

Galatians Study

by

The Rev. Dr. Justin S. Holcomb and
Ross Byrd

Christ Episcopal Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

www.christchurchville.org

Studies in Galatians

“I do not set aside the grace of God,
for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”
Galatians 2:21

We’ve chosen this as the “theme verse” for the study, in hopes that St. Paul’s powerful and unnerving words here to the Galatians will continue to dwell in your minds throughout this entire study and beyond. As we will soon see, the people of the church in Galatia, who had previously received the gospel of grace through Paul and put their trust in Jesus Christ to be their Savior, had since, under pressure from certain Jewish Christian teachers who wanted to reinstitute the old Law as a means to salvation, begun trusting again in their own efforts and in all their old religious duties to achieve right standing before God. And as Paul explains, by doing this they were not only “setting aside” the grace of God, but were also, whether knowingly or not, proclaiming that the death of Christ, God’s only Son, was utterly worthless.

In this letter, Paul reminds us, not only of our own helplessness before God, but even more so, of the glorious freedom that we have in *grace* through faith, that is, through simply trusting that “what the law was powerless to do [i.e. *what we could not do*], *God did* by sending His own Son” (Rom. 8:3). That’s the gospel. We didn’t. He did. And therefore, we are His, and He lives in us, and He will be ours forever. This is the kind of freedom everyone wants and the kind of freedom many people realize they are missing, but we are confused about what true freedom is and how to experience it. With the theme of freedom in mind, let’s look at what St. Paul wrote to the church in Galatia.

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In designing the discussion questions, we referred to Tim Keller’s study on Galatians, “Gospel in the Heart.” The following questions are directly from or indirectly influenced by Keller’s study: week 2, questions 1 and 2; week 6, question 2; week 9, questions 1 and 2; and week 10, questions 1-3.

Week 1: Overview

I. Read Acts 15:1-12 – This serves as historical background of the issues found in Galatians and gives insight into Paul, the author of Galatians.

II. Please read this overview of Galatians.

Paul's letter to the church at Galatia served as a warning to that church, and serves today as a warning for us, not to lose the heart of the gospel.

The church at Galatia had been getting some bad teaching from Jewish Christians (Paul calls them Judaizers) who did not understand the concepts of grace and freedom. They were teaching that God still required everyone to observe certain rituals and statutes in order to be accepted by Him as a father. Paul reminds the Galatians that they were accepted by God in the beginning not through rituals or obedience to strict behavioral codes, but through faith in Him which is given by the Spirit. He then asks them why they think God would suddenly change the rules! The book serves as a wonderful reminder that God loves us because He chose to love us even when we were totally unlovable. This great news can give us rest and peace since we don't need to worry about earning it or losing God's love.

The letter to the Galatians can be outlined like this:

Introduction (1:1-5)

Accusation (1:6-10)

Divine Nature of Paul's Gospel (1:11-2:5)

Authoritative Nature of Paul's Ministry (2:6-16)

God's Spirit is Received by Faith, not Ritual (2:17-4:8)

Ritual-Based Religion is contrary to God's Plan (4:9-5:12)

How to Live in God's Freedom (5:13-6:10)

Summary (6:11-18)

This letter was probably written in 48 AD, when the questions about what would be required of Gentile believers to enter the community of God was hotly debated, but not yet settled at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15).

There are numerous themes in Paul's letter to the Galatians. But here are three specific themes to keep an eye out for.

Christian Liberty> Paul vehemently defended the idea of salvation by faith. He refused to allow the Judaizers to convince the Galatians that God would not accept them or bless them unless they involved themselves in Jewish rituals, especially circumcision.

The Gospel> Paul takes great pains in this letter to show the Galatians that the gospel which he preached was not something he made up, nor was it something he heard from others, but something that God Himself taught him. Paul's gospel was God's gospel, and should not be warped or exchanged for any contradictory teaching.

Ethnic Diversity> Galatians, more than any other letter, stresses that Christian faith breaks the boundaries of ethnicity. There is no one cultural construct that is best fit for God's good news. Rather, the gospel can be accepted and applied in any cultural context, and this should not be done mechanically but with wisdom and sensitivity.

III. Questions:

1. What are your thoughts about the incident in Acts 15?
2. What is “the Law” and how does it relate to “the gospel”?
3. How do you define “faith”?
4. What is grace?

(For more on these themes, see the Appendix 2 and 3.)

IV. This is how one theologian addressed these major questions. Please read and discuss this passage from Paul Zahl’s *The Christianity Primer* (pages 77-79).

Here is the short form of St. Paul’s teaching of being saved by faith, or more technically called “justification by faith.” Human beings try to do what is right on God’s terms. God’s terms are embodied in the Law. We cannot obey the Law, first, because we are not able to. We are not good enough and are not gifted enough and are not strong enough. Second, we break the Law because we *want* to. There is something about us, that when we are told what to do, we immediately desire to do the opposite. So the Law fails. The Law fails to accomplish its work in us because human beings cannot do it and also because they will not do it. We therefore cannot justify ourselves.

Paul glimpsed this fact when Christ appeared to him, nullifying Paul’s past. [Jesus had appeared to Paul in the midst of his fervent persecution of Christians, and therefore of Christ Himself, for the sake of this ‘Law,’ and called him through *grace* to be His. It was clear then to Paul that he had done *nothing* to deserve this call.] Thinking on that, he came to believe that what God requires of us is faith, which is child-like trust. This is the only thing God requires of a person. And trust seems to open God’s heart too.

Paul wrote this down in pure form in Romans 5:1-2: “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have obtained access to this grace in which we now stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God.”

Thus, God has loved the human race in a new way in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. This has put faith, which is child-like trust, in place of Law-keeping as the key to relating to God.

This was a new idea in the ancient world, where religion had always been based on something human beings did to satisfy, appease, or please God. All the ancient religions worked that way. But Paul taught that nothing we do in ourselves is ever enough. Nothing we do in ourselves will ever satisfy. God has to work the work of divine loving and initiative. All we need to do is open our whole heart to it.

Another word for this concept is *grace*. *Grace* means unmerited favor. We don’t deserve it. We get it anyway. It is like romantic love that endures. I am loved. That is everything. And belovedness evokes response, which, unfailingly, is love itself.

Week 2: Galatians 1:1-10 – Paul’s Accusation

You can't add to or compromise the gospel without losing it entirely.

I. Paul’s definition of the gospel

Before we read Galatians 1:1-10, it is important that we understand what Paul means by the word “gospel.” It is the message of “good news” and it is perhaps best summed up in Romans 3.

Romans 3:10-12 – “No one is righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away...there is no one who does good, not even one.”

Romans 3:20-25 – “[N]o one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; rather through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood.”

Romans 3:28 – “For we maintain that a man or woman is justified by faith, apart from observing the law.”

II. Please read Galatians 1:1-10 and discuss these questions:

1. Read some of the introductions to Paul's other letters (Appendix 1) and compare his tone in those to his introduction in Galatians.

2. What stands out to you about the gospel message just from what Paul says in passing about it in 1:3-6? Of what is Paul accusing them? What could he possibly mean by “a different gospel” (v. 6) or “perverting the gospel” (v. 7)?

3. What do you think may be some other forms of this same error that we might find in the Christian community today?

4. One of the things the Galatians were doing, according to Paul, was abandoning “grace” and then turning to a different gospel. Why would *they* have turned away from what Paul calls “good news” in order to accept a different teaching, which was really no “good news” at all?

