

A) INTRODUCTION:

Galatians is an extremely important text in dealing with the distinctions between the Law and Grace. As with all Scripture, it is far too easy to read modern concepts and concerns into the text and thereby not only overlook the ancient concerns but also miss completely what the Spirit is trying to tell the Church today. Paul's main argument being that faith in Messiah by Grace leads to eternal life, while adherence to the Mosaic Law means condemnation and leads to death.

1. **Author & Date:** this is one of the earliest of the Pauline epistles.
 - a. There is no credible alternative to Paul as the author.
 - b. The controversy relates to when and to whom it was written. It was written either on Paul's 1st or 2nd missionary journey, though 49-50 AD is the most likely date accepted by scholars.
 - c. Writing date was less than 25 years after Jesus resurrection.
2. **Destination:** it was obviously directed to the Galatians, but there has been some discussion as to whether this was for the nation of the "Gaul's" or for the Roman Province of Galatia.
 - a. The "South" is the Roman Province of Galatia that included the cities Paul was known to have visited on his 1st missionary journey... advocating the date of 49-50 AD.
 - b. There is no evidence that Paul ever traveled to the "North" geographic Galatian region which was a mountainous region that didn't support much of a population. Those who lived there were Gaul's (AKA Celts) who were considered barbarians for good reason and who didn't relate well to the outside world.
 - c. We know that Paul traveled through the South, and that he established churches there.
 - d. The South would have been the more strategic location with well-developed roads and lanes of travel and commerce. It is far more likely that Paul was drawn to these areas of high population and travel connection to the known world.
 - e. Synagogues already existed in these higher population areas in the south where people were already sensitized and open to the Messianic message Paul preached.
 - f. The general conclusion is that "Galatians" was written to the Roman Province in the southwest and not the geographical "Gaul" region of the northeast.
3. **Purpose/Provenance:** it is clear that others had come in after Paul's missionary journey, and in his absence were preaching another message to the Galatian church. When Paul discovered this, he launched this letter to address the matter and clarify what was at stake.
 - a. Judaizers – Paul would identify these primarily as "Messianic Jews" who were working to pull new believers away from the Way to a more traditional Judaism based upon the Law of Moses rather than the Grace of Jesus.
 - i. They taught that you must first become a Jew in following the Law of Moses, and then they added to that the Grace of Jesus.
 - ii. It should be recognized that there was an argument between Paul and Peter on this very topic that was eventually settled when Peter avowed not to burden the Christian community with the practices of the Law. Note Peter's vision in Acts 10:9-32; Acts 13:43-50; and especially Acts 15:1-20.
 - iii. These Judaizers were misguided and were confusing these young Messianic Jews and Gentile Christian converts. It is important to note that other faiths and cults continue to confuse young Christians whose faith is still embryonic.

- b. Paul's clarification in regards to the Judaizers:
 - i. The sign of the Abrahamic covenant was circumcision.
 - ii. The sign of the Sinai/Mosaic covenant was strict observance of the Law.
 - iii. The sign of the Messianic covenant is unity in love in the Gospel of Grace.
- c. Important clues to understand Paul's purpose in writing to confront the Judaizers – he is instructing these young Galatian Christians in regards to the Judaizers:
 - i. Their motive is selfish – 6:12-13... self-interest is not what the Gospel is about.
 - ii. Their motive is duplicitous – 5:9-13... they have mixed motives and are not entirely trustworthy.
 - iii. Their content is fallacious – 1:6-8... they are not merely innocently misguided but completely wrong headed.
 - iv. They are obviously preaching a different (*heteros*) gospel... as Law and Grace are two different things. Though the Gospel of Grace emerged from the Law, it is shown as a far superior revelation from God.
 - v. Their anointing by God and their calling to Gospel ministry is suspect, while Paul's calling and ministry are obviously true – 1:11-2:21
 - 1. Paul received his calling directly from Jesus.
 - 2. Paul was not influenced by the Jerusalem apostles or elders, though they acknowledged his commission.
 - 3. Paul motives are clear and he was shown as more zealous than the Judaizers who are now subverting him – 1:14. Paul had the experience of a Pharisee zealous for the Law before Jesus redirected him.
- 4. **Ministry Thought Development** – There is an important commentary to be understood that is more subtly revealed in the text between the diatribe of Jews and Messianic Christians:
 - a. "Remember the poor" – social justice:
 - i. This quote refers to the Messianic Christian poor in Jerusalem who were being economically and socially persecuted by the Jews and the Romans. There was great suffering in the Christian community and Paul's priority in helping them was all about demonstrating unity of the faith and solidarity among the people of God.
 - ii. Social justice in the Old Testament context was essentially for the Jews and secondarily for "God Fearing" or those respectful non-Jews and converts to Judaism who attached themselves to and identified with the Jews.
 - iii. Unfortunately the Jews of the day could care less about the world – their ideology was separatist, not inclusiveness. Jesus' Gospel message both challenged them, and then completely changed this notion of the primacy of the Jews. Jesus revealed that God cared for and wanted to free all of humanity... all who would submit to God as disciples of Jesus.
 - b. Paul's Gospel – 2:1-21
 - i. Peter was wrong about disassociating himself from the Gentiles for "fear of the Jews" and Paul called him on it.
 - ii. Peter had the clean/unclean vision and the Cornelius experience, and was enjoying the unity and fellowship of this blended congregation. However, when the Judaizers showed up, Peter didn't stand his ground.

