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FOUNDERS STUDY GUIDE COMMENTARY

Galatians

He Did It All

Baruch Maoz



Founders Press

Cape Coral, Florida

Published by
Founders Press

P.O. Box 150931 • Cape Coral, FL 33915
Phone (239) 772-1400 • Fax: (239) 772-1140
Electronic Mail: founders@founders.org or
Website: <http://www.founders.org>

©2019, 2021 Baruch Maoz

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 978-1-943539-20-8

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Preface

This commentary is based on my translation of Paul's letter to the Galatians, and my translation is based on the British and Foreign Bible Society's Nestle and Aland's New Testament text of 1904. All other quotes from Scripture are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

Using my, somewhat literal, translation of the text will hopefully accord the reader something of a more direct access to the Apostle's terse language without having its edges rounded off by the conventions of modern translations, with their cultural and literary expectations. It will also spare readers the need to read extended exegetical arguments.

This is a *devotional* commentary. It was not written for scholars. Still, I hope scholars will derive more than devotional benefit from what I have written. There is one exegetical argument I believe important to make because it constitutes a departure from most translations and commentaries. I leave it to the wiser and more learned to evaluate, affirm or contradict it. Read on and you will discover what I mean.

The letter to the Galatians, probably the earliest of Paul's letters, carries the seeds of his later, more mature thinking. The parallels with his letter to the Romans are striking. There is nothing in the Apostle's later writings that are not to be found here in seed form. Paul's love for the Messiah, his pastoral concern and his exhilarating view of the finality of Messiah's accomplishments are all evident. It is fascinating to note how thoroughly the Apostle embraced such a full-orbed Gospel at so early a stage in his apostolic ministry. It is no less challenging to measure ourselves by that and other characteristics, evidenced in this letter.

Paul was a man of God, in love with God in the Messiah and therefore in love with the church. His language mellowed somewhat over the course of the years, as he imbibed more and more of the Gospel's principles and applied them in the course of his ministry. But the Holy Spirit used his more terse language for the good of God's church. Paul's under-

standing of the Gospel likewise broadened. While his guiding principles remained the same and his love for the Messiah was as white-hot at the end of his life as it was when he penned the words we are about to study.

Writing this commentary became a painfully searching process. I was repeatedly forced to ask myself: How well do I trust the Messiah for my salvation? How much dare I attribute to myself? I am moved by Paul's piercing challenges: "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3). "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Messiah died for no purpose" (Galatians 2: 21).

My hope and prayer, dear reader, is that you would likewise be moved.

Baruch Maoz

Introduction

TO THE BOOK OF GALATIANS

When was this letter written?

Scholars disagree as to when the letter to the Galatians was written. Some affirm it was the first of Paul's many letters. Others recognize the many similarities in content and terminology between the letters to the Galatians and that to the Romans. On those grounds they insist that the letter to the Galatians was written closer to the time when he penned his letter to the Romans.

Two issues arise in connection to the dating of this letter. How we handle them will determine the date we consider most appropriate. The first has to do with the decisions of the council in Jerusalem, usually dated somewhere around 48/49 AD. This council determined that Gentile believers were not obliged to the ceremonial aspects of the Torah (Acts 15). It seems unlikely this council could have taken place prior to the composition of Paul's letter to the Galatians (written to churches founded in the years 43/44 AD), otherwise, Paul would have naturally referred to the council's decision. After all, its position exactly supported Paul's. It is, therefore, reasonable to conclude that this letter was written prior to the council in Jerusalem, although we are unable to say exactly how much earlier.

Some insist to the contrary, that Paul was anxious to establish his authority in the eyes of the Galatian churches, which is why he chose not to refer to the decision arrived at in Jerusalem. This seems rather forced, more the product of a desire to determine a later date than the product of an objective view of facts. The council's decision could have served well to buttress Paul's authority over against that of his opponents far more than his neglecting to refer to it.

The second issue has to do with the identity of those to whom the letter is addressed. This is largely due to the difference between Luke's terminology in Acts and that employed by Paul in his letters.

Galatia was a Roman administrative province in central and north of what is now modern Turkey. It included the cities of Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, mentioned in Acts (14:1–20). Paul and Barnabas visited these cities in the course of their first journey for the Gospel. However, the term “Galatia” also referred in those days to a vaguely-defined region in the northern part of modern Turkey, also included within the borders of the Roman administrative province but not encompassing it. Some hold to the view that this letter was addressed to churches in the northern region. However, there is no evidence Paul ever preached there, although we do read that he “went through” it (Acts 16:6). The region was inhabited by Gauls (some of whom later settled in France and in Britain), which is how the region and later the province came by its name: Galatia means “the land of the Gaul's.”

Luke consistently prefers to refer to cities and regions, not to provinces. Paul, on the other hand, generally refers to provinces. Paul's reference to the Galatians is, therefore, reference to the churches founded in the province of Galatia during the stage of his and Barnabas' first journey for the Gospel. This, of necessity, makes it likely that the letter to the Galatians is one of Paul's earliest letters, if not the earliest. That, in turn, confirms the assumption that it was composed prior to the council in Jerusalem.

The churches in Galatia were founded in 43/44 AD, some 5 years earlier than the council. Paul would have had to be away from Galatia for at least a short period before those whose views he opposes appeared. It would have also taken some time for the teachers of those views to have heard of the founding of the churches in Galatia, to organize and arrive on the scene. At least a few more months would have had to pass for Paul to hear of their teaching and decide to respond. Assuming something like a year after Paul and Barnabas left Galatia before the other teachers arrived, and about six months before Paul sat down to write the Galatians, it seems reasonable to say that this letter was written somewhere between 46–48 AD.

If those who prefer a later dating are right, then the only periods in which we might think that Paul preached the Gospel in northern Galatia would be in the course of his second evangelistic journey (50–55) or the third (55–57). This letter would, then be dated 52/53 AD at the earliest.

As to the similarities between this letter and that to the Romans, these would naturally arise out of the fact that the Apostle was dealing with the same matters. It is highly likely that, while writing to the church in Rome, he would refer to his earlier letter to the Galatians.

