

**BIBLE STUDY GUIDES: SEEKING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT**

**A SERIES OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES**

**By Bob Young**

**GALATIANS**

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## **BIBLE STUDY GUIDES: SEEKING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

These Bible study guides reflect how I organize and understand the text, taking into account various exegetical factors—syntax, grammar, vocabulary, etc. Along the way, I share some observations that may help clarify passages that are difficult to understand. I have not tried to write about every passage where potential problems or differences in understanding exist. At times my notes may seem to be unnecessary comments on clear passages; in other passages some may ask why I did not include a comment. Such is the individualized nature of Bible study. Some of my comments are designed to help maintain focus on the original author's purpose for writing.

These guides are not intended to take the place of your own reading but are intended to provide help and an opportunity to check your understanding. For each chapter there is a content outline followed by textual notes. The content sections of these guides (including how the text is divided and how subsections are described) are drawn from a comparison of several modern translations and reflect the majority. The textual notes at times provide a periphrastic summary, but as noted above they are not intended to be complete. I have tried to address matters that may not be included in other sources. Texts that are easily understood and matters usually explained in other writings are not treated in detail.

My primary purpose is to make it easier for you the reader or student to analyze and understand the text. Ultimately, you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible and you cannot simply follow what a favorite preacher or commentator says.

### **INITIAL READING AND PARAGRAPHING**

In several previous writings, I have explained the importance of preparatory reading and personal study of the text. It is important that you learn to do this on your own. Once the text is familiar, I suggest you think about what themes you can identify and how you would mark the paragraph divisions, based on the subjects treated in the passage. Once you have completed this work, it is good to compare your paragraphing with that of several modern versions (or you can use the content section of these guides).

### **A NOTE ABOUT PARAGRAPHING**

Paragraph divisions are the key to understanding and following the original author's intent. Most modern translations are divided into paragraphs and provide a summary. Ideally, every paragraph has one central topic, truth, or thought. There will be several ways to describe the subject of the paragraph.

Only when we understand the original author's intent by following his logic and presentation can we truly understand the Bible. Only the original author is inspired—readers must take care not to change or modify the message. A first step toward integrity with the text is to develop the ability to analyze it and establish paragraphs.

The introductory information on this page is not repeated for each chapter. Students will find it helpful to return to this introductory section and reread it before beginning to study in a new chapter of the text.

## **BIBLE STUDY GUIDES: SEEKING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT**

### **Introduction to Galatians**

**By Bob Young**

#### **Summary**

Galatians is one of the earliest writings of the New Testament. It has been called “the Magna Carta of Christian liberty.” Written to combat the influence of Judaizing teachers in the Galatian churches, its message is that nothing is needed for salvation but Christ.

This letter, and Romans, was an important factor in the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. Luther said, “The little book of Galatians is my letter; I have betrothed myself to it; it is my wife.”

Galatians is part autobiography, part doctrine, part practical. The focus of the letter is on salvation part from Judaism’s emphasis on righteousness by works. Seen from another angle, the book of Galatians is Paul’s missionary manual, showing how he attempted to resolve a major problem in recently established churches. (See next section concerning recipients for an explanation of the two major views concerning the destination of the letter.)

Galatians speaks of getting the gospel message right. To paraphrase Paul, there is a “too hard” gospel, a “too soft” gospel, and a “just right” gospel. In Galatians Paul compares these versions of the gospel to show how the gospel he has proclaimed is the only gospel that can by which God justifies and changes lives. This message is still needed today, given that in Christianity one still finds some preaching a “hard” gospel and some preaching a “soft” gospel. Accepting the gospel by faith does not make salvation meritorious. Paul addresses two extremes: on the one hand one must not add to the gospel of Jesus, on the other hand Christian liberty is not license. The gospel does not lead to legalism; the gospel does not lead to license. This concept will be expanded in the Bible Study sections of this guide.

#### **Author, Recipients and Date**

Paul is identified as the author. The autobiographical section of the letter supports the identification. The date assigned to the letter depends on the identity of the recipients. The two theories concerning the recipients of the letter are typically called the “Northern Galatian Theory” and the “Southern Galatian Theory.” The first sees Galatia as composed of the ethnic Galatians of north central Turkey (Asia Minor). There is no biblical evidence of Paul visiting this region, although such a visit would be possible early on the second journey. A date in the mid-50s is usually associated with this theory. The second identifies the Galatian churches as those established on the first missionary journey, in the southern cities of Antioch of Pisidia, Lystra, Derbe, and Iconium. In this view, Galatia is not an ethnic region but an administrative area. If Paul is writing to the churches he has recently established, an early date is assigned. The subject of Galatians is closely aligned with the subject of the Jerusalem meeting in Acts 15 (A.D. 49-50). Paul could have written before the Acts 15 meeting (A.D. 49), but it seems slightly more likely that he wrote after receiving a consensus opinion from the church leaders and the church in Jerusalem (A.D. 50-51). The first date makes Galatians the first Pauline letter in the New Testament. The later date places it in the same time frame as the Thessalonian letters.

Here is a brief overview of some of the salient factors in determining the question. Galatians does not mention Silas or Timothy, but mentions Barnabas three times, which fits the

first journey. The visit to Jerusalem (Gal. 2:1ff) could be a visit not mentioned in Acts or could be the visit to participate in the Jerusalem meeting. The interaction with Peter (Gal. 2:11-14) concerning fellowship with the Gentiles could suggest a date for Galatians before the Jerusalem meeting. In this guide, Galatians is analyzed from the viewpoint that Paul is writing to the churches he had recently worked to establish, probably after the Jerusalem meeting of Acts 15.

Considering the time frame of interest for the study of Galatians, Acts records three visits of Paul to Jerusalem: Acts 9:26-30 after his conversion; Acts 11:30, 12:25 to deliver famine relief funds; Acts 15:1-30, the Jerusalem meeting. Galatians records two visits: Gal. 1:18, after three years; Gal. 2:1, after fourteen years. This suggests at least 17 years after Paul's conversion until the visit referenced in Gal. 2:1. The question of chronology must reconcile these two accounts of Acts and Galatians, recognizing that the different details can be explained by different perspective, different authors, different purposes of Luke and Paul.

How should we reconstruct the timeline of Paul's life? If Paul was converted (Acts 9) within a short period of time after Pentecost, A.D. 31-33 is a possible date. (In this timeline, we are dating Pentecost in A.D. 30). That places the Gal. 1:18 visit in 34-36 (reconciled with the Acts 9:26 visit). Paul then went to Cilicia (Acts 9, 11-12; Gal. 1), and spent a year in Antioch (Acts 11:25-26). He made a visit to Jerusalem in Acts 11-12 (as mentioned above). He made the first missionary journey in A.D. 48-49. There is hardly space to fit in the seventeen years of Gal. 1 and Gal. 2 before the first journey. Such would require his conversion in A.D. 30 or 31, almost immediately after Pentecost. The most likely option is that the Jerusalem visit of Gal. 2:1 (after 14 years) is the same visit as Acts 15. Perhaps the details of Gal. 2 occurred before the more official meeting recorded in Acts 15.