- iii. Paul had no choice but to speak God's word. When you speak for God, who are you trying to please? The answer is obviously God, not men.
- iv. Jeremiah as well as other Biblical Prophets had much the same problem – though they tried to escape their ministry. God's purpose was so burning within them as with Jeremiah, that he had no choice but to preach – such it was also with Paul.
- v. Christians today should heed this lesson:
 - 1. There are those who argue for legalistic practices – this is wrong.
 - 2. We presume that the logical objective of a committed Christian is full time vocational ministry and especially to preach – this also is wrong. While all are called [invited] to ministry as ambassadors of the Gospel and are called to serious discipleship, some are also called to seminary, and only a few are called to vocational ministry. Market Ministry is the norm for most of God's people... being "in the world but not of the world."
- vi. Biblical example shows repeatedly that people whom the Spirit compelled – they couldn't avoid preaching. Calling means "invitation"; ordained means "compelled." Many are invited but few are compelled.

B) STUCTURE & CONTENT:

1. Structural Outline:

- a. 1:1-10 – Introduction
- b. 1:11-2:21 – Paul's Apostolic Anointing
 - i. Paul's Calling – 1:11-17
 - ii. Confirmation of Paul's Gospel message – 1:18-2:10
 - iii. Confrontation of Gospel message – 2:1-21
- c. 3:1-5:1 – Paul's Doctrinal Support for the Gospel of Grace
 - i. The inferiority of the Law – 3:1-4:7
 - 1. The superiority of faith versus works – 3:1-14
 - 2. The purpose of the Law – 3:15-22
 - 3. The completion of the Law – 3:23-4:7
 - ii. The need to move beyond the Law – 4:8-5:1
- d. 5:2-6:10 – Practical application of the Gospel
 - i. Legalism & abuse of freedom – 5:2-15
 - ii. Flesh and Spirit – 5:16-26
 - iii. Practical Spirituality – 6:1-10
- e. 6:11-18 – Conclusion & farewell

2. Thematic Development:

- a. Contrasting Old and New Covenant Relationship: 3-4
 - i. The Law - was a conditional covenant, obedience meant blessing, disobedience meant curse.
 - 1. Under the Law you got what you deserved. Law was a Bi-lateral "Quid-pro-quo" [this for that] covenant arrangement.
 - 2. The Law was in effect in the "Land" on sin-cursed earth in Palestine.
 - ii. The Gospel of Grace – both the Abrahamic covenant and the Messianic covenant were unconditional covenants, where God promised only blessing based on

acceptance by faith.

1. This is what was declared in the Gospel messages of Luke 4:17-21 where Jesus proclaimed Isaiah's prophecy fulfilled; and the Beatitudes of Matthew 5:3-12.
2. It is "unilateral" meaning the blessing was open for all who had faith and the promise was for eternity in the Kingdom of God.
3. The bottom line is – while the Law is good, the Gospel is amazing. Why settle for Law when the promise of the Law led us directly to the Gospel?

iii. Heirs of Abraham:

1. Physical offspring of Abraham were marked by circumcision – the cutting in the flesh to affirm an internal circumcision of the heart.
2. However, the Spiritual offspring of Abraham were marked by internal faith not the physical sign – this is a relational interaction between God and each person occurring both in the heart [emotional/relational] and the mind [cognitive/rational].
3. Relational interdependence is at the heart of the Gospel.

iv. OT Curse is replaced by NT Blessing – Jesus accepted the curse into His own body on behalf of the community of faith.

b. Faith verses the Law of works is demonstrated in circumcision:

- i. Paul explains that circumcision is only the outward sign of inward belief, and in the Messianic Covenant it has no validity whatsoever as the inward belief is all that matters.
- ii. Paul is saying that by reverting back to the Law the Galatians are basically saying that Jesus didn't need to come, let alone to suffer and die and then be resurrected. To revert to the Law is a denial of Jesus and is blasphemy!
- iii. One question that emerges from this argument is what will God think about the resumption of Temple worship in Jerusalem?
- iv. Paul's example of the circumcision of Timothy and not Titus is not a contradiction... notice that:
 1. Titus was a Greek who became a Christian – because his heritage was Greek, he never was under the Law so there was no need for him to be circumcised.
 2. Timothy was from a mixed marriage – his father was a Greek and his mother was a Jew. It was known that he was raised in both cultures, and he chose Christ. Because of his Jewish heritage Paul thought it wise knowing there was a conflict with the Jews to have him circumcised. For Paul this was a pragmatic solution and not a faith mandate.

