

# A PRIMER ON THE TOPIC OF LAW AND GOSPEL

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The topic of Law and Gospel is eminently a topic upon which Christians have long argued and debated about. The Apostle Paul had to face both the Judaizers (Legalism) and the hypothetical Antinomian objection (No-law) which may arise out of his teaching on God's grace, as seen in Rom. 6:1. James on the other hand faced the early Antinomians in his epistle as he demonstrates that faith without works is dead (Jas. 2:17). After the Apostles, the Ebionite sect arising from the early Jewish Church continued the heretical view of the Judaizers to its logical conclusion and thus rejected the Gospel of grace<sup>1</sup>. As we move closer to modern times, the pendulum swung in the direction of Legalism, with the Legalistic works-righteousness of Rome and her Treasury of Merit being faced by Martin Luther. All of that came to a flash-point in the selling of Indulgences by the Dominican preacher John Tetzel, of which Luther nailed his 95 thesis on the door of the Castle Church (Schlosskirche) in Wittenberg, Germany in protest of this travesty, thus starting the Protestant Reformation whereby biblical Christianity was restored to the world.

One would have thought that we would have learned from the past, but sadly in our modern times, the twin errors of both Legalism (salvation by keeping the Law and/or doing good works) and Antinomianism (no requirement to obey any law) runs rampant in the churches. One does not have to look far to see either of these errors even within what calls itself the Evangelical church movement today.

It is in this light that we look at the topic of Law and Gospel. If it is indeed true that the doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone is the article upon which the Church stands or falls (*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*), as Luther says<sup>2</sup>, then it is vital for Christians to know this doctrine, for our very salvation hinges upon the fact that we have gotten it right. For the Scriptures are very clear that Man by nature is sinful (Rom. 3:23), alienated from God and under His wrath (Jn. 3:36b, Rom. 1:18) and deserving the wages of sin which is death (Rom. 6:23a). More than that, Man actively hates and detests God (Rom. 3:10-18), and justly deserve hellfire for his rebellion against the thrice-holy God. How then can we as sinners be reconciled to God and thus be saved? Clearly, this is done through believing in Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:10, 13) as Savior and Lord (Acts 5:31), through the instrumentality of the Gospel (Rom. 10:14-15).

Yet the question still remains. What relation has the Law to do with the Gospel? For the Gospel of grace does not exist in isolation from the rest of the Scripture, and Scripture does mention about the Law of God especially in the Old Testament. Unless one desires to be a Marcionite heretic who throws out the Old Testament as being obsolete, we as Christians have to wrestle with the issue of Law and Gospel, and see how they relate to each other for our own benefit.

In the New Testament, the most explicit text of Scripture discussing this issue is to be found in the epistle to the Galatians. Before exegeting the texts however, it is important for us to look at the historical context in order to properly interpret the epistle as Paul had intended it to be understood.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Church History of Eusebius*, NPNF2-01 Bk. III, Chapter XXVII: *The heresy of the Ebionites* (available online at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.viii.xxvii.html>), footnote 824.

<sup>2</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Books, 1995), p. 18

## ESTABLISHING THE CONTEXT OF GALATIANS

### Introduction

The book of Galatians — an epistle written by the apostle Paul, and the only one in which there is no commendation of any sort as compared to all of the other Pauline epistles. Written to the church in Galatia, the epistle was definitely written during or after the time of Paul's second missionary journey and thus after the proceedings of the Jerusalem Council.

### The biblical narrative evidence

The internal evidence in Galatians, Gal. 4:12-14, indicates that Paul came to the Galatian believers personally and preached to them in the past, while verse 13 indicates that he has come to them at least once prior to the writing of this epistle. Historically as we read through the narrative in the book of Acts, the first time the apostle Paul came to the region and province of Galatia was during his first missionary journey in the cities of Pisidia (Antioch), Iconium and Lystra, turning back at Derbe and returning to Syrian Antioch along that same route as they encourage the churches (Acts. 14:20-21). Upon his return to (Syrian) Antioch, the Judaist<sup>3</sup> opposition to the Gospel of grace began as detailed in Acts 15:1-2. After the great Jerusalem Council precipitated by this crisis described in Acts 15 had been settled in their favor, the delegates from the Jerusalem Church, Judas and Silas, were sent out to the churches "in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia" (Acts. 15:23) to proclaim the rulings of the Jerusalem Council to the believers there. Sometime later, Paul would embark on his second missionary journey through the province of Galatia (and Phrygia) all the way westwards to Mysia and Troas (Acts 16: 7-8), and then across the Aegean Sea all the way to Philippi in Greece.