The following provides a timeline of approximate dates (A.D.) and locations:

50	Jerusalem assembly	Acts 15	Gal, 1-2 Thess written around this date
51-52	Paul in Corinth 18 months	Acts 18	
53-56	Paul in Ephesus 3 years	Acts 19	1-2 Cor, Rom written during this time
	Overland trip	Acts 19-20	
58-60	In Jerusalem and Caesarea	Acts 21-26	a little over 2 years
60-62	First Roman imprisonment	Acts 27-28	wrote Eph, Phil, Col, Philm
63-66	Additional travels	after Acts	wrote 1 Timothy, Titus
66-68	Last imprisonment	after Acts	wrote 2 Timothy

### **Purpose of the Letter**

By surveying the content of the letter, we can say that Paul wanted to accomplish at least the following: defend the authority, independence, and blessing of his apostleship; resolve the problem of the "too hard" gospel in which Gentiles were required to fulfill various aspects of Judaism to be faithful Christians; make certain that Christian liberty did not degenerate into "too soft" license and excess; and explain that the gospel does not depend on law but delivers one to life in the Spirit.

### **Outline of the Letter**

- 1-2 Prologue, against any other gospel than the one received by the Galatians (1:1-10)
- Autobiographical section to explain and defend his apostleship, his call by God, his interaction with other apostles was one of independence, his interaction with Jewish

leaders in Jerusalem shows that he was recognized by them, his interaction with Peter, and his changed manner of life.

- 3-4 Contrast of the law and the Spirit  
Contrast of the law and the promise  
Children of God by faith in Christ  
Paul appeals to his personal relationship with the Galatians  
Paul explains the relationship between Judaism and Christian faith through allegory based on the relationship of Hagar and Sarah
  
- 5-6 Freedom in Christ is based on love and avoids indulgence  
Life in Christ is by the Spirit  
Caring and relating through a new vantage point: not circumcision but the cross  
Closing remarks

Some have identified the typical doctrinal and practical sections in Galatians (1-4, 5-6). I think it better to see three sections: autobiographical and defense (1-2), doctrinal (3-4), and practical (5-6).

## **BIBLE STUDY GUIDES: SEEKING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT**

### **Galatians 1**

**By Bob Young**

[Note: it is suggested that the student read the introductory materials on page 2 of this guide before beginning an individual preparatory reading and analysis.]

#### **CONTENT**

The paragraphs included in the Content section of each chapter are merely guides. The student is encouraged to identify the paragraphs, and subsections within each paragraph, to assist in his or her own study. Often the division of this chapter into paragraphs is fairly standard across modern translations.

#### Outline of Chapter

1:1-5, greeting or salutation

1:6-10, there is only one gospel, there is no other gospel like it\*

1:11-17, Paul's apostleship, called by God

1:18-24, Paul's visit to Jerusalem after three years

*\*There is some question about the paragraph division. NET divides 6-9 and 10ff. See additional comments below.*

#### **STUDY HELPS**

#### Summary of Chapter

1:1-5 is one sentence in Greek

1:6-10, the normal thanksgiving and prayer are absent, perhaps reflecting the tension between Paul and his readers. Paul goes directly to the theme or purpose of the book.

1:11-17, these verses the first part of an extended autobiographical section that extends through Chapter 2. Paul's purpose is to defend his apostleship, and the gospel he proclaimed to the Gentiles.

1:18-24, Paul's visit to Jerusalem after three years and his contacts with the other apostles show his independence

1:1-5. This is one long sentence in Greek. Paul is identified as the author, asserting even in the greeting his divine authority as God's representative, anticipating that the letter will serve to refute any contrary claims. He identifies himself as an apostle in the best sense of the word—sent by Jesus Christ and God the Father. This also means that he has received the content of his gospel divinely. Paul was not an apostle according to the criteria of Acts 1, but was an apostle "called out of due season." The brothers who are with Paul are not named. The letter is unique in that it is sent to a group of churches (some think Ephesians is a "circular" letter, also intended for a group of churches).

Grace and peace are common elements in Paul's use of the Greek epistolary form.

1:4-5. Paul introduces the major points of his gospel: the resurrection of Jesus by God's power; Christ's substitutionary death; rescue and escape from the present age; and God's eternal will. Jesus gave himself to deliver us (set us free, liberate us; these translations fit the theme of the letter, cf. chapters 5-6).

"To whom be glory" serves as a brief word of praise (laudation).

1:6-9 (10). Paul says that the Galatians are turning away from the pure gospel by those teaching another gospel. "So quickly" refers to the fact that only a brief time has passed since they accepted the gospel Paul preached; or to the brief time after Paul's departure, or to how quickly they had changed their thinking when the false teaching was presented. The word Paul uses for turning away is often translated "deserting." It is a military term. They turned away by rejecting Paul's gospel. They were not only rejecting Paul, they were rejecting God who called them by grace.

They were following a different (heteros) gospel which was of an entirely different kind. Paul continues by saying that the different gospel they are following is not a gospel that is different but similar (allos, meaning "of the same kind"). The two words for "different" were sometimes synonyms with little distinction in the first century, but in the text it seems Paul wants to make the distinction: the gospel the Galatians were turning to was "totally different," not just "a little different but of the same kind." Various translations make the distinction in different ways. The NRSV says, "...not that there is another gospel." There are not two gospels. There are not two almost alike versions of the same gospel. What the Galatians are following is so different that it does not qualify to be called gospel. It is a perverted version of the gospel.

Some were troubling them and distorting the gospel. The distortion was apparently centered in the necessity of following Jewish customs, traditions, and teachings in order to be accepted as a Christian.

1:8. "Even if" is hypothetical (third class condition). The one who preaches a gospel contrary to the gospel preached by Paul and his companions is anathema (accursed, cut off). The almost parallel construction in 1:9 is assumed to be true (first class condition). The false teaching is not just hypothetical. It is occurring. This construction serves to accentuate Paul's point: such teachers and teaching are to be rejected!

1:9. This verse with the parallel construction just noted serves well to summarize the paragraph (vv. 6-9) and to accentuate Paul's purpose for writing and the theme of the letter. These verses are the theme verses of the book.

1:10. There is a question concerning paragraphing. Does this verse belong with vv. 6-9, or is it the beginning of a new section? It is easy to understand how this verse can be understood as the beginning of the autobiographical section, although some identify the next section as beginning in v. 11. Paul makes clear that he is seeking to please God, not human beings. (In v. 14, he describes a time in his life when he was trying to please human beings.) This verse (1:10) may provide closure to the first ten verses, and provide a transition to the following section where Paul shows that he was not in any way dependent on what human beings were teaching, saying, or thinking. The "if" of v. 10 is "contrary to fact" (second class condition). The meaning is made clear by a parenthetical insertion: "If I were still trying to please men (which I am not)...." Paul is first and foremost a slave of Jesus because Jesus is his Lord. The question

concerning paragraphing is reflected in this guide by separating the comments of this verse from the both the previous section and the following section.

1:11-17. These verses are the first section of an extended literary unit (1:11-2:14) in which Paul demonstrates various characteristics of his apostleship to demonstrate the validity of the message (gospel) he proclaims. Here is a brief preview of the development of Paul's defense: Paul was called by God and received his message directly (1:11-17); he did not consult with other apostles when he went to Jerusalem after 3 years (1:18-24); he was accepted by the "pillars" in Jerusalem on a subsequent visit after 14 years (2:1-10); he opposed Peter in defense of his gospel to the Gentiles (2:11-14).

1:11-12. The gospel Paul preaches did not originate with human beings. These verses repeat the claim in 1:1—not from men, not by human agency. (This repetition may be set forth as support for beginning the new paragraph with v. 11.) On the contrary, Paul received his message by revelation "of Jesus Christ." If the phrase "of Jesus Christ" is subjective genitive, Jesus Christ revealed it to Paul. If it is objective genitive, the revelation was about Jesus Christ. Many translations prefer the former, although vv. 15-16 mention that God revealed his Son. The subject of the previous paragraph was another gospel. Paul says his message is in fact the genuine gospel.

