

Paul's Letter to the Galatians
Lesson 3

At the end of Chapter 4 Paul gives an example to the Galatians about the bondage that occurs by holding to a law. The example consists of the stories of the two sons of Abraham. One of the sons will be the father of the Jewish line, Isaac. The other will be the father of the Arab line, Ishmael. The Arab line will be in under bondage forever, the Jewish line will have the ability to be free because of Christ Jesus. Paul's conclusion centers on the fact that the line coming through Hagar and Mt. Sinai had now taken over Jerusalem and that same sinful attitude and heart had caused the children of the promise to deny the Savior. Because of that denial, the Savior would be shared with the rest of mankind and the children of God would outnumber the children of the world. And so it has been that the number of Christians throughout the centuries will outnumber those who would follow any other faith.

It is also interesting that this example has played out as a prophecy of the struggle between the two boys. The Arab line will ultimately come into the bondage of the Muslim system of faith, a works based and law based system. The child of the barren woman, Sarah, will lead to the freedom in Christ Jesus. It is the children of the child born to the flesh, Ishmael, which is persecuting the child born to the Spirit, Isaac.

Galatians 5:1 It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

What kind of slavery is Paul speaking of here? What is the context? It is the slavery of "bondage under the Old Testament Law" which was provided by God because of transgressions. It was the school master, the teacher, which taught us what God considered a sin. It taught God's children how to live holy, or rather, set apart from the world, different in every aspect from all others. The Galatians has been bewitched by Jewish spies that were pressuring them to become fully Jewish, in every way, in order to be true followers of Christ.

Galatians 5:2 Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. **3** And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. **4** You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. **5** For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. **6** For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.

There are several points that need to be looked at in these five verses to fully understand what Paul is saying, not only to the Galatians but to our generation too.

First, Paul states that "if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you." Evidently there were Galatians who were listening to the Jewish spies and were being bewitched into the idea of being circumcised in order to be full followers of Christ. But circumcision has absolutely nothing to do with the grace of God that is bestowed upon man through Christ Jesus. Christ's death on the cross was all that was needed to provide salvation for mankind. In this phrase Paul is trying to explain that you cannot put your trust in an "act of works like circumcision" and expect to be saved. Your faith must be in the finished work of Christ on the cross. It cannot be both.

Second, Paul states that “every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.” In other words, if the Galatians were going to keep that one part of the Law concerning circumcision, then ethics demands that they keep the entire law, including all the sacrifices, as well as the do’s and don’ts.

Third, Paul states “You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” This is a difficult statement to understand. Is it possible to fall from grace? If we were to begin following the Law completely would that sever us from Christ and cause us to fall from the grace, or gift, that has been given by Christ’s death on the cross? Let’s not forget that Paul states in this phrase “you who are seeking to be justified by law.” Here Paul is addressing those who are “seeking to be justified,” meaning they are putting their trust in the Law rather than Christ. Does Paul mean that a person can lose their salvation in what he calls the act of falling from grace? The answer is “no.” Paul is talking about the place where you put the hope of your salvation. He is stating that those who have moved their faith from the grace found in Christ to the letter of the law, have in their mind severed, or switched the sphere in which their hope of salvation is rooted. The older versions of the English text might say it better when this phrase is translated “You did fall out of grace,” meaning you moved your attention away from the umbrella of grace in Christ. A better translation might be “you have left the sphere of grace in Christ and took your stand in the sphere of the Law as your hope of salvation.” This is not just an accidental following of the Law, but it is a far more serious act of substituting the Law for the Lord Jesus Christ as the agent or mediator of salvation.

Forth, Paul states “we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness.” There is nothing here that we can do to secure our hope of righteousness but to wait patiently upon the Lord who is the hope of our salvation. The Lord is our salvation! Even in the midst of the time of the Law during the days of David, the Law never brought salvation. Salvation was always in the Lord. Here are some examples from the book of Psalms.

Psalm 3:8 Salvation belongs to the LORD; Thy blessing *be* upon Thy people! Selah.

Psalm 27:1 The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear?

Psalm 37:39 But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their strength in time of trouble.

Psalm 140:7 "O God the Lord, the strength of my salvation, Thou hast covered my head in the day of battle.

Fifth, Paul states “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.” In other words the act of circumcision means absolutely nothing since Christ made the ultimate sacrifice for all mankind on Calvary. Since that time salvation is found in our faith in Christ who loved us enough to provide the means for our salvation.

