Christ by drawing a parallel between the heavenly Jerusalem and contrasting it with the then present earthly Jerusalem. He states that the heavenly Jerusalem is the “mother of us all” and is “free” whereas the earthly Jerusalem and her children are in “bondage” or slavery. It is interesting that Paul associates believers of the new dispensation of the Body of Christ with the “heavenly Jerusalem” for we often think of Jerusalem as the center of something Jewish, e.g. the center of Judaism in the Age of Israel and the center of the Messianic Kingdom in the Millennium. However, here in Paul’s first letter, we see Paul making a connection between the believer of the present age and the “heavenly Jerusalem.”

Paul quotes from a passage in Isaiah (Isa 54:1) to illustrate his point and I believe we can gain insight into Paul’s language and thinking through this illustration. In this passage from the book of Isaiah, Isaiah is contrasting the barren nation of Israel and Jerusalem in captivity with blessed Israel and Jerusalem of the Messianic Age, i.e. the Millennium. In Paul’s analogy, Israel and Jerusalem in captivity is comparable to Sarah who was previously barren, but who is blessed supernaturally by God with a son, Isaac. Through this supernaturally born son will come the Redeemer and “Seed” through Whom God’s covenant with Abraham will be fulfilled in many spiritual “seed.” The spiritual “seed” of Abraham, Jew and Gentile, will inhabit the “heavenly Jerusalem” one day and it is from this “heavenly Jerusalem” that believers will rule and reign with Christ – the “Seed” and the “Redeemer.”

Chapter 5

After establishing the fact that the Galatians were “sons” of God through faith alone in Christ alone, Paul makes an emphatic declaration that they are to “stand fast” in the liberty that is now theirs. In chapter 5, Paul begins to address how the believers of Galatia (and us) are to live the Christian life. The chapter breaks down as follows:

- Living without the Law (5:1-12)
- Living without License to Sin (5:12-15)
- Living by means of the Holy Spirit (5:16-26)

Living Without the Law (5:1-12)

5:1 IT was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.² Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. ³ And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. ⁴ You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. ⁵ For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love. ⁷ You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? ⁸ This persuasion *did* not *come* from Him who calls you. ⁹ A little leaven leavens the whole lump *of* dough. ¹⁰ I have confidence in you in the Lord, that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is. ¹¹ But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished. ¹² Would that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves.¹

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation, 1977).

Several questions emerge from Paul's instruction in these verses. First, I will list them and then we will examine them in the sections to follow.

- Verse 1 – In what sense has the Christian been liberated from the yoke of the Law, the yoke of slavery?
- Verses 2-4 – Is Paul saying that the believer can lose his or her salvation?
- Verse 6 – How does faith “work through love?”

The issue of the Mosaic Law and its relationship to the believer of this present age continues to be a source of on-going debate and discussion. Most believers today will readily admit that Christ fulfilled the Law. However, the problem is that most believers have a difficult time distinguishing between the moral code or teaching in the Law and the principles that should govern our behavior in the present age.

4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (*Rom 10:4*)

7 But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, 8 how shall the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? 9 For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. (*2 Cor 3:7-9*)

Calvin and many reformed theologians have answered this question this way. They have said the ceremonial laws (e.g., animal sacrifices, dietary restrictions, feast days, etc.) are no longer binding on us because of the death of Christ. Nevertheless the moral laws (the Ten Commandments) are still binding. God has done away with the moral laws only in the sense that they no longer condemn us (*Rom. 8:11*). The problem with this explanation is that it makes a distinction between two parts of the Law that the text does not make. The text simply states that Christ is the end of "the Law" (*Rom. 10:4*), not the ceremonial part of the Law. Furthermore if the Ten Commandments are all still binding on us, why have Christians throughout history (*Acts 20:7*; cf. *1 Cor. 16:2*) met to worship on Sunday rather than on the Sabbath? Some reformed theologians, following Calvin, believe that God abolished Sabbath worship along with the ceremonial laws. This seems somewhat inconsistent. Others, following the Westminster Confession, regard Sunday worship as a continuation of Sabbath worship. Nevertheless it is, of course, very different.²

Of course, the answer comes in realizing that the entire Mosaic Law which was designed to govern the theocratic nation of Israel was set aside in its entirety at the death of Christ. There are elements of the moral code (i.e. the Ten Commandments) that are presented to the believer of the present age in similar form in Paul's teaching. Nine of the ten commandments are approximated in teaching found in the Pauline corpus of New Testament literature. The only one without parallel is the keeping of the Sabbath.