One of the features that distinguish this letter is that it is not addressed to an individual (such as Philemon, Timothy or Titus), nor to believers in a specific church (Such as Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philippians) but to the churches of Galatia (Galatians 1:1). Even the letter to the Ephesians, apparently a circular letter addressed to a number of churches, the copy we have on hand is addressed to the church in Ephesus.

Assuming the earlier date is correct, we may further conclude that the letter to the Galatians was addressed to the churches in Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. It is also possible that other churches had been established in the province, of which we know nothing.

There is no way to determine where the Apostle was when he wrote this letter. Various plausible suggestions have been made but none of them aid our understanding of what he wrote, so there is no point in reviewing them.

Why was this letter written?

Pauls' letter to the Galatians was written in response to a claim made by some who arrived in Galatia after he and Barnabas had preached there. These teachers held to the view that faith in the Messiah needs to be supplemented by adherence to the Mosaic Law and Jewish tradition. Here we come to the exegetical argument mentioned earlier.

There is an obvious, compelling logic to such a view. After all, faith in the Messiah is a distinctly Jewish affair, the product of the covenants, law, promises and actions of God in the history of the Jewish people. In other words, non-Jews who believe in Jesus have come over to the faith of the Jews. They believe in the God of Israel and now share the Faith that distinguished Jews from Gentiles for centuries. Should they not, therefore, embrace the fullest implications of that Faith, thereby bringing it to its fulfillment by submitting to laws and traditions that are so much part of it?

Paul thought otherwise. He believed that the fullest implications of the Faith of Israel, of its law and the promises made to the nation are to

be found in the Messiah, and that the fulfillment of Israel's Faith is to be found in faith in the Messiah and in Him alone.

He further understood that another issue was at stake. It was not only an issue of Messiah versus the Law of Moses and Jewish tradition; it was an issue of God's work or ours, and therefore of law—any law, law in principle—and the accomplishments of the Messiah. So far as Paul was concerned, the Messiah did all that was necessary. There is no need or room to supplement His work by ours.

Paul therefore draws a careful distinction, arguing from the greater to the least. He argues against reliance on law of any kind for a greater spirituality, and therefore against reliance on keeping the Law of Moses and/or Jewish tradition. He does so by a careful, almost imperceptible distinction between law (without the definite article) and the Law (with the definite article). The first is law in principle—any law. The second is the Law of the covenant (the Torah) God made with Israel at Sinai.

This is most simply illustrated by what the Apostle has to say in 4:21, which literally says, "Tell me, you who wish to be subject to law, do you not listen to the Law?" In verse nine of the same chapter Paul speaks of the Galatians, who were being encouraged to embrace the Torah and Jewish tradition, as wanting to "return" to law-keeping. Of course, the Galatians were never subject to the Torah or to Jewish tradition. They had no previous share in the covenant of which the Law of Moses was a major part. In their inclination to submit to the Torah and to Jewish tradition they were reverting to a general law that is part and parcel of all false religions, including the error that had crept into Jewish thinking about the role of the Torah. That law dictated the relationship between people and the gods: divine goodwill and blessings were to be obtained by individuals obeying the law. *That* is the idea to which the Galatians were being encouraged to subscribe, and *that* is the view to which they were in danger of reverting.

The literalistic translation on which this commentary is based seeks to draw that attention by carefully following Paul's Greek and inserting the definite article only where Paul inserted it. As a further aid, when Paul speaks of the Law of Moses, I will capitalize, thus: Law. By this medium I hope we shall better understand why this letter was written. It is not a treatise against the Law of Moses or Jewish tradition; it is a clarion call to recognize the fact that salvation—all of it—is God's doing, not ours.

I have chosen to translate the Greek *Christos* by the Hebrew *the Messiah*, not because I object to speaking of our Lord as Christ (as my previ-

ous books clearly indicate) but because I believe doing so will help convey a sense that the more familiar *Christ* does not. People nowadays treat the title Christ as if it is a proper name. The significance of the title—almost always preceded in Greek and always in Hebrew by the definite article—is therefore lost and, in the case of this letter to the Galatians, it is a meaningful loss. The term Messiah intimates something important about our Lord. It points to Him as the fulfillment of the demands of the Law and the promises of the prophets. In context of the letter to the Galatians, that is an important truth.

One more point needs to be made about Paul's language. Paul's letters were not written in lofty, classical Greek; they were written in everyday Greek, the kind used in the markets and in the course of human communication. For that reason, where the option was open to me and in an effort to stay as close to the text as possible, I preferred to translate into spoken, common-place English, rather than otherwise.

Finally, following the example of Scripture, I distinguish between faith (an attitude of trust, Matthew 6:30, Mark 11:22, Acts 6:5, Romans 3:25, 2 Corinthians 5:7) and the Faith (the content of the Gospel, what one believes, Acts 6:7, Galatians 1:23, Ephesians 4:13). I make that distinction by speaking of the attitude with a small f (faith) and of the content by a capital F (Faith).

LET'S SUMMARIZE

- This letter to a group of churches in the province of Galatia was probably written between 43–49 AD and is very likely the first of Paul's letters.
- The principles enunciated in the most mature of Paul's letters—that to the church in Rome—are already evident here, indicating a remarkable consistency as well as a development in understanding.
- The primary issue Paul addresses in this letter is the grounds of spiritual blessing: human merit or those of the Messiah. Human merit is mistakenly thought to be obtained through keeping the Mosaic Law and Jewish tradition. Paul insists that Jesus' merits are enjoyed through faith.