5. Discuss why abandoning grace can be more appealing to *us* than holding onto grace. Could be grace offensive to us as well?

III. Closing Summary: Why grace can be offensive

The Good News: Grace

Grace is God’s free, abundant gift, not simply for those who “do not deserve it,” but for those who have done *nothing* to deserve it and have done countless things to deserve the very opposite. It is the kingly father running out to meet his shameful, prodigal son, throwing his arms around him and kissing him, and saying to his servants, “Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Let’s have a feast and celebrate.” Even more, it is the King Himself, forsaken and nailed to a cross, not simply to forgive and to save those who had done

wrong, but to justify the very ones who were mocking Him, whipping Him, spitting in His face, and *nailing Him to that cross*. It is saying to the criminal next to Him, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” It is choosing the man who denied Him three times that day, to be the leader of the others after He was gone. And it is choosing the man who had been His most zealous persecutor to be His most outstanding preacher. “The Most High is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.” (Luke 6:35) This was Jesus Christ’s message, from his lips and in his actions. Grace has not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

Our Problem with Grace: “where sin increased, grace increased all the more”

Why would anyone turn away from such good news? Well, if we were being persecuted because of it, as were the Galatians, that would probably make it less attractive. But still, it is such an abundant gift, why would anyone not hold on to it for all the persecutions in the world? There is another reason: Many of us, if we’re honest, have come to think that our Lord’s kindness to the wicked and calling sinners—this “grace”—is a beautiful idea, but it’s a little over-the-top; it’s more than we need. And aside from that, it’s idealistic and unrealistic. That’s why we put our trust in things like jails and wars and punishing our children. Grace is problematic and sometimes messy, and all of us could give a few reasons why.

For starters, it’s not for good people. There’s nothing for them, it seems. Grace may be wondrous music to the ears of prodigal sons and daughters, but what about the siblings who have never left home and have always tried to be obedient to their father? I know I’m not perfect...nobody is. We all make mistakes and need a little forgiveness here and there, and we are so grateful to have a forgiving God. But if He’s going to welcome murderers and prostitutes into His courts and give them great rewards and call them His true children...that is dangerous! It’s reckless! One has to have boundaries and limits, don’t they? Imagine if we started functioning that way in the world – treating criminals as though they were innocent? And sure, maybe some people will need a little more than a little forgiveness – granted. But this business about forgiving others 70 x 7 times is just welcoming abuse! It’s bound to make somebody into a doormat, and you can’t tell me God would allow something like that - such injustice! Isn’t God just?

God’s Answer: “where sin increased, grace increased all the more”

And strangely enough, to all our questions and complaints and demands from this fallen world, God in His great love has answered *everything* “YES” in Jesus Christ: “Yes, I have promised my kingdom to those who, in your eyes, deserve it least, and who you think have done nothing to earn it. But I do not give grace with your conditions. Yes, I treat those you call ‘criminals’ and ‘sinners’ as though they were completely innocent, because they *are* innocent – I have made them so. You were not wrong to call them what they were, but now they are my children and do not call anything impure that God has made clean. And yes, this is dangerous, and yes it is reckless, and yes it has welcomed abuse, and yes it has made someone a doormat. But that someone is not you—it was my son, Jesus. The danger is not yours—it’s mine. And, yes, I have allowed it. Such injustice! Such injustice has never been seen or known as that which He endured on the cross for your sake. And yes, you were right to say that grace is not for good people, but my child, you are not good, nor have you been, nor can you be without me. Grace is for you. Yes, grace is problematic, but it is also glorious. Its problem has been mine to bear, its glory will be yours.”

Week 3: Galatians 1:11-2:5 – Paul Being Called By God

*The gospel is not humanity's good news of finding God,
but rather God's good news of finding and redeeming humanity.*

I. The Story of Paul's Conversion (from Paul Zahl's *The Christianity Primer*, pages 60-62)

It is important to have an idea of Paul's experience to understand why he can write such a letter to the Galatians.

Saul was a highly educated Orthodox Jew with a passion for the Torah (i.e. the Law) and a position of total commitment to living it out in every aspect of his life. Saul (now become Paul) wrote later about himself that he had been "of the people of Israel,...a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law blameless." (Philippians 3:5-6).

Acts 9 tells the story of Paul's famous conversion to Christianity. In the aftermath of Stephen's death and the resulting flight of Christians from Jerusalem [Stephen was a Christian who had been stoned to death after proclaiming the gospel of Christ to a crowd of irate Jews, and as a result many Christians fled to other towns], Saul embarked on a trip by horseback to the city of Damascus, in Syria, to identify and arrest certain Jews there who had become followers of Jesus. As Saul traveled along the road to Damascus, Jesus appeared to him in the miracle of a bright light and a voice that only he could hear. The voice said "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

"Who are you Lord?" asked Saul, who had fallen from his horse and lay prostrate on the ground in shock. The voice replied, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; but rise and enter the city and you will be told what you are to do."

So important was the Jewish Saul's conversion into the Christian St. Paul that Paul himself told it again and again to his hearers. The writer of Acts, who was probably St. Luke, included the story three times in his book (see chapters 9, 22, and 26).

II. Please read Galatians 1:11-2:5 and discuss these questions:

1. Why would Paul be talking about his experience and his authority?
2. What does Paul's conversion tell us about grace?
3. Referring to Galatians 2:4, how is it that we also try to enslave those who are experiencing the radical freedom of the gospel? Why do we do that?

III. Closing Summary: Grace begins with God

What is so beautiful about this passage is that Paul is trying to make it completely clear that he did not come up with this stuff. He is not claiming to have found a way to answer the problems of humankind, but rather that God *has answered* the problems of humankind in Jesus Christ – that *He* is the answer. It's the perfect way to begin his message – as if he's saying, "In this letter, I am going to preach grace to you, and therefore I must begin by making it very clear that I am only preaching to you because of grace, that is, because of God. Grace always points to Him, for only He

is good, and every good thing comes from Him. You must know that. This gospel is His answer, not mine. It is His wisdom, not humanity's. For He chose me, I did not choose Him.”

Paul felt the need to explain the same thing to the Corinthians in the beginning of his first letter to them, that he was called “to preach the gospel – not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross be emptied of its power” (1 Cor 1:17). He goes on to say this: “Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let him who boasts boast in the Lord’” (1 Cor 1:26-31).

“It is because of Him...,” Paul writes. Everything in the gospel of grace, even the very fact that we believe, points to Him. It is all a gift. Therefore, the value of Christian faith rests not in the fact that we believe, but in the person in whom we are believing—Jesus Christ.

Week 4: Galatians 2:5–21— “...in line with the truth of the gospel”

*The gospel is not just the way to enter the kingdom,
but a new way to understand everything and to face every problem..*

I. Summary on Jew/Gentile Issues in the Early Church

[This summary is from Tim Keller’s study, “Gospel in the Heart.”]

In the very early years of Christianity, when the church was almost completely made up of Jews, the question of whether or not Gentiles, that is non-Jews, should be included, and if so under what guidelines, became an issue of major debate. There were a number of Jewish Christians (we know they existed in Galatia) who taught that, even as a Christian, one could only be accepted by God and made clean if he continued to follow the strict rituals and laws regarding cleanliness given to the Jews in the OT.