c. What were these false teachers saying?

i. 3:4-5

1. The notion of having "Fallen from Grace" is a contested statement:
 - a. Some argue that this lends weight to the theological position of Joseph Arminius [Arminian perseverance theology] over the position of John Calvin [Calvinist determinism theology].
 - b. Instead, this indicates that someone has placed themselves

- outside the sphere of God’s divine favor.
2. **“Gaining God’s Favor” by observing the Law, and “receiving it by Grace” are fundamentally mutually exclusive.**
 - a. **The Law argues that you get what you deserve until you die.**
 - b. **Grace of the Gospel affirms you get what we don’t deserve – peace with God, blessings and eternal life.**
 3. **Paul contends with these false teachers that if we could gain God’s favor through the Law, then Jesus didn’t need to have bothered to come – and this is blasphemy!**
- ii. **3:5-9**
1. **Abraham was the Scriptural source of blessing by faith.**
 2. **Circumcision was the sign of the OT covenant mediated through Abraham.**
 3. **The Judaizers were not necessarily saying that the Messiah had not come; they were unwilling to acknowledge that He had changed everything. They argued that you needed to observe the requirements of the Law as well as Grace to be fully blessed.**
 - a. **They were more concerned about outward appearance – as exemplified by the established Jewish leadership.**
 - b. **They stoned Stephen because he avowed that Jesus changed everything... that not only was the Kingdom of God available now, that eternity with God is the right of all Christians.**
 - c. **The Gospel was a new message that stated that the “outerman” doesn’t matter at all – only the “innerman” is important.**
- d. **Additional Insights on the termination of Law and the implementation of the Gospel of Grace:**
- i. **The Old Covenant practice of observing the Sabbath and the requirement of tithing started at Sinai and ended at Calvary. In the New Covenant as demonstrated in the Book of Acts tithing is replaced by a voluntary “Love Offering.”**
 1. **Acts 2:42-47 demonstrates a conscience transformed by Grace.**
 2. **Tithing is giving by compulsion... it is essentially a vassal treaty stipulating this for that.**
 3. **Love offering is giving as an expression of gratitude rather than by compulsion. Gratitude stipulates that by knowing what God has done for us we cannot help but desire to give gladly to further God’s Kingdom.**
 4. **The problem in employing the theological requirement of Old Covenant tithing in the New Covenant is to pervert scripture.**
 - ii. **Some have argued that the Sinai/OT covenant were a combination of moral, civil and ritual aspects.**
 1. **Some theologians would agree with this, while others say the Bible doesn’t specifically state this notion – though there is intuitive support.**
 2. **Ethics are either bound and obligated [deontology] or discretionary and voluntary [conventional] in their nature.**
 3. **Moral codes flow out of one or the other of these two major ethical**

approaches.

- a. Immoral actions are either objective “eternal and self-evident – woven into the fabric of the universe” or they are subjective “open to reinterpretation by various cultural/social/ideological changes.”
 - b. If objective they do not change through time; if subjective they are moderated by both time and situation.
 - c. Based upon the perspective taken:
 - i. Things may be considered “immoral” without necessarily being illegal – such as abortion, euthanasia, adultery, etc.
 - ii. Things may be illegal without necessarily being immoral – such as speeding, smoking, drinking, nudity, etc.
 - iii. If you take “Thou shall not kill” objectively then abortion and assisted suicide are murder.
 - iv. If you take “Thou shall not kill” subjectively then the argument of when life begins and when quality of life ends prevails.
4. Accordingly, the Law is divided into two major categories:
- a. Things that are wrong in and of itself, meaning that they are violating the natural order of things as God intended – such as murder, theft, etc.
 - b. Things that are wrong by decree, meaning we make laws solely to control behavioral standards and standards change over time and circumstance – such as poaching, speeding, etc.
5. This is where the reality of conventional theology and sociology intersect – some things are said to be decreed in the “fabric of the universe” affecting all people for all time; while others are “human convention” criminalized or controlled by specific laws intended to enforce behavior in a specific time and social context. What is “Truth” becomes more than a simple “philosophical” problem:
- a. If “worldly truth” is strictly personal and relative to situation and circumstance, then there is no authoritative right and wrong and everything rests on the subjective interpretation of the individual in the moment.
 - b. “Biblical Truth” is something more and doesn’t change based on our personal human perspective. These are based on something far greater than an individuals’ limited and narrow perspective.
 - c. Morality and ethics derive out of the application of worldly truth or Biblical Truth.
 - d. Some theologians argue that conventions operant at the time of the Biblical writers holds true for all time – such as the submission nature of women to men requiring that women can never teach a man. This is not definitively demonstrated in Scripture. Some argue that these are more relative mores that may change with time and circumstance.