1:13-17. Paul recounts his former life as a persecutor and destroyer of the church. These things were known to the recipients of the letter. We do not know whether Paul had told them these things on a previous visit, whether the information was well known among the churches, or whether opponents were citing the change in Paul's life as evidence of Paul's duplicity. Formerly, Paul was well-advanced in Judaism (probably a reference to his rabbinical studies), surpassing many other students and zealously following another way of thinking—the traditions of his Jewish ancestors. How does one explain the change in the focus of Paul's life? Paul's answer is that God had acted in his life (vv. 15-16) to choose him, call him, and to reveal "to him" (literally, in him) His Son, with the purpose that Paul would preach the gospel message of Jesus to the Gentiles.

When Paul understood God's calling in his life, he did not seek knowledge or input from any human being or from those who were apostles, but went directly to Arabia before returning to Damascus. In the time of Paul, the northern part of Arabia extended almost to the city of Damascus. The text does not say that he was in Arabia three years, only that after three years he went up to Jerusalem. Remember Paul's purpose in this section: to show that he was called by God and received his message directly by revelation from God.

1:18-24. This is the second section in which Paul demonstrates the independence of his gospel. In this section he notes that even though after 3 years he went up to Jerusalem for 15 days, his contacts with leaders of the church on that visit were limited—he saw only Peter and James the brother of the Lord. After that brief visit, he went home (to Cilicia) and did not interact with the churches of Judea.

1:18-19. On his visit to Jerusalem Paul visited Peter with the purpose of getting information from him (the Greek word from which we get our word "history"). This verse literally reads "other of the apostles not I saw, except James the brother of the Lord." The text does not clearly describe James as an apostle. A possible reading is, "I did not see any other of the



apostles, but I did see James the brother of the Lord.” James was not an apostle in the sense of the Twelve or Mathias (who was selected in Acts 1). The word “apostle” means “sent one.” In the New Testament various Christians are described as “sent,” and the word is rendered in some translations as “apostle” (see for example 2 Cor. 8:23 where the word is used of messengers or representatives of the churches). For more examples of this usage, see Acts 14:4, 14 (Barnabas), Rom. 16:7 (Andronicus and Junias), 1 Cor. 4:9 (Apollos), and Phil. 2:25 (Epaphroditus).

1:20-24. Paul wants to verify the accuracy of his description of his life immediately after becoming a Christian (v. 20). He continues with a description of his travels to Syria and Cilicia (his home region). It is possible he reverses the order since Acts 9:30 describes his travel to Cilicia and Acts 11:25-26 describes a year in Antioch of Syria. His point is his independence from the original Judean churches, that he was not seeking approval from them, that they were only hearing of his activities on behalf of the gospel, and that they were glorifying God because of Paul.

## **BIBLE STUDY GUIDES: SEEKING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT**

### **Galatians 2**

**By Bob Young**

[Note: it is suggested that the introductory materials on page 2 of this guide be read before beginning your own preparatory reading and analysis.]

#### **CONTENT**

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#### Outline of the Chapter

2:1-10, a visit to Jerusalem, Paul's apostleship, gospel, and work recognized

2:11-14, Paul rebuke's Peter's inconsistency related to the Gentiles believers

2:15-21, Paul's gospel

#### **STUDY HELPS**

##### Summary of Chapter

2:1-14 continues the defense that began in 1:11

*[Note: 2:1-10 contains some interesting Greek constructions, but since the meaning is clear these will not be explained in detail in this study guide]*

2:15-21 describes Paul's gospel and introduces the next chapters. Paul foreshadows the accusations that were apparently being raised about his gospel of grace, matters he will consider more fully in the doctrinal section of chapters 3-4.

2:1-10. "After fourteen years" may refer back to the time of Paul's conversion or to his previous visit to Jerusalem. Paul's point is that he has not had much contact with the church in Jerusalem (and thus with the apostles). The two options mentioned place the Jerusalem visit of Galatians 2 either 14 or 17 years after Paul's conversion. If Paul was converted early, in A.D. 31-32, the visit occurs in A.D. 45 or A.D. 48, perhaps in parallel to the visit in Acts 11:30. If the date of Paul's conversion is seen as a little later, the Galatians 2 visit may be the same visit as that of Acts 15, the Jerusalem assembly in A.D. 50 (noting the presence of Barnabas in both cases). Despite the fact that there are some points difficult to reconcile, this latter possibility fits the context well.

2:1-3. Paul went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus, a Gentile, again by revelation (compare 1:12). Paul explained in a private meeting with some of the leaders the gospel he was preaching to the Gentiles, apparently to verify that his work among the Gentiles was being recognized. He is not seeking acceptance or approval, although in the context his concern is to show that the gospel he had presented among the Gentiles was a verified gospel that should not be changed. That his message was accepted was shown by the fact that the leaders in

Jerusalem did not require the circumcision of Titus. (Recall that the point of the Jerusalem assembly in Acts 15 was to address the question as to whether Gentiles had to submit to circumcision in order to be Christians.)

2:4-5. These verses appear to be parenthetical. Notice the smooth transition from v. 3 to v. 6, with another reference to the influential leaders (compare vv. 2, 6). Why had Paul felt it necessary to meet with leaders in Jerusalem? That is, what is “this matter” of v. 4? In the context, it appears to refer to the fact that Paul’s gospel did not include circumcision for the Gentiles. The question arose because of some with false motives or false pretenses, who were secretly inserted (passive) for the purpose of spying on our freedom (freedom from Jewish rules, including circumcision?) and for the purpose of enslaving (to Judaism, including circumcision?).

Several questions are difficult to answer. Who inserted these false brothers? Who are they (Jewish Christians, Judaizing teachers)? Where were they inserted (the Antioch church, the Jerusalem church, the Galatians 2 meeting, the Jerusalem meeting of Acts 15)? Paul’s point is unchanged by such detailed questions.

Paul and those with him did not yield (surrender) to these at all, so that the gospel Paul had proclaimed among the Gentiles (the truth of the gospel) might remain in place with you (the Gentile Christians to whom Paul is writing in the Galatian churches).

2:6-10. The influential leaders (v. 2) are not considered special in God’s sight, and they did not change Paul’s gospel. Recall Paul’s purpose: he is showing the independence of the gospel to the Gentiles which he received directly from God.

2:7-8. These verses contain more commentary and parenthetical insertions. Rather than adding anything (on the contrary), they (the influential leaders, or those in the meeting) accepted that Paul had been entrusted by God with taking the gospel to the uncircumcised—just as Peter to the circumcised. This description of the Gentiles as “uncircumcised” accentuates that the Gentiles can become Christians and remain uncircumcised. Both Peter and Paul were empowered (energized) by God as apostles in their respective works.

2:9-10. Paul names three specific church leaders who recognized the work of Paul and Barnabas among the Gentiles. (This James is the Lord’s brother, not the apostle brother of John.) The work of Paul and Barnabas was the result of grace given to them by God, and thus fellowship was extended with an agreement for preaching both to the Gentiles and to the circumcised (note the change of terminology from v. 8), and that Paul remember the poor, which he was eager to do. This could refer to taking the gospel to people of every economic standing, but more likely refers to the needs of the poor Christians in Jerusalem. In that case, the meaning would be that Paul, as he traveled extensively and developed Gentile churches, should remember the needs of the original Christians. This is mentioned in Acts 11:27-30, and Paul advanced the project among the churches (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8:9; Romans 15:25-27; Acts 24:17).

2:11-14. The timing of this visit by Peter to Antioch is not given in the Bible. It is not necessary to see the events of Galatians 1-2 as chronological, since Paul is simply recounting various evidences of his independence in the gospel message. If the events are seen as chronological, the Galatians 2 visit is more likely identified with the visit of Acts 11.