The irony of this teaching, however, was that Jesus Christ, who they claimed to follow, constantly rebuked those who propagated the ceremonial law of the OT (Mt. 15:3-20) as a means to actual purity before God. Most of these teachers were called “Pharisees,” and about them, Jesus had almost nothing good to say: “They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them” (Mt. 23:4). He called them “hypocrites” and “white-washed tombs,” those who honored God with their lips, but whose hearts were far from Him. And yet still, beginning with his very first disciples, the earliest Jewish Christians did not understand him at all.

Even Peter, in the midst of his powerful missionary journeys after the resurrection, forgets this truth in Acts 10. God had sent Peter a vision to show him why the ceremonial law was finished. He saw a great sheet full of animals forbidden for eating in the OT, and he heard a voice saying, “Kill *and eat*.” (Acts 10:13). Peter replied, “Surely not Lord. I have never eaten anything impure or unclean” (v. 14). But God responded, “*Do not call anything impure that God has made clean*” (Acts 10:15). Peter’s response showed that he had already forgotten completely what Jesus Himself had emphasized not long before: “Listen and understand. What goes into a man’s mouth does not make him ‘unclean,’ but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him ‘unclean’” (Mt. 15:10-11). In other words, men are unclean, and therefore must also be made clean, from the inside-out, not the other way around. And only God can purify the heart. Immediately afterward, Peter is led to meet a believing, repentant Gentile named Cornelius, and watches as all the uncircumcised Gentiles in his household receive the Holy Spirit. There he realizes: “*God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him...*” (Acts 10:34-35). Peter could finally see that no one was made clean before God by their own efforts to make themselves clean, and that even “Gentile sinners,” who made no effort at all, were accepted by God through faith in Christ. Thus, he begins eating with Gentiles despite a great deal of criticism (Acts 11:2), and soon goes back to Jerusalem to proclaim to all the believers there that, “God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life!” (Acts 11:18)

But for Jewish Christians such as Peter, the pressure of the OT ceremonial law seemed to always hang over them, causing much doubt about Grace, not to mention a great deal of persecution for those who did abandon it for the sake of Grace. No place, perhaps, was the pressure more felt than at meals when Gentile believers were present. As Tim Keller explains it, “Every Jewish Christian faced a ‘collision’ of two beliefs when it came to eating with Gentiles. The Jewish tradition was that you could make yourself clean through your own diligence. The Christian tradition was that through Christ (and only through Christ) all believers were ‘clean’ and acceptable to God.”

II. Please read Galatians 2:5-21 and discuss these questions:

1. Why did Paul think that Peter and the others were “not acting in line with the truth of the gospel” (v.14)?
2. In light of Peter’s innumerable encounters with God’s grace, why would he have done what he did?
3. Paul says in v. 19: “For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.” How did the law make him die? How does dying to the law make him live *for* God?
4. What part does the cross of Christ play in all this?

III. What is this business about “dying” and how could that possibly be good?

This concept can be hard to grasp, and we are only beginning to deal with it in this study series (though it appears countless times in the NT). It is important, and it will become more clear as we read on in Galatians. But for now, let us consider this point: How can a person be “born again” unless his or her current life in some way ends? How can a person be resurrected unless he or she dies? How can we be “a new creation” unless the old has gone? Christianity is not about improvement, it’s about a new creation. And there must be death if there is to be resurrection.

But what could Paul have meant by “dying to the law”? The short answer: Paul speaks of a person’s original existence, by his natural birth, as being alienated from God and enslaved by what is called “the law.” The law declares that we are sinful (alienated from God), and because “the wages of sin is death,” it says that we must die. But the gospel declares that Christ has died in our place to bring us to God, that we have been “set free from sin,” and that “the gift of God is eternal life.” And by believing in Him, we actually have fellowship with Him—both dying with Him to our old existence as slaves to the law and to sin, and being resurrected with Him into new life. We are truly “born again.”

One of the effects of this death (which we will see frequently in Galatians) is that because we have died, the law is no longer our master, but Christ (who is our freedom) is our master. And we should no longer be moved by the law, but by Him. Paul gives an illustration of this “dying to the law” in Romans 7:1-4: “Do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to men who know the law—that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man. So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.”

Week 5: Galatians 3:1-14— Faith or Law, Promise or Curse?

Believing the gospel is to repent, not just for sins, but for self-righteousness.

I. Introduction

In this passage, Paul offers the Galatians (and us) only two options: having faith or observing the law. Paul uses Abraham as an example to highlight the difference between the *righteousness of the law* and the *righteousness of faith*. He argues that because of his faith Abraham was declared righteous before he ever did anything.

In this week's study we will discuss these questions: How does the law function and does it bring us promise or curse? How does faith function and does it bring us promise or curse? The phrase, "faith credited as righteousness," is repeated throughout the bible (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3, 9, 22-23, and Galatians 3:6). What in the world does it mean?

II. Please read Galatians 3:1-14 and discuss these questions:

1. What was the "goal" of the "foolish Galatians" in verse 3? What's wrong with trying to attain their goal by human effort?
2. Paul breaks down two different teachings that propose to attain this goal: one he calls "law" and the other "faith." How does "law" function, according to Paul? How does "faith"?
3. What are ways that we presume to be able to get to God? How are we trying to attain "spiritual maturity" or righteousness by human effort and not relying on the Holy Spirit?
4. In verse 10-11 we are told, unless we do everything in the law, we are "cursed," and no one is declared righteous by the law. How are these problems taken care of by Christ? How can God credit us as righteous? (see vv. 13-14)

II. Please read and discuss this closing summary.

This is a heavy section, so we thought it might be best to address some of the questions raised here directly. First off, the "goal" of the Galatians, which they were trying in vain to reach, may be called many things. "Righteousness" seems to be the best word for it—that is, to be right before God. "Justification" is another term commonly used by St. Paul, meaning just about the same thing. Basically, the Galatians sought everything from "spiritual maturity" to "eternal salvation." But what is most powerful of all is the word St. Paul uses in verses 2, 5, and 14: "The Spirit." That is, the Spirit of God. It had been God Himself that the Galatians were trying to "attain" by their own efforts! After God had already promised *and delivered* His very self—clearly portrayed to them in Jesus Christ (by incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension) and abundantly given to them in the Holy Spirit—they were still trying to attain Him by their own means!

Thus it may be argued that the entire purpose of Paul's letter was to expose this deceptive and deadly line of thinking and call the Galatians back to the true gospel of grace. He's simply stressing that all hopes to "attain" God and God's righteousness are delusional, and that they will at best only lead to self-righteousness (which is no righteousness at all) and inevitably, to death. Human beings cannot attain the God of the universe. And furthermore, God has not promised His righteousness by means of the law! Verse 2 reads, "Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law or by believing what you heard?" Or verse 6: "[Abraham] *believed God* and it was credited to him as righteousness." And so, using the example of Abraham, Paul draws a strict distinction between the *righteousness of faith* and the so-called *righteousness of the law*. One is true, the other false.

And in case anyone wished to somehow blend the two together in their own formula for salvation, Paul makes it quite clear in v. 12 that “the *law* [which, by working, seeks to earn a reward] is not based on *faith* [which, by trusting, seeks to depend on a gift].” But how does each claim to succeed?

The law (v. 12) functions according to how obedient we are to the law. If we do what it requires, it promises that we will “live.” But Paul reminds us in v. 10 that one of the things the law says is that if someone does not continue to do everything written in law, they are “cursed.” In other words, if one presumes to be saved by the law, he must become a slave to the law and follow it perfectly all the time, or else it will not allow them to live. No one can do this, and thus we find that what was intended to bring life actually brings death, and that slavery to the law is torment.