Such historical background would help us to see that the internal evidence in Galatians itself suggests that the epistle must be written after Paul's first missionary journey. Furthermore, since the Judaists arose while Paul was in (Syrian) Antioch, and the Jerusalem Council had settled on the Gospel's and Paul's side, it is highly unlikely that Paul would write a letter to the churches in Galatia when Judas and Silas were going to deliver the "apostolic authoritative pronouncement" as it were of the mother church in Jerusalem together with all the Apostles. Paul in his second missionary journey went through the province of Galatia himself so that would not be a good period to place the writing of this epistle while he was on his way to visit them. The writing of the epistle to the Galatians should therefore be timed after Paul's visit to the Galatian churches during or after his second missionary journey. Louis Berkhof places the writing of this epistle during Paul's time in the city of Corinth<sup>4</sup>, of which one notable reason why he thinks this is so was that Silas' and Timothy's names were not present on the epistle although they were known to the churches of Galatia. Since the only duration where Silas and Timothy were not present with Paul was during Paul's stay in Athens (Acts 17:16-34) and the first part of Paul's stay in Corinth (cf Acts 18:5), Berkhof therefore inferred that Paul wrote Galatians while he was in Corinth. It can of course be seen however that Athens is another distinct possibility. Regardless of exactly when and where the epistle was written, the scriptural and historical evidence leaves us the conclusion that the Epistles to the Galatians was written quite some time after the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, and thus we must interpret

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<sup>3</sup> In this article, the term "Judaists" (*n*) would be used to refer to people who tend towards the religious practice of Judaism, as opposed to the term "Judaizers" (*n*) which refer to false teachers who taught obedience of the Law of Moses as being necessary for salvation.

<sup>4</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1915). As accessed on Christian Classic Ethereal Library, at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/berkhof/newtestament.xv.html> .

what it says in light of the historical context of the struggles of the early church in order to grasp its teaching more firmly.

With that said, let us therefore look into the historical theological context the book of Galatians was situated in.

### **Historical theological context of the book of Galatians**

Knowing therefore the historical background, we can look at the theological development and issues that were faced by the early Christians during that period, as Paul certainly did not write his epistle in a theological vacuum. This is especially so since even a cursory read through the epistle shows that Paul was addressing some issues within the Galatian churches, which we have previously stated to be the problem of the Judaizers and would now give more proof for this previous assumption.

So what exactly is the theological climate of the period of the writings of Galatians? The Jerusalem Council was over and its proceedings and judgments disseminated to the churches throughout the world wherever the Gospel spread, especially to the region of Asia Minor at least initially in Cilicia. Such being the first and only apostolic authoritative church council<sup>5</sup>, its pronouncements would certainly be highly regarded and revered as like the infallible ruling of Christ Himself on this issue, which it most certainly is since the account and judgment is found in the Canon of Scripture.

This alone however may be irrelevant to our study into Galatians, if not for the fact that the subject matters treated in both cases are so similar. For example, the word "circumcision" is mentioned 8 times in the book of Galatians. Furthermore, every time it is mentioned, circumcision was part of the topic under discussion and not a fact mentioned merely in passing. The antagonists also seem similar, with Paul calling them the "circumcision party" in Gal. 2:12, contrasted with the record of the Jerusalem Council antagonists who proclaimed "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1b). In fact, as it will be proven later, the antagonists in both cases are almost exactly the same group of people and the issue remains approximately the same also. Suffice is it for now however to say that such similarity between the antagonists and the issues faced in both instances means that great attention must be given to the Jerusalem Council to provide the needed background to understanding the book of Galatians.

Let us therefore look into the Jerusalem Council, in order to ascertain what exactly the issue at hand was, and what the apostolic and biblical answer to it was.

### **THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL**

The Jerusalem Council took place in Acts 15, and as the first and only infallible council, the truth proclaimed in it is surely very important to us, and would have bearings on how we are to properly interpret the epistle to the Galatians, and in fact, as we shall see, the Gospel too.

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<sup>5</sup> This was the only council presided by all of the Apostles. Since the Apostles are the foundations of the Church (together with the OT prophets) (Eph. 2:20), their declaration on doctrinal matters manifest (not determine as only God determines Truth) the truths of the Faith.

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses."

The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."

And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written,

“‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.’

Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.”

Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, with the following letter: "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled,

and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” (Acts 15: 1-29)

To analyze this passage, it may be helpful to look at various aspects of it.

### **Occasion for the council**

The occasion for the council can be seen in verses 1-2, in which certain men from Judea, purportedly from the Jerusalem church, came to Syria Antioch and began to teach a particular doctrine — that salvation is impossible unless the believers adopt the sign of the Old Covenant ie circumcision. Such a sign is to be administered according to Mosaic Law, because it is stated as being "according to the custom of Moses". What those Judean teachers desire therefore is not merely the physical 'surgical' cutting and removal of the foreskin, but it is to be done religiously as a sacramental sign of the Old Covenant. It must definitely be remembered that these teachers came from a Judaist<sup>6</sup> background, being orthodox Jews, and therefore they most certainly know the letter of the Law reasonably well, having being "forced" to memorize the Torah from young.

It is written that such teaching caused dissension and debate between these teachers on the one side and the apostle Paul and Barnabas on the other side. The disputation became rather heated, so much so that the church at Syrian Antioch who were disturbed by these Judean teachers decided to send representatives to the Church at Jerusalem to enquire of this issue; to the apostles who are the foundation stones of the church (Eph. 2:20).

### **Appeal to the Council**

As it was mentioned earlier, representatives were sent to the Church of Jerusalem from the Church at Syrian Antioch. However, does this mean that it was an appeal from one church to a "mother church" so that there is a biblical precedent for a centralized system of government or Episcopal polity? No, for the appeal was made to "the apostle and elders", while the church body was mentioned in verse 12 and verse 22 as being present while the issue was being hammered out. The appeal therefore was to the apostles mainly, and the elders in the Church of Jerusalem who rule and teach the church in conjunction with the apostles. Further proof that a church-to- church appeal isn't what Scripture is describing nor teaching can be seen in Paul's attitude in this particular episode as it is depicted in Scripture and discussed below.

### **Paul the Apostle and the Council**

Paul, as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, certainly had the authority of an Apostle, and he could always use that authority to proclaim authoritative teachings of Scripture, which he in fact did when he wrote his various epistles especially the teaching ones (ie Romans, Galatians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians). As an Apostle, he could always pronounce the infallible truth and judgment on these Judean teachers who were disturbing the Antioch Church (like he did in the various epistles he wrote ie 1 Cor. 5:2), yet he didn't do so in this particular instance.

Various theories are advanced as to why Paul did not invoke his authority as an apostle, of which being subject to a church council being one of them. Yet such a theory is not viable

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<sup>6</sup> Judaist (*adj*): of or pertaining to Judaism

in light of the fact that verse 3 recounts how he continues to share the conversion stories of Gentiles along their way to Jerusalem, which certainly means that his mind was made up on the truth regarding the conversion of the Gentiles. We must remember that the Judaist opponents of Paul had earlier declared the Antioch Gentile Christians unsaved unless they partake of the Old Covenant sign of circumcision, which they didn't. Paul's actions of proclaiming the **salvation** of the **Gentiles** along the way to Jerusalem would thus be strange since there is no prior indication that the Council will judge in Paul's favor. Such recounting on the part of Paul before the meeting of the Jerusalem Council would be strange at the very least and outrightly premature if Paul had indeed thought that the Council was in fact deciding doctrine on this topic.

If Paul was not subjecting himself and his doctrine to the Council, then why would he seemingly subject himself to the judgment of the Council? Or can it be that Paul confidently knew that the Council would definitely judge in his favor? One reason why Paul did this was certainly due to the fact that the Judaists came from Judea, so Paul may have come to the source to solve the problem that seems to be coming from the Jerusalem Church. A more important goal of Paul was to propel the church to consolidate her position on this particular pertinent topic — the Gospel message of grace<sup>7</sup>. As we will see in our study of Galatians, Paul's passion was for the Gospel and this issue was one area in which Paul was determined that the Church be strong in.

As to the issue of the Council's judgment, since the apostles are led by Christ, there shouldn't be any conflict between their beliefs as Christ leads them in the Truth. Paul thus could be certain about them judging in his favor in the final analysis as the same Spirit guides them all, which they in fact did.

### **Subject matter of the Council**

On the surface, the Council convened to judge with regards to the issue of circumcision and keeping of the law of Moses. It may thus be thought that the basic issue is with regards to the rituals of Judaism and whether Gentiles needed to become Jews before becoming Christians. N.T. Wright for example treats this as an ethno-centric issue<sup>8</sup>, boosted probably because the works under question were quintessentially Judaist. However, is that truly what the real issue is – one purely of ethno-centrism, of Covenantal inclusion and exclusion?