Paul's purpose is to show that his gospel was not dependent on the apostles. Paul opposed Peter personally because he was wrong. Paul then describes Peter's hypocrisy of eating with (accepting) Gentile believers before some Jewish believers arrived from Jerusalem (from James). (James has already been identified as in agreement with Paul's ministry and gospel, so the purpose of the reference in the context is unclear.) Once the visitors arrived, Peter quit eating with the Gentiles (he separated himself) because of fear of the circumcision (perhaps "circumcision party" gives a clearer meaning). This issue is not only circumcision. This text shows that the restrictions some Jewish Christians were placing on the Gentiles extended to points of fellowship such as eating together, items based in the Law of Moses. The question was not only whether Gentiles had to be circumcised, the question had to do with their obligation to maintain other requirements of the Law as well.

2:13-14. Other Jews (Jewish Christians) followed Peter in this hypocrisy, including Barnabas. Such actions were inconsistent (they were not walking straight) with the gospel Paul was defending and explaining (the truth of the gospel, compare 2:5). Paul spoke to Peter "before all." Paul confronted Peter in the presence of those already mentioned in the passage; whether "all" must be extended to include others of the church at Antioch is not clear from the passage. The meaning of Paul's statement is this: "if you as a Jewish Christian recognize that you are free to live as a Gentile without all of the restrictions of the Law and that you do not have to live like a Jew, why are you trying to put on the Gentiles requirements that you do not put on yourself?" Literally, "how are you requiring the Gentiles to Judaize?" This infinitive form appears only here in the New Testament.

2:15-21. The connection between these verses and the previous section is apparent, but it seems better to treat this as a separate paragraph because the principles set forth apply more broadly than to the specific situation with Peter in 2:11-14. It is unlikely that 2:15-21 is a continuation of Paul's conversation with Peter. The question is, "Who are the 'we' of vv. 15-17?"

2:15-16. Even we who are Jews by nature, and are not sinners from among the Gentiles, even we recognize that justification is not by works of the law but by the faith of Jesus Christ. ("Law" is anarthrous in Greek, without the definite article), but is clearly a reference to the Law of Moses. The principle would apply more broadly to any law system. In the context, Paul is referring to Jewish Christians. Jewish Christians understand that justification is not by the law but is by Christ. In fact, justification by the law is impossible (v. 16b). Justification is possible only through the faith of Christ Jesus, by the faith of Christ (2:16), for those who believe in Christ. While it is possible to interpret the phrase "of Christ" as objective genitive (faith in Christ), in this text and in many others (Rom. 3:22, 26; Gal. 2:20, 3:22; Eph. 3:12; Phil. 3:9) it seems better to understand a subjective genitive (faith of Christ, the faithfulness of Christ to God's will and purpose). The significance of this point is described in more detail in the Bible Study Guide for Romans, Chapter 3.

2:17-21. Since justification by the law is impossible, all are sinners under the law. But it is also true that all are sinners, even while seeking justification in Christ. When such is the case (as it always is, the first class condition reflects reality), does that make Christ an agent (minister) of sin? May it never be! With a little patience, one can follow Paul's reasoning in this text, even though it is a little obscure at first reading. "What I once destroyed" seems in the

context a reference to the Christian faith. As a Christian, Paul is seeking to build up what he formerly sought to destroy. He is illustrating the point of v. 17. All are sinners (transgressors), whether they are defined as such by the law, or whether the fact is to be assumed because they are seeking justification in Christ. The argument is built sequentially with the continued use of “for.”

2:19-21. Note the parallel construction: through the law (through trying to keep the law), Paul became dead to the law, and through Christ (seeking justification in Christ) he became dead (was crucified). In dying to the law (v. 19) he was free to live to God. In being crucified with Christ (v. 20), he was free to live by Christ living in him. (See Paul’s parallel to vv. 19-20 in Romans 6:1-23; 7:1-6). In Paul’s gospel, life is lived not by the Christian (it is no longer I who live) but through the Christ living within the Christian. Life is lived in the flesh but is by the faith (faithfulness) of Christ who lives in the Christian. (See Matt. 28:20; John 14:23; Rom. 8:10; Eph. 3:17 and Col. 1:27 for other New Testament references to the indwelling of Christ.)

2:21. In the gospel Paul proclaims, he does not nullify the grace of God. Rather, he accentuates God’s grace. Since righteousness (justification) cannot come through law, Christ’s death is essential to justification. Paul says it this way: If righteousness can come through the law (which it cannot!), Christ’s death is meaningless. That would set aside God’s grace. The only way to God is through the faith of Christ (Christ’s faithfulness in doing the saving work God sent him to do). If relationship with God is possible in any other way, Christ died for nothing.

This is the climax of Paul’s argument, and the transition point to the doctrinal section of Chapters 3-4.

## **BIBLE STUDY GUIDES: SEEKING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT**

### **Galatians 3**

**By Bob Young**

[Note: it is suggested that the introductory materials on page 2 of this guide be read before beginning your own preparatory reading and analysis.]

#### **CONTENT**

The paragraphs included in the Content section of each chapter are merely guides. The student is encouraged to identify the paragraphs, and subsections within each paragraph, to assist in his or her own study. The division of this chapter into paragraphs is fairly standard across modern translations.

#### Outline of the Chapter

3:1-14, Law or faith

3:1-5, the experience of the Galatians

3:6-9, Abraham's example of faith apart from the law

3:10-14, the curse of the law

3:15-22, the law and the promise, the purpose of the law

3:23-29, inheritance comes through promise by faith, sons of God according to promise

*\*Note: the larger paragraph may continue through 4:7, but in this guide the chapter division is being honored and the larger paragraph divided into two shorter but related paragraphs.*

#### **STUDY HELPS**

##### Observations about the Chapter

We noted previously that 2:15-21 provides the transition to Chapters 3-4. Chapters 3-4 may be characterized as the doctrinal section of Galatians.

3:1-5. The description "foolish" is literally "unthinking" (not + mind). "Bewitched" is figuratively deceived. Paul is urging a careful consideration of the false teachings of the Judaizers. Jesus Christ has been publicly proclaimed (set for in public placard or billboard) as crucified. The reference can mean the posting of an official legal notice. This is a reference to Paul's teaching and emphasis on Jesus Christ. Paul publicly, openly proclaimed Jesus Christ. The Galatians are turning away from what has been made known.

Paul focuses the contrast with a series of questions (vv. 2-5). Did you receive the Spirit through works of law or by faith? Are you foolish (compare v. 1)? Would you begin with the Spirit and try to finish with the flesh (by human effort)? Have you suffered so much for nothing? Does God then give the Spirit and work miracles through your works of law or through your faith?

3:3-5. In accepting and following the teaching of the Judaizing teachers, the Galatians were trying to fulfill their Christian commitment by keeping the Mosaic Law. The meaning of

“suffering” is not clear in the context. Perhaps the reference is to persecution by the Jews, perhaps to the doubt and upheaval in their faith. Is God’s provision (of the Spirit) so incomplete that you now have to supplement it?

3:6-9. The example of Abraham is an example of the power of faith. Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6; Ps. 32:1), and thus believers (those who are of the faith) are sons of Abraham. Paul sees in Gen. 12:3 and 18:18 a reference to God’s justification of the Gentiles by faith, that which Paul calls a proclamation of the gospel ahead of time (v. 8). The gospel to which Paul refers is the blessing of God upon all nations (Gentiles). Thus those who believe (are from faith) will be blessed with the believer Abraham. Paul’s first response to the primary question of vv. 1-5 (law or faith?) is to give an example of faith.