Faith, on the other hand, functions according to *another’s* obedience, not our own. It trusts in someone else’s work. Paul explains this best in Rom. 4: “...when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work, but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.” Whereas law puts all the weight on those of us who presumes to obey it, faith puts all the weight on the one in whom we believe, to do the work that we cannot do.

Therefore, the law is surely a curse, because it cannot give us what we’re looking for. But in Christ and in His death on the cross, all is fulfilled, for He “redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (v. 13). He has done the work! We have only to admit that what we could not do, He did. That is faith, and by faith in Christ’s work, we receive the promise of the Spirit as a free gift. God has come and given Himself to us.

Week 6: Galatians 3:15-4:7— “Clothed Yourselves with Christ”

*God loves and accepts believing sinners as if they'd done all Jesus had done—
God accepts us as sons and daughters.*

I. Introduction

There is perhaps no clearer image for how sinners are may be right before God than *being clothed with Christ* (Gal 3:27). This is the image Paul uses in today's passage. As you read, think of the implications of this claim on our own standing before God: If we are clothed with Christ, then it is not *us* that the Father sees, but *Him*. It is His work, His obedience, His purity, His love, His death, His resurrection, and His righteousness. Now, what person that calls himself or herself a Christian can boast in anything except in Jesus Christ? We have nothing except that which is His, which He has chosen to share with us. We may only point to heaven and say, “There is my righteousness—seated at God's right hand!”

II. Please read Galatians 3:15-4:7 and discuss these questions.

1. How do verses 16 and 17 explain that we are saved through promise, not through law?
2. If (as v.18 says) the law is not the way we inherit the Spirit or a right relationship with God then what is the use of the law? How might the law “lead us to Christ” as Paul says in v. 24? Or how does it set the stage for us to believe in Jesus? (see esp. vv. 21-23)
3. How does the image of being clothed with Christ (v. 27) explain salvation? How does it explain our adoption as sons and daughters? How does it explain our equality, mentioned in v. 28?
4. In your own life, why would you need to be reminded that you are no longer a child under a guardian (or a slave under a master) but rather a free son or daughter of God and therefore an heir of His Kingdom?
5. From your experience, what types of things make you feel like a slave rather than an adopted child of God? What helps assure you of your identity as a free son or daughter of God?

III. “What then is the purpose of the law?” Please read and discuss.

St. Paul's answer to this question may be a bit counter-intuitive to us, and in Galatians it's especially hard to get a clear picture of what he means, as he does not go into much detail about it. But it is crucial to understand this point if we are to live as the free sons and daughters that we are.

Paul himself had been a strict adherent—one could even say “a slave”—to the whole law before his conversion. In his letter to the Philippians, he explains that as a Pharisee he had been “faultless” in regard to what he called “legalistic righteousness.” But his conversion experience had been so radical—being called by Jesus Christ in the very midst of his persecution of Christ—and had been so clearly unrelated to his own “legalistic righteousness,” that he had to come to grips with a new concept. This concept is grace—a new righteousness apart from the law, a *true* righteousness from God that comes simply through faith in Him (which was in fact not new at all, but had been unveiled at the time of Abraham). All his righteous doings “for God” amounted to nothing before the truly Righteous One. In fact, he found, humans were powerless to get to God at all, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” and their only hope lay in God Himself, that He might graciously come to us, as He had come to Paul, while we are still sinners. And in fact, He had come, in the person of Jesus Christ, and all of us sinners may be “justified freely by His grace.” (Rom. 3)

But, Paul was forced to ask, if God's righteousness may not be attained through the law, even for those who are "faultless" by the law, is there any good purpose for the law at all? To this he answers, YES! "The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good" (Rom. 7:12). But how does he come to this conclusion? It's fleshed out most clearly in Paul's letter to the Romans:

Romans 3:20— No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

Romans 4:15— Law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

Romans 5:20— The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more.

The grand finale in Romans 7: 7-13: "What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet." But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful."

What he's saying is that without the law, there would literally be no concept of "sin" in the world. In Genesis, we find the story of Creation and the Fall. God created human beings for His special purpose, to be in a relationship with Him. But they chose to take things into their own hands, to live on their own terms, despite His warning: "you will surely die." And so God responds, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever," and He thus banishes Adam and Eve from the garden and makes angels guard the gate, so that they may not re-enter.

But why would He go to such extremes to make sure that they did not eat of this life-giving tree? Was it simply punishment? Clearly not. No, there was grace even in the beginning of things, for God is always the same God. He would not allow humans to attain eternal life of their own accord, because the "eternal life" they would have attained would have actually been an eternity of cursed autonomy, of exile from their true home and alienation from the true God. Indeed, it was a punishment of pure mercy. Yet still, humans left the garden of light, goodness and life, and entered the world of darkness, sin, and death. And such a darkness it would have become, that even the darkness itself would not have been detected, much less would sin have been called "sin" or even death "death." It was to be a world not only estranged from God, but lacking even a concept of estrangement, and even the slightest thought of God.

But He is the same God whose property is always to have mercy, and so into this world, the law was introduced, both as a picture of what we were meant for and as an indicator of how truly perilous our present situation is. And so Paul writes, "Indeed, I would not have known what sin was except through the law." The law gives a name to our estrangement, a diagnosis to our disease, without which we would never have hoped for the cure. But the law is not the cure. *He* is the cure. The law simply brings us to our knees and allows us the mercy of dying to the cursed, god-less life we once lived and would have chosen to remain in forever (had it not been for His mercy and

grace). And because He came and died for us, we may die with Him to the old life, that we might be raised with Him into new unending life. And even now, because of Christ, we are invited to *die to the law*, “that [we] might belong to another” (Rom. 7:4). Through Christ, “we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code” (Rom. 7:6). For Christ is setting us free from every aspect of exile! But more on this in chapter 5...

Week 7: Galatians 4:7-4:31—Slavery to Self-Righteousness

*It is easy for Christians to live in the slavery of self-righteousness
and lose the power of the gospel in life.*

I. A brief introduction to the story of Hagar and Sarah in Genesis

God had promised Abraham that from him would arise a great nation and that his offspring would be as many as the stars in the heavens, and though it appeared impossible that he and his wife could have a child in their old age, Abram believed God and “it was credited to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3, 9, 22-23, and Galatians 3:6). His wife Sarah, however, was not so confident, and in Genesis 16 she encouraged Abraham to sleep with her Egyptian maidservant, Hagar. And so he did, and as a result, Hagar had a son named Ishmael. Yet still we find in Genesis 21:1-3— “The Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him.” It happened that, a few years later, when Isaac was still very young and Ishmael was a teenager, that Ishmael began “mocking,” and Sarah began to see Ishmael as a potential threat to her son’s inheritance, and so she said to Abraham, “Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac” (21:10).

In the Galatians passage, Paul explains that the things in this story “may be taken figuratively.” (Take note that “Mt. Sinai” was the place where the law was given to Moses and that “the present city of Jerusalem” was the center of Judaism and therefore of relentless attempts to gain merit before God by works of the law.)

II. Questions:

Main Point of Interest: How does Abraham and Sarah’s life before the birth of Isaac give us a true picture of the life of a Christian?

More Specific Questions:

1. How does the way that Ishmael was born illustrate the idea of works-based righteousness among Christians (the same thing Paul is upset with the Galatians about in vv. 9-10)?
2. How does the way that Isaac was born illustrate the gospel?
3. If the covenant of Mt. Sinai and “the present Jerusalem” makes slaves of its children, what is so freeing about being children of “the Jerusalem that is above”?
4. Why is Sarah an encouragement to us all, and a picture of the gospel (v.27)?