It is quite obvious that based upon the context of this passage, Paul is addressing how the believer is to live (Phase 2) rather than principles related to the unbeliever's salvation. Paul's exhortation in verse 1 makes it very clear that the believer has the option to “stand fast” in his or her liberty or to become entangled in a yoke of bondage. So, Paul's statements in verse 2 that “if you become circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you” and in verse 4 that “you have been severed from Christ” and “you have fallen from grace” should be interpreted in this context. These are all statements related to the believer's spiritual life and walk.

² Thomas Constable, “Notes on the Book of Galatians,” www.soniclight.com

Paul's response was to teach believers that they needed to be patient and trust God to deliver in the future based upon our righteous standing in Christ. However, I believe that Paul is referring to phase 2 faith and phase 2 righteousness in these verses rather than phase 1 faith associated with justification. Paul uses the phrase "hope of righteousness" here to refer to phase 2 experiential righteousness in the believer's life as the believer remains steadfast in "faith, hope and love."

"We must guard against the misunderstanding current especially in Catholic theology (though Protestantism is far from exempt) that only faith made perfect in love leads to justification. This represents a serious distortion of the relationship between faith, love, and justification. In speaking of justification Paul never talks of faith *and* love, but *only* of faith as receiving. Love is not therefore an additional prerequisite for receiving salvation, nor is it properly an essential trait of faith; on the contrary, faith animates the love in which it works."³ [Underlining is mine for emphasis]

How does "faith work through love?" What did Paul mean? Paul uses the Greek word *agapao* (αγαπαω) here in verse 6. This is not a love that has any selfish aspect to it. This is not a love of this world. This is a love that arises in the believer's soul that is a genuine heartfelt concern for one's fellowman – a heartfelt desire (above all other evaluations) to see the lost saved and the fellow-believer advance in Truth with the desire and motivation that Christ be glorified. It is a love for one's fellowman that is motivated by one's love for Christ. When the believer possesses and is motivated by this type of love, faith can work in that believer's life to accomplish amazing things.

Evidently, the Judaizers were claiming that Paul still taught circumcision. In reality, prior to his salvation, Paul did promote circumcision. After his salvation, there were occasions in which Paul practiced circumcision out of respect for Jewish tradition and not as a requirement associated with one's salvation. For instance, Paul had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3) for this very reason; however, Paul is very clear that he never considered it to be associated with salvation (cf. 1 Cor 7:18).

In some ways, the Judaizers were like every one of us today who even unconsciously associate our human accomplishments in this world with some type of psychological edge when we stand before Christ. At the root of the Cross being a stumbling block to the Jew was the idea of some degree of self-respectability or self-esteem. Isn't this the case anytime that we associate our identity with this world? Our identity is in Christ and it should be the goal of the believer to determine what that means and how that principle works its way through our lives every day.

"The *skandalon* [stumbling block] of the cross, for Jews (cf. 1 Cor. 1:23), lay in the curse which it involved for one who was hanged on it (cf. 3:13). That one who died such a death should be proclaimed as Lord and Christ was intolerable. In the eyes of Gentiles the idea that salvation depended on one who had neither the wit nor the power to save himself from so disreputable a death was the height of folly. But there is a more general *skandalon* attached to the cross, one of which Paul is probably thinking here: it cuts the ground from under every thought of personal achievement or merit where God's salvation is in view. To be shut up to receiving salvation from the crucified one, if

³ Gunther Bornkamm, *Paul* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 153 cited by Constable.

it is to be received at all, is an affront to all notions of proper self-pride and self-help—and for many people this remains a major stumbling-block in the gospel of Christ crucified. If I myself can make some small contribution, something even so small as the acceptance of circumcision, then my self-esteem is uninjured.”⁴

Finally, in this section or passage, it is important to note that Paul considered this issue to be such an important one, that he effectively curses the Judaizers by saying that he wished that they would mutilate themselves in the same way that some pagan religions did. Priests of the Cybele cult in nearby Phrygia practiced castration as a part of their religious ceremonies. It signified their devotion to the goddess Cybele. This cult was closely associated with the Greek goddess Dionysus and was essentially a worship of a deified form of “mother-Earth.”

We will continue Paul’s exploration of our freedom in Christ and how it should impact our daily lives in the next session.

⁴ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, New International Greek New Testament Commentary series (Exeter, England: Paternoster Press, 1982; reprinted, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 237-38.