3:10-14. Paul’s second response to the primary question is to explain what happens to those who rely on works of law. They are under a curse because no one keeps the law. Paul cites Deut. 27:26 to prove this point. The Old Testament law becomes the declaration of unrighteousness and the curse. Paul repeats the claim of 2:16: no one will be justified by works of the law. On the contrary, the just or righteous person lives by faith (Hab. 2:4).

In v. 12, Paul returns to the possible exception—an impossibility. The law is not based on faith, but one who does all of the works of the law perfectly will live by those works. The problem is that the Old Testament is a clear declaration of human inability to keep the law. This is why God, in the gospel preached by Paul, opens a new way to justification, not by law but by faith. Christ redeems from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for humanity, a curse declared and fulfilled in Paul’s citation of Deut. 21:23: cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.

Finally, in v. 14, Paul says that the redemption accomplished by Christ allows the Gentiles to receive the blessing promised to Abraham, and that all by faith receive the promise of the Spirit. The promise to Abraham is blessing on the nations. The promise by faith is the Spirit.

3:15-22. To explain the relationship between the law and the promise, and the purpose of the law, Paul introduces an example from everyday life (literally, I speak according to man). Paul describes a will that controls an inheritance. The illustration is taken from the legal realm. Once the covenant (diatheke) is ratified or confirmed, it cannot be annulled. (The argument is similar to Heb. 9:15-20).

3:16-18. This is Paul’s response to the idea set forth by the Judaizing teachers that the Mosaic Law had superseded or replaced the promise to Abraham. The promise to Abraham was ratified (Gen. 15:12-21) and is thus cannot be set aside. Promises (v. 16) may be plural because of the number of times the promise was repeated, or it may reflect the various facets of the promise (blessing on the nations, the promised seed, innumerable descendants).

Paul’s argument here turns on the use of the singular “seed” referring to a descendant. Paul makes the reference to Jesus (not Isaac and not Israel). The promise is thus disconnected from the law. Paul makes clear his point (v. 17): the law was given 430 years after the promise and cannot cancel God’s ratification of the promise and thus cannot invalidate the promise. The promise has priority. The basis of the inheritance has not been transferred to the law so that the promise is no longer the basis. The inheritance was given to Abraham through the promise.

3:19-22. The logical questions that follow are, “What then is the purpose of the law?” and “Is the law against the promises of God?” First, in v. 19, the law was added because of transgressions, it was temporary (until the seed should come), and it was administered by angels through an intermediary. This shows the inferiority of the law in comparison to the promise.

3:20. An intermediary is needed only if there is more than one party. The context suggests that the promise was given unilaterally and did not depend on an intermediary. The promise was given directly from God to Abraham, without mediation.

3:21-22. The second question (v. 21) is whether the law worked against God’s promises. Paul repeats his previous negative response: May it never be! Paul proceeds to show how the law was actually pointing toward the ultimate fulfillment of the promise. Here is his line of reasoning: If a law able to give life had been given (second class condition, contrary to fact, meaning, it was not), righteousness could have come by law (impossible because the condition cannot be met). On the contrary, the Old Testament (scripture) imprisoned the whole world (literally, all things) under sin. Thus the law opened the way for the promise to function as God intended, as a blessing to the whole world. The promise was given to all who believe because of the faith of Christ (see 2:16).

3:23-29. The final section of the chapter shows that being sons of God (compare 3:7) and heirs of the promise depends on faith. The law was in effect before faith came. Under the law all were held as prisoners (compare v. 22) until the coming of faith. Paul describes the role of the law before the coming of faith as one of guardian (paidagogos, custodian, tutor, “nanny”), preparing us to be declared righteous by faith. When faith comes, the guardian is no longer needed.

3:26-27. In Christ Jesus, all are sons of God through faith. This is associated with baptism into Christ. Paul’s purpose is not to set in place another human work, but to indicate the nature of responsive obedient faith. Baptism is the biblical description for becoming a Christian. This is not metaphorical and it is not a work. Paul clearly associates it with faith. In baptism, one is clothed with Christ.

3:28-29. The barriers are removed. This does not mean that we are no longer Jew or Greek, no longer slave or free, no longer male and female. The distinctions remain, but in determining who has access to being a Christian by faith there are no barriers. The barriers mentioned were significant in Judaism. These factors no longer decide who can and who cannot approach God by faith. These distinctions are not a part of salvation. All are one in Christ Jesus; all belong to Christ; all are descendants of Abraham; all are heirs according to the promise (encompassing all that Paul has set forth in the chapter).



## **BIBLE STUDY GUIDES: SEEKING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT**

### **Galatians 4**

**By Bob Young**

[Note: it is suggested that the introductory materials on page 2 of this guide be read before beginning your own preparatory reading and analysis.]

#### **CONTENT**

The paragraphs included in the Content section of each chapter are merely guides. The student is encouraged to identify the paragraphs, and subsections within each paragraph, to assist in his or her own study. The division of this chapter into paragraphs is fairly standard across modern translations.

#### Outline of the Chapter

4:1-7, Sons and heirs of God (continued from 3:21-29)

4:8-20, Paul's concern for the Galatians, a personal appeal

4:21-31, Allegory of Hagar and Sarah

#### **STUDY HELPS**

##### Comments regarding the Chapter

- As reflected in the content outline, this chapter is fairly consistently divided into three sections. Some would identify the first two sections as vv. 1-7, 8-20; others as vv. 1-11, 12-20. The content of vv. 8-11 provides a smooth transition so that one can see the possibility of including it with either the preceding or the succeeding section.
- Verses 21-31 contain an allegory, described as such by the author (v. 24). Allegory is a type of extended metaphor and identifies a new application in past events, a meaning that has no relation to the meaning of the original author. Allegory identifies persons or events as symbols or representations that go beyond the original text. The use of allegory is difficult, and the modern student of the Bible must be careful about assigning an allegorical meaning to a passage. In this case, the inspired author identifies the allegory, thus giving it credence. Allegory looks backward to identify symbols; typology looks forward so that certain aspects of Christian faith are prefigured or symbolized in the Old Testament. Typology is anticipatory (seen from the viewpoint of the original 'type') and are fulfillment-oriented (seen from the viewpoint of the subsequent 'antitype'). Typology is generally more dependent on similarities than is allegory. Many parables have an allegorical aspect (parable of the trees, Judges 9; the vine, Psalm 80, compare Isaiah 5; Nathan's prophecy against David, 2 Samuel 12; Jesus' parables).

4:1-7. "But I say" is a way to continue and expand the previous point. Here is another illustration from everyday life, applied to those who are sons and heirs of God according to the promise (3:29).

4:1-2. The heir (son), while he is a small child too young to take responsibility for his own affairs, is placed under guardians and stewards until the date set by his father. This phrase,

“the date set by his father” is reflected in 4:4 when God sends Jesus at the appropriate time. While the heir remains in the status described (overseen and controlled by others), he is not different from a slave even though he is the (eventual) owner of everything. Paul has previously described the law as a guardian (3:24) and this section should be seen as an explanation of that point. Paul is describing the status of those under the law.

4:3. As children (minors), we were enslaved to “elemental things” of the world. This phrase focuses on the status as children. The Bible uses this idea of “elemental things” in various ways: (1) a child’s early training and basic teachings (Heb. 5:12; 6:1); (2) the basic elements of the physical creation (2 Pet. 3:10,12); and (3) elementary understandings (Col. 2:8,20). The first option may provide the clearest parallel to this passage. The Law as custodian was focused on basics and could not move beyond to elementary understandings to see the purpose of the Law in God’s eternal will.