III. Closing Summary

A Christian that believes that Jesus is the Savior and yet presumes also to work for God’s approval has not really believed in the Savior at all. He or she is much like Sarah who did not trust God’s promise, but rather tried to bring it about herself. Later she realized that the child born of her own efforts was actually a slave and threatened the inheritance of her true son born of a promise, so she threw it out. Isaac, on the other hand, was born of God’s initiative and Abraham’s faith, and so to him would go the entire inheritance.

Paul links Ishmael—the slave child, born as a result of human initiative and unbelief—to Mt. Sinai (where Moses was given the law) and to Jerusalem (where the law still reigns) in order to show that reliance on the law only makes us **slaves**, who refuse to trust fully in God’s promise and

insist on taking things into our own hands. He links Isaac—the free child, born as a result of God’s promise and the power of the Spirit—to the Jerusalem that is above (where Christ reigns) in order to show that the promise of God makes us **free men and women**, who simply trust in Jesus to bring about all that is promised and who await the Kingdom coming down.

Sarah, the barren woman, is evidence that God’s power is made perfect in weakness, and that we are saved by the miracle of grace alone. For what is impossible with men is possible with God.

Week 8: Galatians 5:1-15— Freedom

The Spirit gives life, the flesh counts for nothing (John 6).

I. What's the deal with circumcision?

In Genesis 17, God made a covenant with Abraham that had two parts: first a spectacular promise, then a simple command. The spectacular promise was as follows: “As for me, this will be my covenant with you: you will be the father of many nations....I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for generations to come to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan where you are now an alien I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God” (Gen. 17: 4, 6-8).

And then the simple command: “As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you...This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised...and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you...Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant” (Gen. 17: 9-11, 14).

II. Please read Galatians 5:1-15 and discuss the following questions.

1. Just from the passage in Genesis 17, why do you think the Christians in Galatia might have wanted to be circumcised in addition to claiming faith in Jesus Christ?
2. Yet, Paul would have them choose one or the other. In v. 2, he argues that if they allow themselves to be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to them at all, and in v. 6 he says that in Christ, *circumcision* has no value at all. Why does each cancel out the work of the other? What was circumcision was meant to be for and what had it become among the Galatians? How does preaching circumcision “abolish the offense of the cross,” as Paul puts it in v. 11? (See esp. vv. 3-5)
3. Look at verse 6.
 - a. “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value.” What is this saying about the freedom we have in Christ?
 - b. “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” How might *love* be the greatest and truest expression of faith in God?
4. How then might the command to “love” be a different kind of command? How might it offer freedom, whereas the other commands brought only slavery? (vv. 13-15)

III. Closing Summary

The Gentile believers in Galatia had been founded on the true gospel through their faith in Jesus Christ after Paul himself had proclaimed it to them, but since then, they had been persuaded by the Judaizers to adopt a number of “important” rituals from OT Jewish life in order to guarantee favor before God. Circumcision was at the top of this list. What was the harm, they thought, in believing that Christ died for them and that His Spirit lives in them, and yet, in their flesh, still doing the most important works of the law to make sure they sealed the deal? Paul warns them, however, that to do so would mean a complete rejection of the gospel. Circumcision had been meant to mark their trust in God for salvation, but they had considered it a means to saving

themselves. Just like Sarah (Abraham's) and Adam and Eve before that, they had taken the matter into their own hands, because they simply did not trust God. With their lips they may have said that Jesus was the Savior, but in their hearts, they had come to believe that "Christ died for nothing" or at least that His death on the cross had accomplished so little, that they were now required to pick up the slack.

But Christ died once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God, and therefore, "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything!" He has accomplished all things and His Spirit works in us to will and to act according to his good purpose. Why would we, who have finally been set free, go back into slavery?

Week 9: Galatians 5:16-6:10— Simultaneously Justified and Sinful

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do (Rom 7:15).

I. Introduction: The Schizophrenic Christian

In his writing, Paul commonly portrays the Christian as being composed of two separate and opposing natures, which are always battling one another as long as we live on this earth. One he calls “the Spirit,” that is, the Holy Spirit, who resides in our “heart” or “inner being” or “mind” or “spirit.” And the other he calls “the sinful nature” or “the flesh” or “the earthly nature,” which resides in the very members of our body. This is the main subject of today’s passage, and Paul must have found it to be a crucial concept, as it appears quite often in his letters. For example, he writes this in Romans 7: 18-23: “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work within the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.”

Martin Luther described the Christian’s situation on earth as *simul justus et peccator*—simultaneously justified and sinful. That is, when a person becomes a Christian he is, as Jesus put it, “born again” or as Paul put it, “a new creation”—the old has gone, the new has come—and this is completely true, because in our spirit, we have been crucified with Christ and we no longer live but He lives in us. But as we all know, the sin in our flesh remains, and still, we constantly find ourselves doing what we do not want to do. This is frustrating, to say the least. But Paul constantly urges believers to remember their identity, that their very self is no longer found in the old nature, in their flesh, but rather in the Spirit of God.

II. Questions

1. Notice what is opposed to the Spirit in v. 16 and what is opposed to the Spirit in v. 18. What does this tell us about how the "sinful nature" or "flesh" actually operates?
2. In light of verse 18, what common mistakes do people make about what it means to "crucify the flesh" or to “put to death” the sinful nature? On the contrary, how is that “those who belong to Christ Jesus *have* crucified the sinful nature” (v. 24)?
3. What is "the law of Christ" (v. 2)? How do verses 2-5 have anything to do with the previous questions and with the gospel in general?
4. Examine 5:19-21 and 6:7-8 in terms of reaping what we sow. Is Paul preaching karma?

III. Closing Summary

Being a Christian means believing that we have been made righteous by the work of Christ alone, and yet still dealing with the fact that we are nonetheless constantly sinning and doing what we do not want to do. Evidently, it was the temptation of many who had received Paul’s message of grace, to attempt to blot out these visible transgressions by imposing on themselves all kinds of strict rules made by men. But Paul pleaded with them that this was not the way, that they had lost sight of what it meant to be saved by Christ, and that they were abandoning the freedom they had found in Christ by seeking a righteousness of their own. Last week we read Paul’s stern warning to the Galatians in 5:4 that, “you who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ;

you have fallen away from grace.” But the Galatians were not the only ones dealing with this – the heresy was wide spread (and still is today). Paul wrote this in his letter to the Colossian believers (Colossians 2:20-23): “Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: ‘Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!’? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.”

Paul’s message here is clear: Do not fool yourselves into thinking that, in your flesh, you can defeat your sinful nature. That would be as if to say that your flesh can defeat your flesh, or that your sinful nature can defeat your sinful nature (they’re the same word in the Greek). This is the reason the law is powerless to save or even to sanctify—because it demands of our flesh what our flesh cannot do. But, as Paul writes in Romans 8:3-4: “...what the law was powerless to do, in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”

Now, this phrase “live according to” (or in other places “live by”) is worth looking into, so that we do not understand it wrongly. Here we see that Christians “do not *live according to the sinful nature* but *according to the Spirit*.” In today’s passage in Galatians we read “So I say, *live by the Spirit*, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Gal. 5:16). Earlier in Galatians, Paul had used this sentence: “The righteous will *live by faith*.” In another place, Paul writes “if you *live according to the sinful nature*, you will die, but if *by the Spirit* you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will *live*” (Rom. 8:13). In one sense, we might think Paul is using the phrase as a command: as one is to “live by” or “live according to” a certain set of rules or guidelines, so he should “live by” or “live according to the Spirit.” By that thinking, however, we make the Spirit (who is God) into the law, and the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) into burdensome commandments—“You must be joyful, or else!”—and we seem to have lost the whole idea of “freedom” that was Paul’s entire purpose for writing the letter.