LET'S PRAY

Almighty God of grace and of mercy, You have given us Your Word to teach us how to think and live for Your glory. You have chosen to love us in spite of our sins. We long to love and serve You in response. Grant us the grace to understand Your Word, apply it to our hearts and live out its principles in our daily lives. Teach us to find our all in Jesus, Your Son and our Savior and Messiah, so that we never rely on ourselves but put the whole of our trust in Him, who is able to save to perfection. May Your Holy Spirit guide us, strengthen us, rebuke us as we study Your Word and encourage us by the sweet comforts of the Gospel, to the praise of Your name and for Jesus' sake. Amen.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND STUDY

1. What do you think would be the implications if this letter was written after the Acts 15 council in Jerusalem? If it was, why do you think Paul did not reference it here?
2. Create a list of the fundamentally essential doctrines of the Gospel. Can you find these taught—directly or indirectly—in the Old Testament? If so, where?
3. What is the relationship between the Faith and faith? Can one have the second without the first? Is the first of any use without the second?

Paul's Letter to the Church in Galatia

A TRANSLATION

CHAPTER 1

¹ Paul, an apostle appointed, not by men and not through men but by Jesus the Messiah and God the Father, who raised Jesus from the dead, ² and all the brothers who are with me, to the churches in Galatia: ³ grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus the Messiah, ⁴ who, in accordance with the will of God the Father, gave himself for our sins to bring us out of this present evil generation, ⁵ to whom the glory is due for age of the ages, Amen.

⁶ I'm surprised that you so quickly leave him who called you by the grace of the Messiah to a different gospel, ⁷ which isn't a similar one, only that there are those who are unsettling you and who want to distort the Gospel of the Messiah. ⁸ but even if we or an angel from heaven would proclaim to you a Gospel contrary to that which we proclaimed, let him be cursed. ⁹ Like we said before I say again now: if anyone is proclaiming to you a Gospel contrary to the one we proclaimed to you, let him be cursed. ¹⁰ And now: Is it men's approval I am seeking or God's? Am I trying to please men or God? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of the Messiah.

¹¹ I inform you, brothers, that the Gospel proclaimed by me is contrary to man, ¹² because I did not receive it from a man, nor did a human teach it to me, rather, I received it by way of a revelation of Jesus the Messiah. ¹³ You heard of the way I conducted myself previously in Judaism, that I was radically persecuting the church

of God and destroying it. ¹⁴ I advanced in Judaism beyond many countrymen of my age because I was all the more zealous for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when he who chose me from my mother's womb and called me by his grace wanted ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me to that I would proclaim him to the nations of the world, I immediately did not consult with flesh and blood. ¹⁷ Nor did I go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles who preceded me, but I went away, to Arabia and again returned to Damascus. ¹⁸ Then, after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to make Cephas' acquaintance, and I remained with him 15 days, ¹⁹ but I did not see any other apostle, except James, the Lord's brother.

²⁰ Take note, I am writing to you, I write in the presence of God. I am not lying.

²¹ Then I went to the areas of Syria and Cilicia. ²² I was personally unknown to the churches in Judea, ²³ only that they heard again and again, "he who persecuted us in the past is now proclaiming the Faith he tried to destroy," ²⁴ and they praised God for what he did in me.

CHAPTER 2

¹ Then, after 14 years, I went up to Jerusalem again, with Barnabas. I also took Titus with me. ² I went up in accordance with a revelation and I presented before them the Gospel that I proclaim among the nations of the world. I did this privately, in the presence of those respected among them, lest I be running or had been running to no end. ³ But even Titus, who was with me, who was a Greek, they did not force to be circumcised ⁴ because of false brothers who stole into the church undetected. They stole in to spy out our liberty, which we have in the Messiah, in order to enslave us. ⁵ Not even for an hour did we give in to them, and that so that the truth of the Gospel would continue with you. ⁶ And those who seemed to be respected (for whatever it was, I don't care. God does not differentiate between people), those "respected ones" added nothing to me. ⁷ To the contrary. They understood that I was entrusted with the proclamation of the Gospel to the uncircumcised just as Peter was entrusted with the proclamation of the Gospel to the

circumcised, ⁸ because he who worked through Peter in his mission to the circumcised worked through me in relation to the nations of the world.

⁹ James, Cephas, and John recognized the grace that was given me. Therefore, those who are apparently considered to be pillars in the church in Jerusalem gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the nations of the world but they to the circumcised. ¹⁰ They only requested that we remember the poor, and I was eager to do the same thing.

¹¹ But when Cephas arrived in Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he was guilty. ¹² For before certain people arrived from James, he ate with non-Jews. But upon their arrival he withdrew and was separating himself from them because he feared the circumcised. ¹³ The rest of the Jews also acted hypocritically, so that even Barnabas was swept away by their hypocrisy.

¹⁴ But when I saw that they were not behaving in strict accordance with the truth of the Gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of everyone: “If you, a Jew, live like a non-Jew and not like a Jew, why do you force the non-Jews to Judaize?” ¹⁵ We, by nature, are Jews and not “Gentile sinners,” ¹⁶ and we know that men are not justified by keeping a law but only through faith in the Messiah, Jesus. We too have believed in the Messiah Jesus, so that we would be justified through faith in the Messiah and not by law-keeping, because by law-keeping no one is justified.

¹⁷ “But if, by seeking to be justified in the Messiah, it turns out that we also are sinners, is the Messiah serving sin? It can never be!

¹⁸ But, if I reestablish what I have torn down, I make myself out to be a sinner!

¹⁹ “For I, through a law, died to law in order that I should live for God. ²⁰ I was crucified with the Messiah, alongside him, and it is not me who is now living but the Messiah living in me, and the life that I now live in the flesh I live through faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not make the death of the Messiah into nothing—because if righteousness is by way of law, then there was no need for the Messiah to die.”

CHAPTER 3

¹ Stupid Galatians! Who bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus the Messiah was pictured crucified? ² This is the only thing I want to learn from you: did you receive the Spirit by keeping some law or by hearing the Gospel in faith? ³ Are you so stupid? — You’ve begun in the Spirit and now you achieve perfection by the flesh?! ⁴ Have you suffered so many things for nothing—if it was in fact for nothing? ⁵ He who gives you the Spirit and works miracles among you, does he do it because a law is kept or through a hearing with faith?