Galatians 5:⁷You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? ⁸This persuasion *did* not *come* from Him who calls you. ⁹A little leaven leavens the whole lump *of dough*. ¹⁰I have confidence in you in the Lord, that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you shall

bear his judgment, whoever he is. ¹¹But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished. ¹²Would that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves.

The Galatians had started life's journey in the Lord correctly, but along the way, as they were maturing in the Lord, someone had sidetrack them into believing that they had to do more than just believe in the simple gospel of Christ. A little bit of error brought into the church had caused the entire church to think they needed to do more to obtain salvation. Paul wanted them to know that putting their trust in the Law for salvation was futile. He did not preach circumcision any longer and for that he was persecuted by the Jews who did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. If the Law was still effective in the Christian life then the act of Christ being the stumbling block to the Law was of no effect. But Christ is the stumbling block and He still has effect on their lives. They wanted the Galatians to mutilate themselves in circumcision when circumcision meant nothing. Paul wished that these false teachers of the Law would mutilate themselves instead.

Galatians 5:¹³For you were called to freedom, brethren; only *do not turn* your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the *statement*, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." ¹⁵But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another.

Here Paul places the big "however" in his letter. The Law was given by the Lord to mankind to show what God considered sin. But Christ fulfilled the Law in his death, burial, and resurrection so we would not have to be subject to the Law. But the Law told us what a sin was in God's eyes! Does this mean that we no longer have to worry about sin? Once we have come to salvation in Christ can we live as we wish, doing the same things as the people of the world do? Can we be saved and live in the depths of sin? Absolutely not! The Law is still the school master! The Law is still the tutor! We can not live as saved people in the desires of our flesh. What God considers a sin is still a sin after we have obtained salvation.

Galatians 5:¹⁶But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. ¹⁷For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. ¹⁹Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, ²¹envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Because of your salvation, you will not carry out the desires of the flesh, the desires that the unregenerate man has in his daily walk. The unregenerate man lives in "immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these." If this is the picture of your life then you do not have salvation in your life. You have not turned your life over to the Lord.

In addition, if you have put your trust in the Lord and you are continuing to live as you did before you came to Christ, then the Law has condemned your sin as sin. As a Christian you must put away all the desires of the flesh with all its passion.

The Christian must robe himself in a new life apart from the sin and passion of the flesh. He must strive to enjoy a life of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." This is how we walk in the Spirit.

Galatians 5:²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another. **6:**¹Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. ²Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ. ³For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have *reason for* boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. ⁵For each one shall bear his own load.

Paul states "Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another." In the Church we are not to say things like "look what I did, I am better than you, or I wish I had your" That is not Christ like nor is it what Christ desires for our lives. Yet, in the midst of the church there are those who will commit sins. There are those who will be drawn to false thoughts and false actions. There are those who will follow those who have invaded the congregation with evil desires. There are those who have followed their fleshly desires and paid the price for their sin. If they can be restored to the true faith and walk with the Lord, it is the business of the church to take the time and expend the energy and resources to restore them to the truth. We are to bear their burdens, loving them and caring for them as we direct them away from the sins and desires of the flesh. We all have the propensity to sin and but for the grace of God, there are many roads we have not traveled that have led to disastrous ends. We are to try our best to rescue those who have salvation but live in habitual sin. We are not to compare ourselves to these people but we are to examine our own lives to keep ourselves in check and out of the error of sin. It is interesting that in this one paragraph the Lord instructs that we are to "bear one another's burdens" and at the same time each person must "bear his own load." Which is it to be? The answer is "both!" We are not only responsible for our own doings but we are responsible for helping other Christians see and over come the error of their ways.

Galatians 6:⁶And let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches. ⁷Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. ⁸For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life. ⁹And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. ¹⁰So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. ¹¹See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.

The student must respond to the teacher. The student who has been taught the word must respond the teacher who has strayed in his teaching from the word. A teacher who sows false teaching will reap corruption. A teacher who sows truth will reap eternal life. Now we are not talking about the corruption or eternal life of the teacher in this passage but we are talking

about the product of his sowing. The planting of false theological thoughts does not reap salvation for a person who is hearing the teacher, it reaps corruption. Those who teach that Jesus was the Savior who died on the cross, but He was just a creation of God the Father and He is not in fact God Himself leads a person to put their trust in a different picture of a Savior than that presented in the Scripture. Therefore, that person does not receive salvation but eternal corruption. Whereas the teacher who teaches that Jesus is the Savior, the eternal God and Creator of all that has ever existed, leads a person to put their faith and trust in the true Savior and this results in eternal life.