There is another way, however, to read these phrases. “Live according to” or “live by” can also be taken to mean “to be given life by” or “to be sustained by.” So we read: “If you are given life by the sinful nature you will die, but if by the Spirit...you will live” (because there is *no* life in the sinful nature). “Do not be sustained according to the sinful nature, but according to the Spirit” (because there is *no* sustenance in the sinful nature). “Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” In other words: “Here is the fountain of life—the fountain that gave you life—from which you may drink *for free* and live. Why would you work in the desert to earn a drink of sand? To drink *water* is to be who you are! You have not earned a single sip from this fountain, but in Him, *all* of it is yours. To drink from here is to be who you are. Now, it is ridiculous to work any longer! Rather trust that through Christ you are of the fountain and the fountain is in, so that you shall live for eternity, and even now, bear fruit.” Of course, even this we will not do, except *by the Spirit*, by grace, because every good thing comes from God alone. Without Him, we would work for eternity to drink from a sand-pit. But He who called us to be alive and free has done the work for us and in us. As Paul said, “by the grace of God, I am what I am...” (1 Cor. 15:10).

“That’s all fine, well, and good,” we might respond, “but what do we *do*? The gospel can’t be that impractical! We don’t just want to trust God; we want to do what He would have us do.” This request is astoundingly similar to that which a desperate crowd posed to Jesus in John 6:

“What must we do to do the work God requires?” they asked. And Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one He has sent.” The crowd was not content with this answer, but Jesus did not compromise, and at the end of the chapter he told them, “The Spirit gives life. The flesh counts for nothing” (v. 63). Could Paul’s message be summed up any better!

God has won the Christian’s heart. God has made us a new creation. The battle that still wages in us can only be won by Him, and our work is to not work, but to trust that He *has* and *will* be victorious. That is why Christians set their hearts and minds on things above, not on earthly things, for they have died, and their life is now hidden with Christ in God. Christ *is* our life (Col. 3:1-4). His Spirit lives in us, so that now, we are able to “bear fruit” that is good. And though daily we struggle with sin, we may be assured that sin is no longer who we are, for “it is no longer I who do it, but sin living in me who does it.” So, neither shall we boast in the good (though He does good things in us), nor shall we fear the bad (though it threatens us still), for we have been clothed with Christ. Our old self has been taken off along with its practices and the new self has been put on, which is being renewed in the image of its Creator (Col. 3:10).

Week 10: Galatians 6:11-18— Boasting in the Cross

There really is a key to all of life, the cross of Christ and the new life of boasting only in Christ!

I. Introduction

These final words of Paul seem to be fairly disconnected, both from what precedes (a discussion of Christian relationships), and even from each other. But Paul is making a final invitation (6:11-18).

II. Please read Galatians 6:11-18 and discuss these questions:

1. What is the first of the two ways that Paul contrasts the true gospel from the religion of the false teachers? (6:12-13)
2. What is the second of the two ways Paul contrasts the true gospel from the religion of the false teachers? (6:13b-15)
3. In what ways does v. 14-15 summarize everything Paul has been saying in the letter?

III. Bono on Karma, Grace, and Boasting only in Christ

[The following is an excerpt from an interview in *Bono: In Conversation with Michka Assayas* by Michka Assayas.]

Michka Assayas: As I told you, I think I am beginning to understand religion because I have started acting and thinking like a father. What do you make of that?

Bono: Yes, I think that's normal. It's a mind-blowing concept that the God who created the Universe might be looking for company, a real relationship with people, but the thing that keeps me on my knees is the difference between Grace and Karma.

Assayas: I haven't heard you talk about that.

Bono: I really believe we've moved out of the realm of Karma into one of Grace.

Assayas: Well, that doesn't make it clearer for me.

Bono: You see, at the center of all religions is the idea of Karma. You know, what you put out comes back to you: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, or in physics—in physical laws—every action is met by an equal or an opposite one. It's clear to me that Karma is at the very heart of the Universe. I'm absolutely sure of it. And yet, along comes this idea called Grace to upend all that “as you reap, so will you sow” stuff. Grace defies reason and logic. Love interrupts, if you like, the consequences of your actions, which in my case is very good news indeed, because I've done a lot of stupid stuff.

Assayas: I'd be interested to hear that.

Bono: That's between me and God. But I'd be in big trouble if Karma was going to finally be my judge. I'd be in deep s---! It doesn't excuse my mistakes, but I'm holding out for Grace. I'm holding out that Jesus took my sins onto the Cross, because I know who I am, and I hope I don't have to depend on my own religiosity.

Assayas: The son of God who takes away the sins of the world. I wish I could believe in that.

Bono: But I love the idea of the Sacrificial Lamb. I love the idea that God says: "Look, you cretins, there are certain results to the way we are, to selfishness, and there's mortality as part of your very sinful nature, and let's face it, you're not living a very good life, are you? There are consequences to actions." The point of the death of Christ is that Christ took on the sins of the world, so that what we put out did not come back to us, and that our sinful nature does not reap the obvious death. That's the point. It should keep us humbled... It's not our own good works that get us through the gates of Heaven.

Assayas: That's a great idea, no denying it. Such great hope is wonderful, even though it's close to lunacy, in my view. Christ has his rank among the world's great thinkers. But Son of God, isn't that farfetched?

Bono: No, it's not farfetched to me. Look, the secular response to the Christ story always goes like this: he was a great prophet, obviously a very interesting guy, had a lot to say along the lines of other great prophets, be they Elijah, Muhammad, Buddha, or Confucius. But actually Christ doesn't allow you that. He doesn't let you off that hook. Christ says, "No. I'm not saying I'm a teacher, don't call me teacher. I'm not saying I'm a prophet. I'm saying: I'm the Messiah. I'm saying: I am God incarnate." And people say: No, no, please, just be a prophet. A prophet we can take. You're a bit eccentric. We've had John the Baptist eating locusts and wild honey, we can handle that. But don't mention the "M" word! Because, you know, we're gonna have to crucify you. And he goes: "No, no, I know you're expecting me to come back with an army and set you free from these creeps, but actually I am the Messiah." At this point, everyone starts staring at their shoes, and says: Oh, my God, he's gonna keep saying this. So what you're left with is either Christ was who He said He was — the Messiah — or a complete nutcase. I mean, we're talking nutcase on the level of Charles Manson. This man was like some of the people we've been talking about earlier. This man was strapping himself to a bomb, and had "King of the Jews" on his head, and they were putting him up on the Cross, going: OK, martyrdom, here we go. Bring on the pain! I can take it. I'm not joking here. The idea that the entire course of civilization for over half of the globe could have its fate changed and turned upside-down by a nutcase, for me that's farfetched.

IV. Closing Summary

There is perhaps no better way to sum up this section, and in fact the entire book of Galatians, than by Paul's own powerful words to the Colossians (chapter 2):

“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also

circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”

Appendix 1

A Comparison of Introductory Comments in St. Paul's Letters

Galatians 1:6-9 (No Other Gospel)

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

Romans 1: 8-17 (Paul Longs to Visit Rome)

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you. I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

1 Corinthians 1:4-9 (Thanksgiving)

I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge—because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

2 Corinthians 1:3-7 (Comfort)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

Ephesians 1:3-9 (Spiritual Blessings)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good

pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

Colossians 1:3-8 (Thanksgiving)

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints—the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth.