⁶ Abraham also “believed and it was attributed to him as righteousness.” ⁷ So you should know that those who have faith are the sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the scripture, having seen in advance that God would justify the nations of the world through faith, announced the Gospel to Abraham: you will be a blessing to all the nations of the world. ⁹ So then, those who believe are blessed with Abraham, the believer, ¹⁰ and law-keepers are subject to a curse because it was written: “whoever does not continue in all the matters written in the scroll of the Law and do them is cursed.”

¹¹ Well then, it is clear that no one is justified before God by a law because “by faith do the righteous live,” ¹² and the Law is not of faith, but whoever fulfills its commandments live by them. ¹³⁻¹⁴ The Messiah redeemed us from the curse that the Law imposes by becoming a curse for us (because it was written, “everyone who is hanged on a tree is cursed”), so that the blessing, that blessing promised Abraham, will reach the nations of the world through Jesus the Messiah and we would receive by faith the promised Spirit.

¹⁵ Brothers, I speak in human terms: once a will, even a human one, is confirmed, no one cancels it or adds to it, ¹⁶ and the promises were given to Abraham and his seed. It was not written “seeds,” referring to many, but to one, “and to your seed,” who is the Messiah. ¹⁷ In other words, after God confirmed the will in the Messiah, the Law which came 430 years later cannot cancel it. If the Law had, in fact, cancelled it, it would have also cancelled the promise ¹⁸ because, if the inheritance is conditioned on law, the inheritance is no longer a promise. But God gave Abraham a promise.

¹⁹ Well then, what was the Law for? It was added because of trespasses, until the seed for whom the promise was intended should come. It was given by means of angels and thorough a mediator (²⁰ and a mediator is not for one person, but God is one).

²¹ So then, is the Law contrary to God's promises? It could never be! If there was a law that was capable of giving life, then righteousness would indeed come from law. ²² But the scripture imprisoned everything to sin so that, in Jesus the Messiah, the promise by faith would be given to those who believe.

²³ Before the coming of Faith we were held in custody, imprisoned for the Faith that was about to be revealed, ²⁴ so that the Law was our mentor until the Messiah came, so that we would, by faith, receive righteousness. ²⁵ But since the Faith has come, we are no longer subject to a mentor ²⁶ because you are all sons of God through faith in the Messiah Jesus, ²⁷ because every one of you who was baptized into the Messiah has clothed himself with the Messiah. ²⁸ It is not possible that there still would be a Jew, nor a Greek. It is not possible that there still would be a slave, nor a freeman. It is not possible that still there would be male or female because you are all one in the Messiah Jesus, ²⁹ and if you belong to the Messiah, you are the seed of Abraham, inheritors in accordance with the promise.

CHAPTER 4

¹ But, I say, for as long as the heir is a small child, he is no different in any way from a servant although he is the owner of everything, ² rather, he is subject to a guardian and to house managers up to the time that the father determined in advance. ³ So too we. When we were little children we were subject to the most basic things of the world, ⁴ but when the fullness of time arrived, God sent his Son, who came into the world through a woman and was subject to law, ⁵ in order to redeem those who are subject to law so that we would be adopted as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ so that you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then, through God, an Heir.

⁸ In the past, when you did not know God, you served those who by nature are not gods. ⁹ But now, when you know God, or rather, now that you are known by God, how is it that you are turning again to the fundamental, weak and empty basics? Is it to these that you want to be enslaved again? ¹⁰ You take note of days and months and seasons and years! ¹¹ I'm afraid for you, lest I exerted myself among you for nothing.

¹² Be like me because I am like you, brothers, I plead with you. You have not wronged me in any way. ¹³ And you know that because of a weakness in the flesh I proclaimed the Gospel to you in the past, ¹⁴ and you did not make light of the test to which you were put because of my flesh, nor did you despise me, but you received me as a messenger of God, like Jesus the Messiah. ¹⁵ Well then, where has your happiness gone? I testify concerning you that, if it were possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me— ¹⁶ and now, in telling you the truth, have I become your enemy? ¹⁷ They are zealous for you, but not for a good purpose. They want to separate you, ¹⁸ so that you would be zealous for them. It is always good to be zealous for a good thing, and not only when I am there with you.

¹⁹ My children, for whom I experience the pains of childbirth again until Messiah is formed in you! ²⁰ I want to be with you right now and to speak to you in a different way because I'm confused about you.

²¹ Tell me, you who want to be subject to law, don't you listen to the Law? ²² It was written that Abraham had two sons, one was born from the slave woman and the other from the free one. ²³ But he who was born from the slave woman was born according to the flesh, and the one who was born from the free, through the promise.

²⁴ These things are an illustration, because there are two covenants, one from Mount Sinai who gives birth to the enslaved, and who is Hagar, ²⁵ and this Hagar is Mount Sinai, which is in Arabia, equal to the Jerusalem of today because she and her children are enslaved. ²⁶ But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is the mother of all of us, ²⁷ because it was written, "rejoice, barren one who did not

give birth, break out in songs, you who have not experienced the pains of childbirth, because the children of the desolate woman are more than those of the one who has a husband.”

²⁸ And you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of the promise, ²⁹ and exactly as he who was born according to the flesh persecuted the one who was born according to the Spirit, so too now. ³⁰ And what does the scripture say? “Send this slave woman and her son away, because the son of this slave woman will not take part in the inheritance alongside the son of the free woman.” ³¹ For that reason, brothers, we are not from the slave woman but from the free.

CHAPTER 5

¹ In the freedom to which the Messiah freed us stand firm and don't get entangled again in a yoke of slavery. ² Here, I, Paul, tell you that if you become circumcised, you will gain nothing at all from the Messiah. ³ I testify to every circumcised person that he is obliged to keep the whole of the Law. ⁴ You, who are justified by law-keeping, have been cut off from the Messiah, you have fallen from grace. ⁵ We, in spirit, through faith, enthusiastically await the hope of righteousness. ⁶ Because, in the Messiah Jesus, circumcision affects nothing, nor does uncircumcision, only faith acting through love.

⁷ You were running well, who hindered from obeying the truth?

⁸ This conviction is not from him who called you.

⁹ A little bit of yeast causes the whole lump to rise.