Paul wants the Galatians to stand up to the Jewish spies and correct, if they can, their false teachings. This is a good deed that the Galatians need to do, if they will step up to the task. In addition, those who belong to the household of faith must be corrected also, if they should fall from the elemental teachings of the gospel.

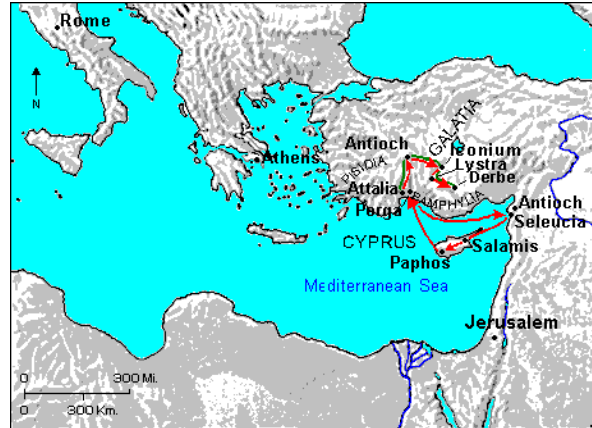
When Paul says "See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand," Paul is doing two things. First he is saying that he practicing what he is preaching to the Galatians in that he is trying to correct the false teaching that they have heard. He is bearing their burden in an attempt to bring them out from under this corruptible teaching, back under the incorruptible teaching of the gospel of grace. Second he is telling us that he has written this letter himself. He had shared the gospel with the Gentile Galatians in the first place because he had paused in his missionary journey due to his illness which we can presume was his declining eye sight. Paul was basically blind at this time requiring that he write in huge letters.

Galatians 6: ¹²Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised, that they may boast in your flesh. ¹⁴But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. ¹⁶And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

There are those in this life who do everything for show. Their houses and cars and various other toys are all for show. Their boasting is entirely for show. Yet, time in the teller of all false pretenses. In time we learn that all that glitters is not gold and devastation and corruption comes to the lives of those who live for the show. Such is the case with the Jews and the Law. It is all a show that leads to corruption of eternal consequences. As children of the Lord, who have put our trust in the His saving grace, this should never be a part of our lives. Is it alright for us to have nice and expensive things? Absolutely! Save your dollars and pay cash for them, trusting in the Lord for all that you have. Yet, if you borrow money for those things, having them because of the status or show that you think they will bring, you are out of the will of the Lord. We are not to boast in the flesh, but we are to live in Christ as a new creation! If you walk in Christ as a new creation, peace and mercy will be upon you. Not to leave out the Jews, Paul includes that if the Jews will live in Christ as a new creation, they will also live in peace and mercy.

Galatians 6:17 From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus.

Paul is writing this letter within a year or so of 49 A.D. This letter was written after Paul's first missionary journey which began in 47 AD and only lasted a year. His second journey will not begin until after the counsel in Jerusalem in 50 AD as found in Acts chapter 15. Therefore we must understand that Paul is writing to relatively new believers. This helps us understand the importance of this letter to the Galatian churches. They were young in the faith and they were easily bewitched by false teaching. Galatians is an important letter to our generation because it teaches us that we need to be vigilant in the lives of young Christians until they have reached a level of maturity in Christ that cannot be shaken.



Paul mentions the brand-marks. What kinds of brand-marks are on his body? Slaves were stamped with their owners names on their bodies. Cattle are branded with the owner's mark. It is no secret that Paul gloried in being the slave of Jesus Christ. This is probably the image in Paul's mind since he bore in his body brand-marks of suffering for Christ received in many places. Paul is saying "If for no other reason, listen to me by reason of these scars for Christ and let no one keep on furnishing trouble to me."

Galatians 6:18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.

As promised in his first letter, Paul signs this letter with the logo that assures the letter is from him. The grace of the Lord ... be with you" In some form or fashion this logo is at or near the end of every letter. The Galatians could be assured that Paul had written the letter and it reflected not only his heart by the Word of God.