- e. A helpful tool in understanding this debate can be found in the “Introduction to Theology” found under the Biblical Literacy tab on authenticdiscipleship.org home page. See particularly "Learning to Distinguish Between Degrees of Certainty" by Gerry Breshears.
- e. Thematic Change in Redemptive History – the Reformation – was one of the most significant events in the Christian faith and practice of the last millennium.
 - i. Martin Luther was a seminary professor in the German town of Wittenberg. He was a devote believer who was tortured by the concept that hidden and unintentional wrongs could separate him for eternity from Christ. As a consequence he repeatedly went to confession to be absolved of unknown or unintentional sin.
 - ii. He pondered the Scripture and prayed for insight into this dilemma so that he could have assurance and peace. The result was Luther’s 95 theses which revolutionized the church.
 - iii. Primary in this revolution was the theological mandate of “justification by faith” rather than “justification by works.”
 - 1. For Luther – works were based upon the theological and moral/ethical corruption of the Roman Catholic Church. True faith was essentially being held hostage by the political and social desires of political and church authority.
 - 2. While Abraham was justified by faith, the legalism of the Pharisees resulted in Jesus’ condemnation. While generically the Law was in itself pronounced “good” by Paul, the specific application by the Jewish establishment was not. Thus legalism could be either generic or specific.
 - 3. For Paul – he was speaking against specific legalism where the church was imposing a code of moral/ethical behavior not supported by Jesus and NT theology.
 - iv. “Faith” in Pauline thinking was focused on belief and personal righteousness [Gal 3:6; Rom 4:3; Gen 15:6]
 - 1. Faith = belief.
 - 2. Righteousness = justified.
 - 3. Blessing = the answer to the Fall of Gen 3 – where Salvation is the ultimate blessing.
 - 4. Paul concluded that the Law was a “works” system and was contrary to God’s calling; it was dead moralism.
 - 5. While Faith was the only way to please God... Paul argued that faith = blessing while works = curse. The righteous shall live by faith 3:11.
 - 6. The law was not faith, and instead was living by works 3:12 which would necessarily lead to death.
 - 7. Sinai Covenant was based on a long life in the Promised Land, but break the law and you are cursed and die. This covenant was a physical/material reality, and hence was temporal.
 - 8. New Covenant was eternal life in the Presence of Jesus and the Father, it was a spiritual/eternal reality.

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9. Sinai was never about eternal life or death – it was a “live long and prosper” in the land covenant.
 10. It is heresy to believe that the Law can save – it can’t. It never could. The law was only a child-custodian waiting for the arrival of Messiah. Life only occurs in Jesus.
- v. Paul speaks of Messiah redeeming “us” [Jews] from the curse of the Law [3:13]. Only the Jews were obligated under the Law, however Jesus’ redemption was for all of humanity.
1. These events led to the mission of the church to spread the “good news” – the Gospel of Grace.
 2. This is also why Jesus and the apostles went to the Jews first.
 3. All of humanity was under the curse of the Fall, but only the Jews were under the curse of the Law.
 4. Jesus became a curse in order to release blessing [3:13].
 5. Jesus flesh abolished the Law – Eph 2:15.
 6. The Beatitudes revealed blessings – the meek shall inherit the land – the land was both the “promised land” of specific blessing, and the “earth” of general blessing.
 7. If you want blessing, you have to come to the New Covenant faith [3:14].
- f. Additional Thematic Development:
- i. 3:22 – “everyone” actually should be translated “all things” not “all people.” Gen 3 shut all things under sin... this include all of creation not just humanity.
 - ii. 3:23 – “before faith came” actually “the coming of faith” refers to Jesus. We were all in prison before Jesus, we just didn’t know it.
 - iii. 3:24 – “tutor” is actually “custodian” or better “stern care-taker” – it was the term used for the nanny/guardian of small [under aged] children.
 - iv. 4:1-2 – In the Ancient Near East a child heir is relegated to the custodial guardianship of an appointed meadiary until maturity... the appointed time.
 - v. 4:3 – “elemental things” refers to pagan religious bondage based on the elements of “earth, wind, water, and fire.”
 - vi. 4:4-7 – “adoption” is speaking about “adult sons” – that is as being heirs and owners with full authority.
 - vii. 4:8 – both Jewish children and Pagan children were under custody. Jews to the Law, and Pagan’s to General Revelation.
 - viii. 4:21-23 – slave woman and free woman has to do with our identity and future – slave refers to the flesh, while free refers to the promise in the Spirit. This is an argument of “antitheses” much like Law versus Faith
 - ix. 4:24 – 2 covenants = Sinai [Hagar] and Messianic [Sarah]
 - x. 4:27-31 – Jews are in bondage while Christians are free.