¹⁰ I have confidence with regard to you in the Lord that you will not think differently, and that whoever is bothering you will bear the punishment he deserves, whoever he may be. ¹¹ But I, brothers, if I still proclaim circumcision, why am I persecuted? In such a case the offense of the cross would be abolished. ¹² I really wish that those who are unsettling you would cut themselves [off], ¹³ because you were called to freedom, brothers, only not to a freedom that becomes an opportunity for the flesh. Instead, serve one another in love, ¹⁴ because the whole of the Law is summarized in

one word: “love the other like you love yourself.”¹⁵ but if you bite and consume each other, be careful that you are not consumed by each other.

¹⁶ And I say: behave according to the Spirit and you will under no circumstance gratify the desires of the flesh¹⁷ because the flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. These two oppose each other so that you are unable to do what you want to do.¹⁸ But if you are guided by the Spirit you are not subject to law.

¹⁹ What the flesh does is obvious: fornication, impurity, lewdness,²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarrels, jealousies, competitions, divisions, factions,²¹ envy, drunken parties, and the like of which I warn you in advance as I warned you before, that those who are doing these kinds of things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, generosity, kindness, faithfulness,²³ humility, self-restraint—against such things there is no law,²⁴ and those who belong to Messiah have crucified their flesh with its desires and lusts.²⁵ We live by the Spirit, so we should conduct ourselves by the guidance of the Spirit.²⁶ Let’s not be taken up with empty boasting, provoking one another, envying one another.

CHAPTER 6

¹ Brothers, if someone is caught in some trespass, you, the spiritual ones, restore him while looking humbly at yourselves, and be careful so that you are not tempted.² Each of you, carry the burdens of the other and in this way fulfill the Law of the Messiah,³ because if someone thinks he is really something while he is nothing, he is deceiving himself.

⁴ Everyone should examine his own actions, and then he would be able to boast, he and no one else, in what he has done.⁵ Each will carry his own load.

⁶ Those who are taught the message should share all good things with whoever is teaching him.⁷ Don’t be fooled: God must not be mocked, because whatever a person sows, that is what he will also

reap. ⁸ He who sows to his flesh, from the flesh will reap rot, but he who sows to the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. So, let's not become tired of doing good ⁹ because, when the moment comes, we will reap if we do not tire. ¹⁰ For that reason, so long as we have opportunity, let's do good to all, and especially to those who belong to the household of faith.

¹¹ You see how I have written you with large letters by my own hand. ¹² Those who want to look good in the flesh are the ones who force you to be circumcised, with the sole purpose that they not be persecuted for the sake of the cross of the Messiah Jesus, ¹³ because the circumcised are not law-keepers but they want you to be circumcised so that they would be able to boast in your fleshly circumcision. ¹⁴ But so far as I am concerned, it will never be that I would boast in anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus the Messiah, by which the world is dead so far as I am concerned, and I am dead so far as the world is concerned, ¹⁵ because circumcision and uncircumcision amount to nothing. The only important thing is a new creation. ¹⁶ Peace and grace to all who live according to this principle, and to God's Israel.

¹⁷ And now, no one is to cause me trouble because I bear the scars of Jesus on my body. ¹⁸ May the grace of our Lord Jesus the Messiah be with your spirits, brothers, Amen.

CHAPTER 1

Opening Words

(GALATIANS 1:1–5)

¹ Paul, an apostle appointed, not by men and not through men but by Jesus the Messiah and God the Father, who raised Jesus from the dead, ² and all the brothers who are with me, to the churches in Galatia: ³ grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus the Messiah, ⁴ who, in accordance with the will of God the Father, gave himself for our sins to bring us out of this present evil generation, ⁵ to whom the glory is due for age of the ages, Amen.

Contrary to his practice in the rest of his letters, this letter opens without greetings, prayers or wishes until we come to verse 3. Paul turns to the issue that concerns him immediately after introducing himself. He is concerned with defending the Gospel that he preached to the Galatians over against efforts to distort it. In an effort to justify their views, certain teachers who arrived in Galatia raised doubts as to Paul's understanding of the Gospel and to the validity of his apostleship. The matter at hand is urgent, too important to leave room for niceties. There will be time for that later. Paul opens by declaring that he is an apostle appointed, not by men and not through men but by Jesus the Messiah and God the Father, who raised Jesus from the dead.

The apostle considers it important for his readers to recognize that he is not the founder of a new religion. He did not determine the content of the message he was preaching, nor is he the messenger of some

great thinker. Plato did not send him, nor did Socrates. The apostles in Jerusalem did not send him either, nor did wise men or leaders of some religion. Paul's mission was not given to him by humans, although much-respected humans acknowledged his calling and ordained him publicly (Acts 13:2, Galatians 2:1-10). He had been appointed to preach the Gospel by Jesus the Messiah and God the Father, who raised Jesus from the dead.

Knowing that is what gives the Apostle such obvious confidence, leading to the ability to withstand efforts to persuade or influence him, regardless of all dangers and threats. Paul writes knowing that he is a messenger of the Messiah, a messenger of God. He therefore knows that the message he proclaims is the truth, the absolute truth, committed to him by the Messiah and by God the Father.

That being so, and in spite of the temptation to do otherwise, Paul does not dare deviate to the slightest degree from the truth committed to him. We will do well to ask ourselves if we are disciples of a human being, some influential teacher, for example, or if we really and truly examined our views in the presence of God. Are the conclusions at which we arrived truths that stand on their own, or have we embraced them because they serve us in some way? In other words, are we servants of the truth, or have we embraced a so-called truth to serve ourselves? If our conclusions are truly valid, they are objective truth. They stand above us and unequivocally oblige us. Indeed, they oblige all mankind to dedication and sacrifice.

Relative truth, "our" truth, lacks such validity. It is subject to every man's preference. It changes with the tide of opinion. The truth of God stands over us all, obliges us all, demands the obedience of us all with a dedication that knows no bounds and an ongoing sacrifice that never thinks in terms of loss or gain.