Philippians 1:3-10 (Thanksgiving)

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Appendix 2

The Main Issues in Galatians: How Paul's Letter Answers the Galatians' Questions

Galatian question: We believe that Jesus is the Christ. But is that really the whole answer? We're simply to trust that God's promise and Christ's sacrifice is enough to atone for our sins and make us righteous? That's all? Grace alone?

Paul's answer: Yes, Christ alone, faith alone, grace alone.

Gal 2:21 – “I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

Gal 3:2-3 – “Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to obtain your goal by human effort?”

Gal 2:16 – “...a man is not justified by observing the law but by faith in Jesus Christ...”

Gal 3:10-12 – “All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything that is written in the Book of the Law.’ Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, ‘The righteous will live by faith.’ The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, ‘The man who does these things will live by them.’”

Gal 5:4 – “you who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.”

Galatian question: But don't we have to obey the law in order to inherit the righteousness of God¹ promised to Abraham in the covenant?

Paul's answer #1: No, the covenant had no such condition; in fact, the condition of the law would undo the covenant completely.²

Gal 3:15 – “Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant...so it is in this case.”

Gal 3:17 – “The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise.”

Gal 3:18 – “...if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in His grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.”

Paul's answer #2: No, because now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known (Rom. 3:21). It is an *inheritance* for all who are children of God through Christ – given not by requirement, but by promise, that is, not earned by us, but gifted by the Promiser at His death.

Gal 3:14 – “[Christ] redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”

Gal 3:16 – “the promises were spoken to Abraham ‘and to his seed’...who is Christ.”

¹ The inheritance promised to Abraham and to his offspring in Gen. 12-17 is so great, it may be summed up as the very “righteousness of God” (Martin Luther). For instance, Gen. 15:2 – “Do not be afraid Abram, *I am*...your very great reward.” He is promising the Spirit, i.e. *Himself!*

² “[The covenant] would become void and would annul the promise altogether if [the Law's] works were necessary for righteousness...as though the grace of the promise were not enough or were powerless to effect our righteousness” (Luther again).

Gal 3:29 – “if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

Galatian question: What then is the purpose of the law? Does it have any good purpose at all?

Paul’s answer: Yes.

Gal 3:19 – “It was added because of transgressions until the Seed [Christ] to whom the promise referred had come.”

Gal 3:23 – “Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.”

Gal 3:24 – “...the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”

Gal 3:25 – “Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.”

Gal 2:19 – “For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live for God.”

Galatian question: So we are saved according to His promise, not according to the law, but doesn’t circumcision guarantee that we are the heirs of this promise?

Paul’s answer #1: No. Christ alone has guaranteed that for you on the cross. Circumcision was meant to represent your promise, but you have made it your law. It was meant to mark your trust in God for salvation, but you have considered it a way to save yourselves, and as long as you insist on bringing salvation into your own hands, you render Christ useless.

Gal 5:2-3 – “If you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all...every man who lets himself be circumcised...is obligated to obey the whole law.”

Gal 5:6 – “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”

Gal 5:11 – “...if I am still preaching circumcision...the offense of the cross has been abolished.”

Gal 6:13-14 – “Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh. May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Paul’s answer #2: No. Your circumcision guarantees nothing. What counts is a circumcision of the heart. Only Christ can do this. Because of Christ alone, we are a ‘new creation’ - the old has gone, the new has come.³

Gal 6:15 – “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything. What counts is a new creation.”

³ Baptism, not circumcision, is the outer mark of this inward “new creation” for those who have faith in Jesus. Baptism marks what has really occurred when people finally believe that they cannot save themselves and put their trust in Jesus: the old has gone because they have shared with Him in his death (“been crucified with Christ”) and no longer live, and the new has come because Christ lives in them, and one day they will share with Him in bodily resurrection and eternal Life. All things will be new!

Appendix 3

Paul's view on a few more things from his other letters...

The Promise (the covenant with Abraham)

It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless... Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.

—Romans 4(13-14, 16)

The Law

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

—Romans 3:20

...because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

—Romans 4:15

The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more...

—Romans 5:20

For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

—Romans 6:14

Do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to men who know the law—that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives?

—Romans 7:1

What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet."¹ But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

—Romans 7:7-13

For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son

—Romans 8:3

...he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet,"^l and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

—Romans 13:8-10

...I myself am not under the law...I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law...

—1 Corinthians 9:20-21

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

—1 Corinthians 15:56

Circumcision

Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.

—Romans 2:25-29

Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

—Romans 3:29-30

Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

—Romans 4:9-12

For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh...

—Philippians 3:3

By Grace through Faith

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe...²⁸For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

—Romans 3:21-22

If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."...[W]hen a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless.

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

—Romans 4:2-5, 13-14, 16-17

...that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

—Philippians 3:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.

—Ephesians 2:8-9

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

—Romans 5:1-2

What it means to have faith in a graceful God:

God's righteousness comes to us through *faith*, says Paul, just as it did to Abraham in Gen 15: "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." And if this is true, we can be sure of these things:

(1) Righteousness *comes* to us – that is, from the outside - from God, and therefore does not and cannot naturally exist or begin *in* us. It must be given, i.e. credited to us. No one is righteous in and of himself.

(2) Righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe, to those who do not work but *trust God*, who justifies the wicked.

(3) No person will ever find righteousness by observing the Law. If they could, the promise to Abraham and faith in general would mean nothing.

(4) By faith and not by working, through promise and not through law, through Christ alone with no help from us, God's righteousness comes to us and saves us from our own deceptive self-righteousness.

(5) Faith trusts fully in Jesus Christ to do all that we cannot do. It puts all the emphasis on the Giver and none at all on the receivers. *He* is righteous; we are not. It knows that by *grace* we have been saved, not by works, and that even our faith is a gift from God. Therefore no one can boast.

(6) Those that have this faith stand in grace, simply because they know that by grace alone, they stand.

Appendix 4

Martin Luther's Preface to the Galatians

(Abridged and paraphrased by Tim Keller...
...and tweaked by Ross Byrd and Justin Holcomb)

1. The most important thing in the world

a. The one doctrine, which I have supremely at heart, is that of faith in Christ, from whom, through whom, and unto whom all my theological thinking flows back and forth day and night. This rock...which we call the doctrine of justification...was shaken by Satan in paradise, when he persuaded our first parents that they might by their own wisdom and power become like God.... Thereafter the whole world acted like a madman against this faith, inventing innumerable idols and religions with which everyone went his own way, hoping to placate a god or goddess, by his own works; that is, hoping without the aid of Christ and by his own works to redeem himself from evils and sins. All this is sufficiently seen in the practices and records of every culture and nation....

b. The devil our adversary, who continually rages about seeking to devour us is not dead. Likewise our flesh and old man is yet alive. Besides this, all kinds of temptations vex and oppress us on every side, *so that this doctrine can never be taught, urged, and repeated enough*. If this doctrine is lost, then is also the whole knowledge of truth, life and salvation lost; if this doctrine flourish, then all good things flourish...