g. Chart of Thematic Dualism in Galatians 4:21-31:

Verse 22	2 sons	Isaac	Ishmael
Verse 22	2 mothers	Sara	Hagar

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Verse 22,31	2 statuses	free	slave
Verse 23,29	2 origins	promise, Spirit	flesh
Verse 24-26	2 covenants	(New, Gospel; <i>Abraham</i>)	Sinai - Law
Verse 25-26	2 cities	Heavenly Jerusalem (Spiritual)	Historical Jerusalem (earthly)
Verse 25,28	2 people	Christians	Unbelieving Jews
Verse 29	2 conditions	<i>Persecuted</i>	<i>persecutor</i>
Verse 27,30	2 destinies	Ultimately blessed	Ultimately cursed

h. 5:16 – “walk by the Spirit” is actually literally “walk in Spirit” – meaning that man is both spirit and flesh. When spirit is capitalized it refers to the Holy Spirit, when lower case it refers to the spiritual nature of humanity. What is Paul saying? We have a choice how we want to walk.

- i. The flesh/works/Law are an outerman reality.**
- ii. The Spirit/faith/Grace are an innerman reality.**
- iii. Innerman is utterly and completely perfected already in Christ, while outerman is dead and passing away.**
- iv. Innerman is fundamentally stronger than outerman – righteousness emerges through the flesh by the Spirit... this is what living out our faith means. It is not perfected flesh, but the perfected Spirit radiating out through corrupted flesh.**

3. Thoughts on the contrast of Faith [Grace] versus Works [Law] in Galatians:

a. Presuppositions:

- i. Paul believes that the Law says that you must abide by all of it or face judgment. Faith on the other hand says we’ve already passed out of judgment into life.**
- ii. Abraham’s relative position in redemptive history – faith is eternal and enduring.**
- iii. Law is associated with works and curses – the antithesis is faith and blessing**
- iv. Paul avows he kept the Law – but that the Law can’t save... he is saying that the Law cannot transform people.**

b. Premises:

- i. Righteousness is by faith**
- ii. Law is by works**
- iii. Works and faith are mutually exclusive**
- iv. Works don’t equal righteousness**

c. Propositions – Gal 2:14-18

- i. Peter is a Jew who chooses to live like a Gentile Christian... it is hypocrisy to make others live like a Jew and be a Christian.**
- ii. Cultural ethnocentricity – we are by nature Jews while they are by nature Gentiles.**
- iii. Messiah died and the Law died with Him – 2:16**

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- iv. Faith in the Son of God is believing by faith.
 - v. Justification is past tense if you have believed... you pass out of death and judgment into life and promise.
 - vi. Sanctification is present tense meaning walking [continuing] by faith.
 - vii. Glorification is future tense meaning hoping for the 2nd coming.
 - viii. The promise of the Old Covenant is for a “seed” meaning an heir... which is Jesus.
 - ix. The Law doesn’t invalidate the covenant of blessing, but faith brings blessing now and eternal life later.
 - x. Inheritance is based on a promise by God.
- d. Pronouncements
- i. The Law cannot bring about righteousness in an of itself. It can only convict and condemn.
 - ii. Paul believed that the Law died with Jesus, and didn’t resurrect with Him. Following the Law is absolutely fruitless.
 - iii. Paul believed that the Law cannot restore relationship with God.
- e. The Law
- i. Is a works system.
 - ii. Is not Messiah – at best it points toward Messiah.
 - iii. Is subsequent to the promise in faith.
 - iv. Generates sin.
 - v. Produces segregation & boasting by Israel as the sole keepers.
 - vi. Was mediated by Angels, Moses, and Messiah.
 - vii. Is for Israel only.
 - viii. Is generally a curse covenant.
 - ix. Is associated by the flesh – it is non-spiritual.
 - x. Is inferior to the Abrahamic promise through Faith.
 - xi. Is not an end in itself.
 - xii. Is fundamentally inferior to faith.

4. Antitheses – of Faith and Works:

Rom 3:27	Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works ? No, but by a law of faith .
Rom 3:28	For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.
Rom 4:2-5	For if Abraham was justified by works , he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." Now to the one who works , his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work , but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,
Rom 9:32	<i>they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works.</i>
Gal 2:16	knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.
Gal 3:2	did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith ?
Gal 3:5	does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith ?