The apostle speaks of Jesus the Messiah and God the Father, who raised Jesus from the dead, in that order—a surprising one. He references the Messiah before God the Father! Imagine someone saying he was sent by Moses and God. How could one place God and Moses one beside the other? All the more so would it be unacceptable to place Moses *before* God, unless they are in some sense on par with one another.

The order in which Paul mentions the two is an expression of how the Apostle views the Messiah, and it is all the more impressive because it is incidental. Paul has a high view of the Messiah, and he takes that view so much for granted that he does not comment on it; he simply assumes it.

On the one hand the Messiah is Jesus, that is to say, He has a human name, He is a man among men. But He is not only man. He is equal to God (see John 5:18). Paul believes as does John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14). By virtue of His sonship He is also the Messiah—the object of Israel’s hope and the one through whom God is fulfilling all the purposes of His covenant with Israel. As such Jesus has a prior claim on the Jewish people’s fealty, obedience and affection. They owe Him double duty by virtue of their Jewishness as well as their standing as humans. However, as we shall see, He is not the Messiah of the Jews only, but also of the non-Jews.

We should also note how Paul describes God. He is the Father, who raised Jesus from the dead. In this connection, the term Father serves to indicate the relationship between the Father and the Son in the one, eternal deity. God is the Father of Jesus in a manner and in a sense that are untrue of His relations with any others. That is why Jesus is also described as Lord. There are many lords in the world, but none as exalted as Jesus, and none whose right to rule exceeds His. He is Lord over all aspects of our lives because His lordship is divine. He is, therefore, not only our Lord but Lord over all creation, the Master of all in heaven, on earth and under the earth, He who determines their fate and is sovereign over their very existence and all that they do.

Paul further tells us that the Father is the one who raised Jesus from the dead. He did so as a testimony to the fact that Jesus’ sacrifice was accepted by Him. It satisfied the Father’s righteousness and laid thereby purchased the salvation of all for whose it was intended. The Messiah “was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Romans 4:25). God acts in the course of human history: the resurrection took place at a point of time, when God reversed the natural order of things and brought the Lord Jesus the Messiah up from the dead. The God of which the Gospel speaks is not a god far away, remote and disinterested from the course of events. He molds those events, guiding them with a sure hand in the direction to which He would have them go. He is not subject to history but its Lord.

As for Paul, he is no maverick, no lone ranger. His views are common among the believers. That is why he mentions that others—all the brothers who are with me—share what he is writing to the Galatians. Paul insists that his mission was given him by the Messiah and God the Father,

but the test of that claim and of the message he proclaimed was to be found in confirmation received from the church of the Messiah of that day. He will later make sure to clarify that his message also received the approval of the Apostles in Jerusalem.

No one should dare ordain himself. No one should presume to be free of accountability to the church. Woe be to the person who is not subject to the watchful, authoritative eye of others in the Messiah. When Paul embarked onto his mission before the approval of the church to which he belonged (in Damascus and later in Jerusalem, in the first period of his walk with God), he wreaked havoc and no recorded good was accomplished.

Acts 9:28–31 indicates as much. Paul, driven by the urgency of his new discovery and the excitement of a new convert, thrilled with what he knew to be his calling, pre-empted the church's confirmation of that calling, embarked on a campaign in Jerusalem. He preached "boldly in the name of the Lord," "disputing with the Hellenists," yet no indication of any fruit of those efforts is given. The only indication of a response to his preaching is that his hearers "were seeking to kill him." The church in Jerusalem was by this time well acquainted with persecution, but "when the brothers learned" of the result of Paul's eager efforts, "they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus." "Sent him off" the text says. Apparently, they made every effort to ensure this young, well-intentioned but misguided trouble-maker not only left the city, but was shipped off to Tarsus, his home-town. There, presumably chastened by his experience, he remained for an extended period, with no reported Christian activity, until invited assist to Barnabas in Syrian Antioch. Only then did the Holy Spirit speak to the church: the time had come and Paul was to accompany Barnabas in what turned out to be the first of his missionary journeys.

As a result ("So," as the Scripture puts it in Acts 9:31), "the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and (in contrast to the short period during which Paul was in Jerusalem) was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied."

All that Paul is said to have achieved in the early days of his ministry is a name for himself (They heard again and again, he who persecuted us in the past is now proclaiming the Faith he tried to destroy. Galatians 1:23). It was later, when the Holy Spirit spoke to the church and Paul was ordained by the church for the mission (Acts 13:1–3), that his labors were manifestly blessed by God.

Paul learned to keep himself from the arrogant presumption that motivated many in his day and motivates many in ours. God taught him the advantage of self-effacing humility that recognizes the importance of submitting his views and sense of mission to the scrutiny of others. He learned that initiative, energy, talent and good intentions are not enough, nor is a sense of call by the Messiah. The church's acknowledgement of one's gifting and calling is necessary. Until such an acknowledgment was granted, "the brothers brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up and, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied" (Acts 9: 30-31).

That is the logic of the standards God determined and Paul set forth in his letters to Timothy and Titus for those whom the church is to enlist for spiritual service. That is also the logic behind the fact that he provided the churches with those standards. Under guidance of the Spirit, he came to disbelieve in situations when an individual identifies his own good intentions and talents, recognizes an opportunity, and enlists in the service of the Gospel. In the providence of God, he had gone that way and saw its error. Most of the standards he set to Timothy and Titus were fundamentally moral, measured over the course of time by those who know the candidates best. God used Paul's own experience to inform him, and then guided him by His Spirit to write as he did to Timothy and Titus.

Paul writes to the churches in Galatia. We discussed this statement in our introduction. This letter was not addressed to a church but to a group of churches in the province of Galatia, which we identified as Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, the first churches Paul and Barnabas established in the course of their journeys for the Gospel. They visited these three cities during what turned out to be Paul's first of three such journeys. Apparently, sometime after they left Galatia, unnamed individuals arrived and sought to supplement what Paul and Barnabas taught by adding Jewish practices to the Galatians' faith. This letter to the Galatians is a response to such efforts.