4:4-5. At the right time (see 4:2), God sent his Son. Commentators have noted that the first century was the right time due to the Pax Romana (Roman peace), ease of travel on the Roman road system, and the presence of Koine (common) Greek as a common language. “Born of woman” may focus on Christ’s humanity or may point back to 3:28. “Born under the Law” shows that Jesus was born in the context of the law and was himself subject to the elemental things. Jesus, born under the law and participant in the law, was uniquely qualified to redeem those under the law (the phrase is repeated in 4:4 and 4:5). God bought back (redeemed) those under the law (Jews) so they could be adopted as sons.

Paul is describing in this section how and why the Jews were given access to justification, since all believers are heirs of Abraham through the faith of Christ.

4:6-7. Those who are sons (and heirs) receive special blessings. This verse declares that God sends the Spirit of his Son into the hearts of his sons. God sent his Son (4:4); God sends the Spirit of his Son (4:6). This demonstrates that one is part of the family, with intimate relationship (reflected in the cry ‘Abba’), and shows that the believer is not a slave but a son and an heir.

4:8-11. These verses are treated separately here due to the question about whether they should be included in the previous paragraph (with vv. 1-7) or the subsequent paragraph (vv. 12-20). The application of this verse (v. 8) is not clear. Is Paul continuing his description of the Jews, or is this a description of the Gentiles in their former separation from God? Those Paul describes here formerly did not know God and were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods at all. What it would mean that the Jews did not know God is hard to understand although the word translated “know” describes intimate relationship—something the Jews had lost in their focus on the law. The phrase “not gods” is often a description of idols, although it is also possible that he is referring to the elemental things (v. 3, and also v. 9 where the same Greek word is used again) or to the law which had become an idol in the sense that loyalty to the law had replaced loyalty to God.

The “now” of v. 9 is in contrast to the “then” of v. 8. Some of the Galatian Christians (likely referring to the Gentiles, but possibly referring to Jewish Christians) are apparently accepting the false gospel of the Judaizers. Paul describes this as a process of turning back again to the elemental things. Applied to the Gentiles, the idea is that of moving from the slavery of paganism to the slavery of legalism devoted to the law. Applied to the Jews, the idea is that of

moving back into the slavery of legalism devoted to the law, having formerly escaped it through belief in Christ. Regardless of the application, in v. 10 Paul describes a slavish regard for certain special days, months, seasons, and years. Paul is afraid that if the false gospel of the Judaizers is accepted in the churches of Galatia, that his efforts to present the authentic gospel to the Gentiles (in Galatia and in other places) will be hindered and the genuine gospel will be emptied of its power. He describes this as having labored in vain.

4:12-20. In this paragraph, Paul expresses his concern for the Galatians and makes a personal appeal. Verse 12 is difficult to understand. Without deciding whether Paul's reference is to viewpoints, to shared experiences past or present, or to other aspects of the relationship, this is Paul's call to mutuality, reflected in his use of the vocative term of address "brothers." The last phrase of v. 12 probably refers to the fact that during his visit to them they accepted him and his message. This understanding connects the last part of v. 12 with vv. 13-15.

4:13-16. In reminding the Galatians of their shared past, Paul gives several details concerning his visit to them. He preached the gospel to them despite his illness or infirmity (weakness of the flesh, referring to a physical malady). "At the first" can be translated "formerly" and does not necessarily imply a second. The Bible contains other references to Paul's physical problems (see 2 Cor. 12:1-10) and various possibilities have been conjectured. That Paul suffered from a problem with his eyes is one of the better options. The Galatians had not rejected Paul because of his physical condition but had welcomed him beyond expectation. "What has changed?" (literally, where then is your happiness, v. 15). Formerly, the relationship between Paul and the Galatians had been very warm. This reference supports the idea that Paul's physical ailment was some eye problem or disease. Why the radical change of attitude? Why is Paul now an enemy? Is it because he told them the truth?

4:17-18. These verses are not easy to interpret. The unstated subject of v. 17 would seem to be the false teachers. What does "they are zealous of you not well" mean? "Not well" may be translated "not sincerely." Paul sees through the selfish motives of the false teachers. Paul's meaning is something like this:

The zeal of the Judaizers for the Galatians is not good, because in fact the false teachers are seeking to exclude the Galatians. Paul says the reason for this is to make the Galatians jealous, that is, so the Galatians will want to reestablish relationship with the false teachers.

4:18-20. "It is good to be jealous for a good thing." What is the subject? This could be a reference to the Judaizers: being jealous for something is good if the motives or purpose are good. In view of the phrase that follows the statement, it is more likely a reference to the Galatians: you were jealous for me and the gospel when I was with you, and it is good to be jealous for these same things in my absence. The Galatians had done an about face in Paul's absence and had developed hostility in place of concern.

Paul expresses his concern for the Galatians by noting the tenderness of the relationship (children) and by the depth of his feelings (as childbirth). He desires their growth—that Christ be formed in them, and he longs to be with them and assure them of the depth of his love and concern with tenderness. "Change my voice" is likely something like "change or soften my tone of voice." Paul's attitude is in obvious contrast to that of the false teachers. Paul is at his wit's end. He does not know what else to do in face of the situation among the Galatian churches.

4:21-31. Paul appeals to them through an allegory. If you are so anxious to be under the law, would it not be good to listen to the law? "Under the law" hearkens back to vv. 4-5. This is the concluding paragraph of the doctrinal section and is built upon the concepts of seed, descendants, sons and heirs in chapters 3-4.

4:22-26. The details Paul sets forth to develop the allegory are straightforward and easily understood. The two sons of Abraham are contrasted, one being born according to the flesh (naturally) and the other according to the promise (supernaturally). The mothers of the two sons are the slave woman and the free woman, representing two covenants. Hagar represents Mount Sinai and brings forth slave children, corresponding to physical Jerusalem. Judaism in Paul's day was centered in Jerusalem. By contrast, Sarah represents the heavenly Jerusalem and freedom.

Paul's point is that the promise was never fulfilled in the experience of Israel under the Old Testament. Paul is not saying that the Jews were descendants of Hagar or Ishmael. This is an allegory. The Jews are "like" the experience of Hagar and Ishmael. The believers in Christ are sons of God by the promise "like" the Sarah and Isaac story.

4:27-31. This verse (v. 27) quotes Isa. 54:1. Paul's application of the allegory is that believers in Christ are the true descendants of Abraham by the promise and by faith, just like Isaac. During the lifetime of Ishmael and Isaac, there was enmity and persecution, and that is still the case. Those seeking to follow God naturally are persecuting those who seek to follow God by the Spirit. Paul then uses a citation from Gen. 21:10 to say that those who are like the slave woman cannot share the inheritance of the son of the free woman. The verse cited also suggests that the Galatians should throw out the false teachers. The conclusion: Christians are not children of the slave woman but are children of the free woman.

See the related article about the allegory on the next page.

### The Allegory of 4:21-31

What remains in this section is to make sense of the allegory and to understand how it contributes to Paul's argument about a proper definition of the gospel and the demands of the gospel.

Paul's argument is that the gospel of salvation is through faith by grace. His final argument is an allegory. An allegory takes a historical event and presents it as the vehicle to illustrate and to carry a parallel present truth. It is similar to the type and antitype analogies in the book of Hebrews. This is the only allegory in the New Testament.