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Gal 3:9-10	So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer . For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse
Gal 3:12	the Law is not of faith ; on the contrary, "HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM."
Gal 5:6	in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.

5. Faith is not the way of the Law

Rom 4:13-14	For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law , but through the righteousness of faith . For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified
Rom 3:20-22	through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe
Gal 2:16	knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law ; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.
Gal 3:18	For if the inheritance is based on law , it is no longer based on a promise
Gal 5:18	But if you are led by the Spirit , you are not under the Law

C) POSITION PAPER – ARGUMENT ON FAITH VERSUS WORKS:

Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians is described by Greg Herrick as “a powerful Christian treatise designed to declare the truth of salvation by grace alone and . . . the freedom from sin’s tyranny.”¹ Early Christians were initially from Jewish origins, and later outreach added Gentile believers. They were confused as to how to reconcile Jewish traditions and the Mosaic Law, with the freedom offered through Grace. It is generally accepted that the letter to the Galatians offers a clear view into Pauline theology regarding the law and grace. The purpose of this paper is to briefly review Paul’s view about the inferiority of the law and the vast superiority of Grace.

Introduction

Behind Paul’s writing are two significant underlying currents that strongly flavor his letter – Greek philosophy and Jewish theology. In terms of Greek philosophy, L. Morris observed, “Faith has many aspects.” Particularly relevant to this discussion, faith is the

Response to revelation as contrasted with discovery of new knowledge. It implies our recognition that we are sinners and thus unable of ourselves to forsake evil and do good. Socrates might hold that knowledge and virtue are much the same, so that to *know* what is right leads people *to do* what is right, but Paul would not have agreed. For [Paul] faith implies both that we have come to see ourselves as sinful and also that we have come to recognize that God has provided for our forgiveness through what [Jesus] Christ’s death has done for us. Faith means coupling the recognition of the impossibility of our achieving our salvation with the acceptance of the truth that God

¹ Herrick, Greg, Th.M., Ph.D., [The Epistle to the Galatians](http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=318); www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=318

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has done all that is necessary. The ‘Good News’ is the ‘power of God for salvation to everyone who believes’ (Rom 1:16).”²

There were a number of difficulties for the Galatians in getting beyond their pagan past and also their Neo-Platonic and Sophist philosophical orientation derived from their cultural world view in accepting Christian faith. Jews had previously proselyted in the region, and the Law was known by many. Paul preached salvation by Grace which gain traction, but then was being undermined by Jews unwilling to accept this perspective. Paul believed the gospel was complete in itself, and the witness of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of these new believers proved it. In terms of Jewish theology, Paul was being opposed by:

Jewish Christian legalists who regarded Paul as inferior and his message to be in error on certain crucial points. Therefore they sought to correct [Paul’s] preaching, arguing that in order for the Gentiles to become ‘full’ sons and daughters and heirs of the covenant, they needed faith in [Jesus] Christ *plus* adherence to the Mosaic code including circumcision and observance of certain religious feasts.³

It can be inferred from Paul’s writing that the Galatians were confused as a result of these Jewish teachers in opposition to Paul’s theological position. In the process of this redirection in his letter to the Galatians, Paul makes a number of propositions about the law and faith.

Christians are justified before God only by faith in Jesus Christ, and not by the law. (Chap 2)

Verse 2:16 is packed with emphatic words Paul used to drive this point home. “Law,” “works,” “Christ,” and “justified,” are each used three times, while “faith,” and “Jesus” are used twice in this one verse (see attached “partial chart” for word references). The point of this portion in the letter is to expose the false teachers and their mistaken notions of faith plus law. The theological trajectory Paul argued for is “Justification by Faith” based on the Messiah and not the Law, versus “Justification by Works” associated with the Law. Along this line, Paul confronted Peter and the pillars of the faith in Jerusalem who were supporting this notion of faith plus law. The importance of linking “faith” and “justified” is Paul’s assertion that only faith leads to God’s blessing (2:9, 21) and the promise of life (2:14, 19, 20), while the physical sign of “circumcision” in fulfilling the Law therefore means absolutely nothing (2:7, 8, 9, 12).

The true sign of the Mosaic covenant (Law) and Abrahamic covenant (Sonship) is faith, not works.