As soon as the truth is proclaimed, counterfeits of all kinds emerge, which serve in the hands of Satan to divert us from the truth, often by way of apparently innocent additions. Such false teaching is often presented as helpful for the spiritual life but it, in fact, erodes true spirituality by changing the essence of the Faith simply by adding to it. We ought to be careful with what we hear, as with what we teach.

Paul goes on to write, grace to you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus the Messiah. Note the fact that he is reverting to the natural order: God the Father is mentioned before the Lord Jesus. The traditional greetings, commonplace in Paul's day, are transformed by the Apostle into an opportunity to proclaim the Gospel and present its essential features.

Paul repeats this greeting, with minor changes, in most of his letters. Here they serve as an introduction to what he has to say to the Galatians later on. The churches of Galatia were inadvertently inclined to deviate from the grace of God. Such a step would inevitably cause them to lose that sense of inner peace and the knowledge of being reconciled with God, both of which are the fruit of grace, and grace is the only valid basis for salvation, its one and only source.

As noted, the churches in Galatia were founded something like a year or so before this letter was composed (see the Introduction). Immediately following their founding, certain people arrived and embarked onto a campaign that sought to persuade the Galatian Christians to supplement their faith in the God of Israel with obedience to the Law of Moses and Jewish tradition.

There was a certain logic to their argument: after all, the Galatians had embraced what was distinctly a Jewish faith. They attributed their salvation to Israel's Messiah and viewed the Scriptures delivered to Israel—the Law, the Prophets and the Writings—as God's living Word. It would only be natural to expect them to subject themselves to the commandments of God in the Law, as well as to the interpretational precepts dictated by the wise men of Israel. It would make sense for them to be circumcised and become part of the nation of Israel.

In spite of its logic Paul stood firmly against such a perception because it implied that the Messiah had merely affected the initial salvation of sinners and, possibly, an assurance of their eternal future. Their holiness, God's presence, their relationship with Him and the measure of their understanding of Scripture were all made contingent on their willingness to proceed from the initial stage of faith and repentance to the supposedly higher, more advanced stage of conducting themselves in accordance with Israel's traditions.

Another reason Paul opposed such a view was that it divided the church of the Messiah into two groups: those who remained at the lower level of spiritual life, and the more advanced, whose righteousness and spiritual supremacy were to be seen in their observance of Israel's tra-

ditions: circumcision, celebration of the Holy Days, maintaining the dietary laws, and so on.

In so doing they undermined the Gospel, which teaches that salvation, sanctification, blessing, and enlightenment are the product of God's grace, and that the objects of that grace are all—equally—full-fledged equal members of the body of the Messiah. They all enjoy God's presence and receive his blessing, and their only merit before God is that obtained by the Messiah through his sacrificial death and resurrection—in other words, Messiah did it all. There was nothing more to add.

Grace, of course, means favor one does not deserve. The grace of which the Gospel speaks is expressed in the forgiveness of sins, freedom from bondage to sin, the transformation of sinners' hearts, God's ongoing blessing in their lives and eternal blessing in the presence of God. All this is given to sinners, to rebels against God who broke His commandments, defiled, abused and misused the world He created, and shaped their lives to please themselves instead of pleasing Him.

Peace is the absence of hostility and the existence of good-will between two or more. The peace of which the Gospel speaks has two aspects. The first is the absence of hostility toward men on the part of God and His good-will toward them in spite of their sin. The other is man's acknowledgement of God's right over man, all he is and all he has, and the lack of hostility on man's part toward God, replaced by a sincere desire to honor Him and do His will.

Both are what the Apostle wishes the believers in Galatia, and what we should wish ourselves. Nothing more is necessary.

The Lord Jesus the Messiah who, in accordance with the will of God the Father, gave himself for our sins to bring us out of this present evil generation. These words of the Apostle are so full of meaning they exceed anything we imagine.

The words, gave himself for our sins, refer of course to what Messiah did for the redeemed. The reference is not only to His death but to the whole fabric of His life from that moment in eternity when the Father, Son and Spirit decided to act for the salvation of sinners, through Messiah's conception in Mary's womb, His birth, amazing life, death in our place bearing the guilt of our sin, His resurrection, ascent to heaven where He now sits at the right hand of the Father, ruling the universe and interceding for us as our sovereign king, our faithful priest and our wise, all-knowing prophet, the Lord of salvation.

Every one of these acts of giving are necessary for our salvation. The Lord Jesus, in spite of His amazing glory, willingly gave Himself for our sakes. He is not only the messenger of God the Father's love; He acted out of His own love, not only for the Father but for us. But note! Paul does not say the Messiah gave Himself for everyone's sins (if He had done so, everyone will assuredly be saved), but that that He gave himself for our sins—the sins of specific individuals. Paul will reiterate this amazing truth at the end of Chapter Two of his letter.

The focal point of the Lord Jesus the Messiah's giving Himself is that He took upon Himself the guilt of our sins and died the death we deserve, so that we would have life (or should I not rather say, LIFE!) based upon His merits. He took our place and became the object of God's terrible, righteous hatred of sin. He purchased life for us by His life and death. He purchased an assured, a perfect salvation to which nothing is lacking. By virtue of His merits, we are reconciled to God.

There is more. Paul says that the Messiah gave Himself for our sins to bring us out of this present evil generation. The salvation He purchased for us consists of more than just the forgiveness of our sins. The apostle will write of this again when, in his letter to the Christians in Rome, when he will point to the power of God to save and then describe the consequences of that salvation, including his own inner transformation by the work of the Holy Spirit, so that he earnestly loves God's law and longs to shape his life according to it (Romans 1:16, 7:14 to the end of the chapter).

In other words, salvation includes a complete change in the direction of our lives. It includes freedom from Satan's shackles, from the power and influence of this present evil generation. If we truly have been saved, we are no longer subject to this world. We are no longer obliged to its standards. We are no longer bound to its point of view; we have been born again. The Holy Spirit lives in us. We have tasted the grace of God and recognized His right to be honored in everything that happens in this, His world. He has become the focus of our lives and His grace the foundation of our joys. All we have from Him is given by grace.