2. Kinds of righteousness

a. Paul expounds the Biblical doctrine with the goal of demonstrating beyond doubt the difference between Christian righteousness and all other kinds of righteousness, for there are many kinds. First, there is political or *civil righteousness*--the nation's public laws--which magistrates and lawyers may defend and teach. Second, there is *cultural righteousness*--the standards of our family and social grouping or class--which parents and schools may teach. Third, there is *ethical righteousness*...the Ten Commandments and law of God--which the church may teach (but only in light of Christian righteousness). [Now it is right to be a good citizen, to be loved and respected by your social group, and to be a morally upright person. So all these may be received without danger], if we attribute to them no power to satisfy for sin, to please God, or to deserve grace.... These kinds of righteousness are gifts of God, like all good things we enjoy

b. Yet there is another, far above the others, which the Paul calls "the righteousness of faith"—Christian righteousness.... God imputes it to us apart from our works--in other words, it is passive righteousness, as the others are active. For we do nothing for it, and we give nothing for it--we only receive and allow another to work--that is God.

3. The need for Christian righteousness

a. This "passive" righteousness is a mystery that the world cannot understand. Indeed, Christians never completely understand it themselves, and thus do not take advantage of it when they are troubled and tempted. So we have to constantly teach it, repeat it, and work it out in practice. For anyone who does not understand this righteousness or cherish it in the heart and conscience, will continually be buffeted by fears and depression. *Nothing gives peace like this passive righteousness.*

b. For human beings by nature, when they get near either danger or death itself, will of

necessity view their own worthiness. We defend ourselves before all threats by recounting our good deeds and moral efforts. But then the remembrance of sins and flaws inevitably comes to mind, and this tears us apart, and we think: "How many errors and sins and wrongs I have done! Please God, let me live so I can fix and amend things." We become obsessed with our active righteousness and are terrified by its imperfections. But the real evil is that we trust our own power to be righteous and will not lift up our eyes to see that Christ has done for us....So the troubled conscience has no cure for its desperation and feeling of unworthiness unless it takes hold of the forgiveness of sins by grace, offered free of charge in Jesus Christ, which is this passive or Christian righteousness...If I tried to fulfill the law myself, I could not trust in what I had accomplished, neither could it stand up to the judgment of God. So...*I rest only upon the righteousness of Christ...which I do not produce but receive; God the Father freely giving it to us through Jesus Christ."*

4. Law and grace

a. It is an absolute and unique teaching in all the world, to teach people, through Christ, to live as if there were no Law or Wrath or Punishment. In a sense, they do not exist anymore for the Christian, but only total grace and mercy for Christ's sake. Once you are in Christ, the law is the greatest guide for your life, but until you have Christian righteousness, all the law can do is to show you how sinful and condemned you are. In fact to those outside of Christian righteousness, the law needs to be expounded in all its force. Why? So that people who think they have power to be righteous before God will be humbled.

b. Therefore the communicator of the Word of God must be careful when dispensing the knowledge of both law and grace. We must keep the law within his bounds! If you teach that we can be accepted by God through obedience, then Christian righteousness becomes mixed up with earned/moral righteousness in the people's minds. Such a teacher is an ill logician--failing to "rightly divide". On the other hand, if You teach to persons outside of Christ about God's acceptance and love, with no mention of repentance and the cross of Christ, you also confuse and fail to "rightly divide". Rather, he that applies the law and works to the flesh or the old man [the unconverted], and who applies forgiveness of sins and God's mercy to the spirit or the new man [the awakened by the Spirit] does well.

c. For example, when I see a man that is bruised, oppressed with the law, terrified with sin, and thirsting for comfort, it is time to remove out of his sight the law and active righteousness, and that I should set before him by the Gospel the Christian and passive righteousness. Then the man is raised up and realizes the hope of being under grace, not under the law (Rom. 6:14)....But upon the man without Christ there must be laid the obligation of works and the law--we do have to fulfill the law. This burden must press him down until he put on the new man, by faith in Christ--then he may enjoy the freedom of the spirit of grace. (Nevertheless, no one fully does this in this life!)

d. So, have we nothing to do to obtain this righteousness? No, *nothing at all/For* this righteousness comes by doing nothing, hearing nothing, knowing nothing, but rather in knowing and believing this only--that Christ has gone to the right hand of the Father, not to become our judge, but to become for us, our wisdom, our righteousness, our holiness, our salvation! Now God sees no sin in us, for in this heavenly righteousness sin has no place. So now we may certainly think: "Although I still sin, I don't despair, because Christ lives, who is both my righteousness and my eternal life." In that righteousness I have no sin, no fear, no guilty conscience, no fear of death. I am indeed a sinner in this life or mine and in my own righteousness, but I have another life, another righteousness above this life, which is in Christ, the Son of God, who knows no sin or death, but is eternal righteousness and eternal life.

5. Living the gospel

a. Now both these things continue while we live here. We are accused, exercised with temptations, oppressed with heaviness and sorrow, and bruised by the law with its demands of active righteousness. These attacks fall upon Our "flesh" [--the part of our heart that still seeks to earn our salvation]...Because of this, Paul sets out in this letter of Galatians to teach us, to comfort us, and to keep us constantly aware of this Christian righteousness. For if the truth *of being justified by Christ alone* (not by our works) is lost, then all Christian truths are lost. For there is no middle ground between Christian righteousness and works-righteousness. There is no other alternative to Christian righteousness but works-righteousness; if you do not build your confidence on the work of Christ you must build your confidence on your own work. On this truth and only on this truth the church is built and has its being

b. *This distinction is easy to utter in words, but in use and experience it is very hard.* So you who would be teachers and counselors of others I admonish to exercise yourselves continually in these matters through study, reading, meditation on the Word and prayer -- that in the time of trial you will be able to both inform and comfort both your consciences and others, to bring them from law to grace, for active/works-righteousness to passive/Christ's righteousness. For in times of struggle, the devil will seek to terrify us by using against us our past record, the wrath, and law of God. So if we cannot see the differences between the two kinds of righteousness, and if we do not take hold of Christ by faith, sitting at the right hand of God (Hebrews 7:25) who pleads our case, sinners that we are, to the Father, then we are under the Law, not under grace, and Christ is no Savior, but a Lawgiver, and is no longer our salvation, but an eternal despair.

c. So learn to speak to one's heart and to the Law. When the law creeps into your conscience, learn to be a cunning logician -- learn to use arguments of the gospel against it. Say: "O law! You would climb up into the kingdom of my conscience, and there reign and condemn me for sin, and would take from me the joy of my heart which I have by faith in Christ, and drive me to desperation, that I might be without hope. You have over-stepped your bounds. Know your place! You are a guide for my behavior, but you are not Savior and Lord of my heart. For I am baptized, and through the Gospel am called to receive righteousness and eternal life....So *trouble me not!* For I will not allow you, so intolerable a tyrant and tormentor, to reign in *my* heart and conscience -- for they are the seat and temple of Christ the Son of God, who is the king of righteousness and peace, and my most sweet savior and mediator. He shall keep my conscience joyful and quiet in the sound and pure doctrine of the Gospel through the knowledge of this passive and heavenly righteousness."

d. When I have this Christian righteousness reigning in my heart, I descend from heaven as the rain making fruitful the earth. That is to say...I do good Works, how and whensoever occasion is offered -- Whoever he be that is assuredly persuaded that Christ is his righteousness, does not only cheerfully and gladly work well in his vocation...but submits to all manner of burdens and dangers in his present life, because he knows that this is the will of God, and that this obedience pleases him.

e. This then is the argument of this Epistle, which Paul expounds against the false teachers who had darkened the Galatians' understanding of this righteousness by faith.