An allegory does not prove the truth of a point. This allegory, which uses the Abraham and Sarah story, is Paul's way of illustrating his teaching. One can easily allegorize or spiritualize a text and be wrong about what the text says or means. Building an allegory does not prove the truth of Paul's position. It illustrates it, and says that God has operated in the same way previously. When we study church history, we learn that the early church went into apostasy by allegorizing and proof-texting their religion with unrelated passages. Untold errors can be taught while quoting the Bible. Allegory is not a way to discover truth. Only divinely inspired allegories can be considered an authoritative application.

One can describe an allegory as an extended metaphor. It is not a word or phrase, it uses an entire story. Allegories were developed about the 6<sup>th</sup> c. BC to avoid anthropomorphisms and crude literalisms. These were considered offensive to the Greek mind.

Paul's use of the story has three sections: the facts of the story, an interpretation of the story, and the contemporary application of the story. **First**, the story is set forth briefly in 4:21-23. The focus is on the different origins of the sons. One was naturally born, one was by promise. There could be other contrasts noted, but they are not the point of Paul's allegory. **Second**, Paul interprets the facts of the allegory by outlining the figurative meanings (4:24-27). The two women represent two covenants. The Sinai covenant (represented by Hagar) bears children who will be slaves. Paul expands the first half of the interpretation by connecting Hagar to the literal Mount Sinai corresponding to the present city of Jerusalem. This connection appears to depend upon Mt. Sinai as a past center of Judaism and Jerusalem as the current center of Judaism. **Finally**, Paul observes that the earthly Jerusalem experiences slavery and her children.

The connections can be set forth in a chart:

Hagar (slave)	Sarah (free)
Ishmael (origin-natural, fleshly)	Isaac (origin-promise, Spirit)
Old Covenant	New Covenant
Law	Promise/Gospel/faith/grace
Sinai, physical Jerusalem, Judaism	Jerusalem above, Christianity
Slavery and no inheritance	Sonship and inheritance

To conclude, Paul applies the allegory to the Galatians' experience (4:28-30). The heavenly Jerusalem is free and is the mother of Christians who are identified with Isaac and born by

promise. Just as the two sons were in conflict, with the ordinary son pursuing the promise or “spirit” son, so the conflict continues. Abraham expelled the slave woman and her son so that neither she nor her son would share in the inheritance which was reserved only for the son of the free woman. This story of Abraham’s treatment of Sarah and Hagar, Isaac and Ishmael, Paul uses to conclude that Judaism and its resultant “slavery” is no longer valid, but that Christians are called to liberty by the gospel of faith which is the ultimate fulfillment of the promise. To revert to a system which enslaved made no sense to Paul.

## **BIBLE STUDY GUIDES: SEEKING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT**

### **Galatians 5**

**By Bob Young**

[Note: it is suggested that the introductory materials on page 2 of this guide be read before beginning your own preparatory reading and analysis.]

#### **CONTENT**

The paragraphs included in the Content section of each chapter are merely guides. The student is encouraged to identify the paragraphs, and subsections within each paragraph, to assist in his or her own study. The division of this chapter into paragraphs is fairly standard across modern translations.

#### Outline of the Chapter

5:1-15, Christian freedom

5:16-26, walking in the Spirit

#### **STUDY HELPS**

##### Introducing the chapter

Chapters 5-6 are sometimes described as the practical part of Galatians. A fairly standard division of the book identifies three sections of two chapters each—autobiographical, doctrinal, and practical.

To combat the “too hard” gospel which placed additional demands from Judaism on the Galatians, and to avoid the “too easy” gospel of license, Paul sets forth what it means in a practical way to live as one justified by grace through the faith of Jesus.

These two extremes are reflected in Galatians 5: vv. 1-12 deal with the temptation to legalism, and vv. 13-15 deal with a perverted understanding of Christian freedom that results in license.

Paul’s gospel is a call to freedom that is expressed by love and service.

The last section of the chapter shows that Christian freedom is controlled by the Holy Spirit.

5:1. The first verse of the chapter is sometimes included as part of the final paragraph of chapter 4, as a summary of what Paul has previously written. In this study guide, we are maintaining the traditional chapter divisions as much as possible. “For freedom” suggests purpose, but it is also possible to understand the phrase as “with freedom or by freedom.” Regardless, freedom comes from Christ. Freedom in Christ is wonderfully freeing. Freedom in Christ lets us stand firm and rejects the slavery of Judaism.

5:2-3. Paul with his authority (compare 1:1, as an apostle?) clearly sets forth his point: if you submit to circumcision and seek God’s justification through the requirements of Judaism, Christ is of no benefit (literally, profits you nothing). The problem is larger than circumcision. Circumcision is only an evidence of the Judaizers’ dependency on keeping Jewish law in order to be a Christian. The question is how one is justified before God. Keeping one part of the Jewish

law (circumcision, for example) requires that one keep the whole law (compare Gal. 3:10, also James 2:10).

5:4. You who try to be justified by the law are estranged (alienated, cut off, separated) from Christ. The verb used here is also used in 3:17 and 5:11. The KJV renders it Christ is become “of no effect.” This reflects the basic meaning of powerless, unproductive, unprofitable, empty, or void. To seek justification (righteousness) by the law is to fall away from grace. Seeking justification by law excludes grace; grace excludes law. The doctrinal point of chapters 3-4 is that justification is by Christ only, without any additional requirements.

5:5-6. Paul mentions the role of the Spirit in anticipating justification by faith. This prepares the way for Paul’s extended explanation in vv. 16-26 of how walking by the Spirit enables Christian freedom and avoids license and ungodliness. In Christ Jesus, faith works by love and excludes the necessity of measuring Christianity by the standards that were being required by the Judaizers. The last phrase “faith through love working” is capable of two understandings. Does “working” go with faith or with love? In the context of Galatians and considering Paul’s point in this section, faith is primary. Faith works through love. (The other option sees love as primary and says faith is seen “through love working.”)

5:7-12. The singular pronoun is likely only stylistic, or perhaps a collective singular. Paul is combatting the false teachers. The Galatians were doing well, but now they have been hindered (“cut off” continues the race metaphor) from obeying (being persuaded by) the truth. The idea that they have been persuaded by something other than the truth leads to v. 8. The persuasion they are experiencing is not from God (1:6). The proverb of v. 9 underscores the danger of accepting a little false persuasion or a little false teaching. Therefore, v. 10 accentuates Paul’s confidence that they will not accept the different ideas that are being advanced by the false teachers. If the Galatians reject the false teachings, the judgment will fall on those who are troubling them.

5:11-12. These verses are difficult because we do not know all that was occurring. The Galatians likely understood Paul’s point better than we. “If I yet preach circumcision:” apparently the false teachers were accusing Paul of preaching circumcision, that is, in Paul’s absence they were saying that Paul was actually in agreement with them. In the historical context, this could refer to the circumcision of Timothy (Acts 16:3). Timothy was from Galatia (assuming the south Galatian theory, see the introduction). The accusation was not true, as is obvious by the fact that Paul is being persecuted and opposed by the false teachers. In the context, v. 11 is understood thus: to preach circumcision is to deny the need for the cross (and thus to remove the offense of the cross). In v. 12, Paul uses hyperbole (exaggeration, not to be understood literally), an exaggeration that in essence says “if a little cutting—circumcision—is good, why not do a little more cutting.” The Greek literally says “cut themselves off.” The word is often translated as castration or emasculation. An alternative understanding is that the false teachers would be separated from the Galatians, although in the context the first option is best.

5:13-15. These three verses conclude the argument, thus Paul restates the point (5:1). As reflected in the introduction to the chapter above, these last verses deal with turning freedom into license. Christian freedom is not an opportunity for indulgence, but rather is an opportunity for loving service one to another. Against the focus of the Judaizers on the necessity of circumcision to keep the law, Paul cites Lev. 19:18 to show that love is the



summary or fulfillment of the law (v. 14). Paul describes the impact of the false teachers on the Galatian churches are parallel to animals devouring each other. The ultimate end of letting such false teaching continue will be destruction.