(Chap 3)

Paul as a Jewish Rabbi having become an Apostle argued that Genesis 12:2-3 and 15:6 declare God’s blessing was solely the result of Abraham’s faith. Verse 18:18 clearly states that through Abraham all the nations would be blessed. Paul makes the point that the Holy Spirit was received by the Galatians through faith and not works, and he goes on to condemn the folly of what was begun by faith they are now attempting to perfect through works (Gal 3:2-3). Paul reminds them that “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (Gal 3:6; Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3). In this chapter, law and faith are each employed fifteen times; promise is employed eight times, Jesus five times, works three times, and Christ (Messiah) eleven times. Paul argues that the purpose of the law was to serve as “custodian of the promise” (or tutor) that would ultimately lead the faithful to the Messiah (3:23-24). Now that the Messiah has come and His blessing received by faith, not only does the law no longer apply, but through faith in Jesus we become sons of God (3:25-26). Paul’s argument

² Morris, L. “Faith.” In The Dictionary of Paul and his Letters. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin eds. IVP, 1993, p 285

³ Herrick, Greg

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states that the Grace of Jesus is an infinitely greater covenant than the Mosaic Law.

The law leads to slavery and bondage, while faith in Jesus leads to freedom and adoption as sons.

(Chap 4)

Building on this foundation of faith, Paul contrasts the natural condition of “bondage to the elemental things of the world,” with “redemption of those under the law and adoption as sons” (4:3-5). Abraham’s wives further serve to contrast law and freedom with Hagar representing the covenant of slavery [law], and Sarah representing the covenant of Sonship [Grace] (4: 21-23). Those who remain under the law are in slavery (4:25), while those born of the Spirit are children of the promise (4:28-29). In this section “son” is employed five times, “Heir” three times, “promise” twice, “Christ” twice, and slavery three times. Paul is emphasizing the point that through Jesus we become sons of God and heirs to the Kingdom, and the indwelling of the Spirit confirms our relationship (4:6).

Those seeking justification from the law have fallen from Grace, while those led by the Spirit are freed from the law and its condemnation. (Chap 5)

Paul admonishes the Galatian church to remain free through Grace, and not return to slavery under the law (5:1). Those who pursue the works system of the law including the sign of circumcision must keep all of the law, which the Jews know is impossible. Thus, adherence to the law occurs at the expense of Grace and results in being severed from Christ Jesus (5:2-4). Paul encourages his church instead to remain faithful to the gospel he taught, and reject those that preach the false gospel of circumcision and a return to the law. Instead of circumcision and a works related faith, the Galatians should fulfill their spiritual calling by loving and serving each other (5:13-14). The spirit and the flesh are presented as being in fundamental conflict, and both are evidenced by the character of the individual as natural or spiritual (5:16-24). Those who live by the Spirit [evidenced by character] also walk by the Spirit [evidenced by proper action] (5:25). In this section “Spirit” is employed six times – roughly one-third of the total usage in the entire letter. As Paul winds down his thoughts, he emphasizes the nature and character of the Spirit and what constitutes spiritual people. Other themes revisited in this section are the “law” (used five times), “faith” (used three times), “Christ” [Messiah] (used four times), “circumcision” (used four times, “slavery” and “freedom” (each used twice). This section serves to reemphasize the nature of the conflict between flesh and Spirit, and to clarify the choice each person must make.

There is considerable debate as to the nature of Paul’s rebuke to the “Judaizers” (verb) referring to “those who live as a Jew in accordance with Jewish customs.”⁴ On one hand, one can understand how Jews who came to believe in Jesus as their Messiah would expect Gentiles to enter into their Jewish identity. After all, their Lord Jesus was a Jew and had come first for the Jews – it was reasonable and wrong. Paul identified the hypocrisy of Peter and the Judaizers, and argued that we stand before God by Grace alone. From a slightly different perspective, one could also understand that circumcision being the ancient Jewish sign of faith given to Abraham might reasonably continue as a sign for the new people of God. Again, this is reasonable – and wrong. Paul argues that the flesh counts for nothing, and marks in the flesh such as circumcision count least of all. It is Spirit that endures, not the flesh; and faith that matters, not works or physical signs. The only sign worthy of the new covenant is love. It is in the demonstration of love and service to others, not adherence to the law that true faith is manifest.

Conclusion:

The purpose of the law was to identify sin and make known the Messiah. When Messiah arrived, the law was fulfilled and a new order of Grace was made possible through the Cross, which

⁴ Campbell, W.S. “Judaizers” In The Dictionary of Paul and his Letters. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin eds. IVP, 1993, p 513

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triumphed universally. Jews who were mistaken about their role in the new Kingdom order, were required to accept as equals the Gentiles they once regarded as inferior. In the new age of the Spirit, love has become the new Kingdom symbol replacing circumcision, and faith has utterly replaced the law.