This present evil generation to which the Apostle refers was (and is, down to the present day) the generation that worships, power, success, money and influence, that despises the weak, that admires achievers and measures achievement by material and physical standards rather than moral and spiritual ones. Such a generation believes it is more important to make money than to love God, that it is more impressive to run faster than anyone else than to be kind, humble and honest. In such a genera-

tion, only those thought to be naive are kind, humble and honest. God is, at best, to be used and displays of devotion to Him serve as a cloak for self-indulgence: “God in not in all their thoughts.”

Such is the generation that worships man, whose heroes are super-man, iron-man, wonder-woman, free of human limitations and excused of obligations, at liberty to do whatever he wishes: he defines his gender regardless of moral and physical realities. He determines his values. He chooses the course of his life. He denies God and sees in himself and in his enjoyments the purpose of all things.

The Gospel runs contrary to such a view. The Gospel reminds us that man’s value is the product of the fact that he is created by God, not the happenstance consequence of a blind chemical or physical reaction. His moral value is not the product of his own achievements or his place in the evolutionary ladder (can someone tell me why an amoeba has moral value at all?) but the fruit of God’s grace, who formed man in His image and placed him above all the creatures. There is no room for human presumption, no grounds for pride, no basis on which to boast. If man glories, he should glory in the Lord.

The Gospel places God at the head of all things, while this present evil generation places man there. The Gospel informs us that man is unable to save himself, nor can he contribute anything to his salvation, not even a little. Nor can he secure his ongoing salvation or the ultimate level of spiritual life. The Gospel insists that all we have from God is unmerited: we do not deserve it. It is a gift of God’s grace. The Lord Jesus the Messiah gave himself to bring us out of this present evil generation, which is evil precisely because it dares to think otherwise.

The Messiah acted for us in accordance with the will of God the Father. The title Father here refers to the relations between the God the Father and God the Son, not to His fatherhood of all mankind. There was, is, and ever will be full agreement between the Father and the Son (as there is with the Spirit), because the three are one. The Father sent the Son and the Son came of his own volition. Our salvation is the consequence of the will of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the fruit of the one act they perform together. They may be distinguished the one from another but they can never be separated. God the Father, Son and Spirit is our savior, in all the majesty and greatness of His being.

To whom the glory is due for age of the ages, Amen. It is not altogether clear from this passage whether it is God the Father or God the Son who is to be glorified. The syntax seems to indicate that the reference is to the

Father, because He is the last to be mentioned in the previous statement. In any case, the glory of one is the glory of the other. The Father is glorified in the Son and the Son in the Father. The Father would have all men glorify the Son, and all the Son does has as its purpose that the Father might be glorified in Him.

The will of the Father is that all mankind should honor and glorify the Son as they do the Father. “If anyone does not honor the Son, he does not honor the Father, who sent him” (John 5:23). Jesus, the Son of God, honors the Father, and we honor the Father by honoring the Son. Therefore, it is ultimately immaterial whether Paul is saying that the Father should be glorified, or that the Son should be. The result is the same, and our salvation is intended for the glory of both Father *and* Son.

Contrary to what is often thought, the beating heart of the Gospel is not man’s happiness but the glory of God. Jesus gave Himself for our sins to bring us out of this present evil world because that is the way God chose to be glorified. Man’s salvation does not begin with man’s need, nor does it end in his happiness. It begins with God’s right to be glorified and ends with God receiving the glory that is His due for all generations, to eternity and beyond.

The essence of what lies in the future is the glory God will receive. The song of the kingdom is a song of praise to God. Our eternal blessing in the Messiah is that we will at last be enabled to love, value, worship, and praise our Creator, Sustainer, and Savior with cleansed, sincere hearts. This should also be the essence of our hope, the goal to which we aspire, the focus of our service and the purpose of our lives.

LET’S SUMMARIZE

- Paul insists that the Gospel he preaches was taught him by God rather than through the instrumentality of man. It is, therefore, absolute truth. We should trust it, believe in it and live by it. Do we? Do we really?
- Paul recognized the importance of being subject to scrutiny. He was not self-appointed, nor did he labor alone. Others testified by their support to the validity of his calling. Are we willing to serve alongside others and under their oversight?
- Truth is important in order to true spiritual life. We should labor to know and understand truth, and then shape our lives by it.

- The Messiah is equal to God the Father. He too is to be worshipped.
- We have ample reason to worship and praise Him because He secured every part of our salvation. He did it all. Nothing need be added.
- The Messiah freely gave Himself for our salvation, a salvation which consists of more than forgiveness and wistful hope; it includes actual deliverance from the rule of sin and complete confidence as to the future.
- It was God the Father's will to glorify Himself by saving us. He sent the Messiah for that purpose. Ours must now be to bring Him glory.

LET'S PRAY

Eternally glorious God, Master, Ruler, and Savior of all, three in one and one in three, we adore You for Your amazing beauty. We thank You for the kindness You have shown us in the Gospel. You have granted us solid truth on which to build our lives. You have granted us the fellowship, encouragement and oversight of the church, in which You work by Your Holy Spirit. Teach us to understand and love the truth until it becomes a vital part of our thinking. We cannot stand on our own; move us to seek the scrutiny of others. Teach us to sincerely worship and obey the Son, our Messiah, and to seek in Him alone in the fullness of Your grace. Grant to us the ability to live to Your glory, as those who have been delivered from the power of sin and handed over to righteousness. Glorify Yourself in us, we plead, in Jesus' name, Amen.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND STUDY

1. Discuss: Is truth relative (or is it our understanding that is relative)? Can we arrive at a reasonable measure of knowledge of the truth? If we can, how? If not, by what standard should we live?
2. Enlarge on the importance of serving the Lord within the context of the church's oversight.
3. Consider ways in which our view of truth shapes our spiritual life.

4. To what extent and how do we evidence our deliverance from sin, rather than mere forgiveness, in daily life?
5. Discuss the implications of God's glory being the ultimate object of the plan of salvation.