5:16-26. The first verse of this paragraph obviously connects to the thought just presented in vv. 13-15. Paul says that the way to avoid indulgence and fleshly desires is to walk in the Spirit. Walk is a typical word used as a synonym for live. Live life controlled by the Spirit. The use of the double negative is not reflected in most translations. Literally, “walk in the Spirit and the lust of the flesh ‘by no means’ you will complete” (carry out, fulfill, gratify). The flesh and the Spirit are opposites. The contrast is apparent. A literal translation helps clarify the last phrase in v. 17: “For the flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, for these things oppose each other, lest you do whatever you want.” Paul’s point is that the opposition of these two forces is what makes it possible not to do whatever you want. The last phrase of v. 17 is parallel to the last phrase of v. 16. Paul’s point is not lack of control—it is exactly the opposite! Paul’s point is that by walking in the Spirit one can control fleshly desires. Further, walking by the Spirit frees one from being “under the law” (v. 18). Those who walk by the Spirit are not subject to the law and should not subject themselves to the law.

5:19-21. Paul continues the contrast with a list of the works of the flesh (vv. 19-21) and a list of the fruit of the Spirit (vv. 22-23). The list of sins has been analyzed and categorized in various ways. Since good descriptions of these sins are available in various Bible study resources, they are not described in detail here. Of interest as one thinks of modern applications is the inclusion of “lesser sins” in the list: enmities, hatred, strivings, and jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfishness, rivalry, dissensions (disagreements, arguments), factions and envy. The sins in the list are not distinguished as more or less important—all are works of the flesh. The phrase, “things like these,” shows that other similar sins could be included. Those who practice such sins will not inherit God’s kingdom.

5:22-23. In contrast with the first list, Paul describes aspects of the Christian life which are fruit (produced by) the Spirit. Does Paul purposefully use the word “fruit” to avoid confusion with the word “gifts”? The characteristics listed in these verses flow naturally from the presence of God’s Spirit within the believer. Again, there are good descriptions of these characteristics in other Bible study resources and the specific Greek words are not described in detail here. Against such things there is no law (v. 23).

5:24-26. The ones who are “of Christ” have crucified the flesh (see 2:20) with its passions (strong physical desires) and lusts. Now Paul uses two different Greek words—living and walking. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit (v. 25). To walk by the Spirit is to behave in accordance with the Spirit, showing the fruit of the Spirit. The last verses of the chapter summarize the paragraph (vv. 16-26), and also serve as a summary of the entire chapter. Verse 26 reflects the thoughts of v. 15, again highlighting the disastrous consequences of the false teachers.

## **BIBLE STUDY GUIDES: SEEKING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT**

### **Galatians 6**

**By Bob Young**

[Note: it is suggested that the introductory materials on page 2 of this guide be read before beginning your own preparatory reading and analysis.]

#### **CONTENT**

The paragraphs included in the Content section of each chapter are merely guides. The student is encouraged to identify the paragraphs, and subsections within each paragraph, to assist in his or her own study. The division of this chapter into paragraphs is fairly standard across modern translations.

#### Outline of the Chapter

6:1-10, the love and service of Christian liberty motivate the shared life

6:11-18, final admonitions and postscript

#### **STUDY HELPS**

6:1-10. “Brothers” is a typical transition and introduction of a new topic. This chapter continues the practical section of Galatians (chapters 5-6). Paul describes several actions that flow from a correct understanding of his gospel—love, service, relationships, caring, life in the Spirit.

6:1. If a fellow-Christian (a man, used in a general sense applying to both males and females) is discovered in a trespass (likely referring to any kind of wrongdoing), the spiritual ones are to restore such a person. Literally, “if one is overtaken” (surprised), but the context shows that other Christians are aware of the wrongdoing. Restoration is to be done in a spirit of meekness, taking careful notice of oneself, to avoid temptation. The temptation could be to participate in the same sins; more likely the temptation is to pride, being judgmental, and failing to forgive.

6:2. To carry one another’s burdens fulfills the law of Christ (compare 1 Cor. 9:21). Two different words are translated burden or load in v. 2 (baros) and v. 5 (phortion). The word in v. 2 is the very heavy burden of a pack animal. The word in v. 5 is used of a soldier’s pack.

6:3-5. These verses have to do with properly assessing oneself. If anyone thinks (himself/herself) to be something while in fact being nothing (v. 3), such is self-deceiving. A proper self-understanding will smooth interpersonal relationships, which is a major underlying topic in vv. 1-10. Each must test or prove his own work (v. 4) so that he will have reason for boasting in himself, and not in comparing himself to another. Each must bear (same word as v. 2) his own burden (the words in v. 2 and v. 5 are different; see comment on 6:2). The point is that each one must carry personal responsibilities, not depending on others to do what one should be doing for oneself.

6:6-10. These verses continue the theme of personal responsibility and interpersonal actions from the previous verses. Those who receive teaching in the word should share with the teacher. “In all good (things)” is ambiguous. The warning against deception is literally “do not be led astray.” We get our word planet, which means wanderer, from this Greek word. The

specific point of the deception is likely described in what immediately follows. God will not be ridiculed or made fun of. Thus, each will receive according to what he sows—whether of flesh or Spirit (v. 8). The Spirit is the source of eternal life. The contrast of flesh and Spirit goes back to 5:16-17. Do not lose heart (weariness, discouragement) in doing good, because we will reap at the right time if we do not quit (fail, give up). Opportunity in v. 10 is “as we have time” (compare to 5:13, “as advantage”). The admonition of v. 10 repeats the phrase “the good”—let us do good to all but most of all to those of the household of faith.

6:11-16. The personal note of v. 11 likely shows that Paul is writing these words with his own hand, to verify authenticity. The idea of writing in large letters has been cited as possible support for problems with his eyesight.

In this section (vv. 12-16) is a summary of the letter. Those who want to look good outwardly are demanding circumcision. Paul is suggesting that the false teachers were concerned about outward signs of religion, to avoid persecution. The meaning seems to be that by demanding that the Gentile believers be circumcised, they would avoid being castigated and rejected by Jewish brothers who had not accepted the message of the cross.

6:13. How is it possible that by simply demanding circumcision for Gentile believers that the Jewish Christians could avoid being rejected by non-Christian Jews? If this is understood as the logical question, Paul’s response makes sense. Those who are circumcised (whether unbelieving Jews or Jewish Christians) do not keep the law, so they do not demand that all Jews keep every aspect of the law. Thus, the false teachers are only interested in circumcision so they can boast about keeping the law with regard to the outward ritual.

6:14-16. Paul’s boasting (and dependence) is only in the cross. In the cross Paul has experienced crucifixion to the world (2:20). He has died to the world and the world has died to him. In the word “world” Paul is referring to concern for the fleshly, temporal things. From the death described in v. 14 comes new creation. When one understands new creation in Christ, circumcision and uncircumcision are nothing. Understanding what God does in Christ makes the whole question about which the false teachers were so adamant a non-issue. Those who understand and live by this rule (canon, measuring stick), are in fact the Israel of God, the true people of God, sons and heirs.

6:17-18. Paul wishes an end to the trouble he is experiencing for preaching a gospel that includes Gentiles. He has suffered physically (his stoning in Acts 14 gives one possible example). The lack of personal references in this letter addressed to multiple churches reminds one of Ephesians, often seen as a cyclical letter intended for various churches. The final greeting is much like those in Paul’s other letters.