D) Partial Synthetic Chart showing themes and where they appear in the text:

Partial Chart - Epistle to Galatians									
Chapters & Story Summary									
		1	2	3	4	5	6		
Themes	C S h u a m p a r t a r y	Introductory comments; Confusion about the Gospel; Paul's ministry	False brothers exposed; Confrontation with Pillars; Justification by faith not law	Faith not law confirmed by Spirit; Faith not Law imparts life	Slaves and bondage, sons and freedom	Those seeking justification from law have fallen from Grace; Walk by the Spirit	Spiritual restoration; reaping what you sow		Total Hit Count of theme
Law	n. G3795 (32-194) law, regulation, principle; this has a broad range of meanings and referents, ranging from law as a principle revealed in nature or reason, to the OT Scriptures as a body, the first five books of the Scriptures, or any single command of the Scriptures			2, 5, 10(2), 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 21(3), 23, 24	4, 5, 21(2)	3, 4, 14, 18, 23	2, 13		32
Works	n. G2240 (8-169) work, deed, activity, task, job		16(3), 19(2), 21	2, 5, 10		19	4		8
Faith	n. G4411 (22-243) faith, faithfulness, belief, trust, with an implication that actions based on that trust may follow; "the faith" often refers to the Christian system of belief and lifestyle	23	16(2), 20	2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 22, 23(2), 24, 25, 26		5, 6, 22	10		20
Promise	n. G2039 (10-52) promise			14, 16, 17, 18(2), 21, 22, 29	23, 28				10
Christ	n.pr. G5986 (38-529) Christ, Anointed One, Messiah, the Greek translation of the Hebrew 5431 (cf. Greek 3549). The Messiah is the Son of David, an anointed leader expected to bring in an age of peace and liberty from all oppression. In the NT, the Messiah is Jesus, who came first to bring liberty from sin and peace with God and who will come again to bring all things under his control	1, 3, 6, 7, 10, 12, 22	4, 16(3), 17(2), 20(2), 21	1, 13, 14, 16, 22, 24, 26, 27(2), 28, 29	14, 19	1, 24, 6, 24	2, 12, 14, 18		37
Justified	v. G1467 (8-39) to justify, vindicate, declare righteous, to put someone in a proper relationship with another, usually referring to God's relationship to humankind, implying a proper legal or moral relationship		16(3), 17	8, 11, 24		4			8
Curse	n. G2932 (3-6) curse, imprecation			10, 13(2)					3
Blessing	n. G5921 (7-155) grace, the state of kindness and favor toward someone, often with a focus on a benefit given to the object; by extension: gift, benefit; credit; words of kindness and benefit: thanks, blessing	3, 6, 15	9, 21	9, 14		4	18		9
Jesus		1, 3, 12	2, 16(2)	1, 14, 22, 26, 28	14	6, 24	14, 17, 18		17
Life	n. G419 (1-13) way of life, behavior	13							1
	v. G2409 (9-140) to be alive, to live a life; in the NT this can also refer to the resurrection life, Jesus Christ is then "the Living One"		14, 19, 20	11, 12		25			6
Died	v. G633 (2-111) to die (in a literal or fig. sense); to be about to die, be mortal		19, 21						2
Circumcision	n. G4364 (7-36) circumcision; fig., the Jews (as a group of people who adhered to the ritual of circumcision)		7, 8, 9, 12			2, 3, 6, 11	15		9
Cross	n. G5089 (3-27) cross					11	12, 14		3
Slavery	v. G1526 (4-25) to serve (as a slave)				8, 9, 25	1, 13			5
Freedom	n. G1528 (4-124) servant, slave; in the NT a person owned as a possession for various lengths of times (Hebrew slaves no more than seven years, Gentile slaves without time limit), of lower social status than free persons or masters; slaves could earn or purchase their freedom	10		28	1, 7		5		5
	n. G1800 (4-11) freedom, liberty, not enslaved		4			1, 13			3
	v. G1802 (1-7) to set free, liberate, cause someone to receive liberty or freedom					1			1
Bondage	v. G2871 (1-2) to make a slave, enslave		4		3				5
Son	n. G5626 (13-377) son, child (of either gender), descendant (in any generation); by extension: a term of endearment; one of a class or kind, for example, a "son of the resurrection" is one who participates in the resurrection. "The Son of Man" is an OT phrase usually meaning "human being," that in the NT is used almost exclusively as a messianic title (see Da 7:13), emphasizing Jesus' humanity	16	20		4, 6, 7, 23, 30				7
Heir	n. G3101 (3-15) heir, one who inherits				1, 7, 30				3
Spirit	n. G4460 (18-379) wind, breath, things which are commonly perceived as having no material substance; by extension: spirit, heart, mind, the immaterial part of the inner person that can respond to God; spirit being: (evil) spirit, ghost, God the Holy Spirit			2, 3, 5, 14	6, 29	5, 16, 17, 18, 22, 25	1, 8, 18		15
Spiritual	a. G4461 (1-26) spiritual, pertaining to the Spirit; (n.) spiritual person						1		1
Redeem	v. G1973 (2-4) (act.) to redeem, as a fig. extension of the act of purchasing something in the marketplace; (mid.) to make the most (of the time)			13	5				2