As it has been said, a surface reading of the text supports this reading as a valid interpretation of the issue before us. For surely, verse 8 does in fact teach that God gave the same Spirit to them as **He did to us**, says Peter. Verse 9 similarly proclaims that now there is "no distinction between us and them", and that now there is one way — faith — by which all men can be saved, which is made available to both Jews and Gentiles. Similarly,

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<sup>7</sup> The fact that much consideration and debate had to go on with regards to this issue (Acts 15:6-7a) seemingly proves that the Apostles themselves did not know the truth with regards to this issue and the Council was gathered thus to determine doctrine. However, an alternative which takes this into account while at the same time taking into account Paul's confidence in His position even before the Council met is that the Council was not determining doctrine per se but deciding how to apply the doctrines they know to this current situation; not **determining** doctrine but **developing** and **formulating** theological praxis from more foundational doctrines. Since the issue in the church pertains to the transition between the Old to the New Covenant, the validity and the practice of Old Covenant practices must be re-evaluated in the light of the New Covenant and the revelation of the mysteries of God found in both the Old and the increasing volume of New Testament texts starting with the teachings of Jesus at that time.

<sup>8</sup> John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N.T. Wright* (England: IVP, 2008), p. 22-23, 133, 147-161.

verses 11, and 14-18 proclaims for both Jews and Gentiles the common position they now share before the Cross.

Now, most certainly, ethnocentrism is part of and in fact is a symptom of the problem. Wright's point is correct in that ethnocentrism is a problem, but it is neither the whole problem nor the core issue at hand. His diagnosis doesn't go deeper, and thus is in error because it neglects the weightier issues of Law and Gospel as it can be seen in verses 10-11.

Verse 10 in my opinion is the weak spot for the New Perspective's position on the issue raised in the Jerusalem Council. At the same time, it shows us the heart of the issue with respect to the Law in this setting. In verse 10, we read that the placing of the Law was a yoke which neither the Jews now like the Apostles nor their forefathers were able to bear. If the practicing of these things was not bearable even for the most orthodox of Jews (cf Phil. 3:5-6), then surely these things were never meant to be practiced with an eye to be saved in any way or shape reformed. Even the talk about Covenantal inclusion/ exclusion fails here, for unless the practicing of the Law was meant to be one big show of hypocrisy like what the Pharisees are often accused of, how can one even begin to talk about obedience to the Law especially prior to the coming of Christ? Notice here that the ability or lack thereof is the issue at hand, not the motive to attempt to obey, as if they meant anything at all in God's sight. After all, judgment by works require truly acceptable works before God, and good motives will not suffice (cf Rom. 2:6-10)

To further confound New Perspectivism, verse 11 follows immediately on the heels of verse 10. On its own, verse 11 may seem to support New Perspectivism. When placed in context with verse 10 however, such 'support' vanishes. For in verse 11, the object is God's grace which saves us, and that grace is contrasted (by the word 'But') with the inability of the yoke of the Law which is unable to save since the Law cannot be kept by any Jew anyway. Such a contrast posits a sharp distinction between Law and Gospel, and confirms that the issue at hand is salvation or soteriology and not merely covenantal inclusion. For if Jewish believers were not saved by the Law but also by grace, whereas previously they were not saved in their law-keeping either, then this Covenant of Grace mentioned here in the New Testament must be a new covenant starting with a blank sheet of paper (*tabula rasa*)<sup>9</sup>, of which entry into the Covenant was not by law-keeping or obedience or anything else but solely through the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and of which before the Cross this Covenant does not yet actually exist in time<sup>10</sup>.

So with all this said, it can be seen that the issue before hand is indeed the Gospel message; the message of salvation. Is salvation one of grace through faith, or is one of covenantal obedience of the Law through fidelity to the Old Covenant rites and rituals?

### **Judgment of the Council**

As it has been stated previously, the Apostle Peter in verse 10 proclaims the insufficiency of the Law in saving even the Jews who could not keep them. Nevertheless, the Jewish

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<sup>9</sup> This is not a description on the subject of Man's state before God (which is altogether sinful - negative), but a description of the comparative state of Jews as opposed to Gentiles on their relative merits in being made partakers of God's grace in the New Covenant. Simply put, they have no advantage in this respect.

<sup>10</sup> Old Testament saints are most definitely saved by believing in Christ (Jn. 14:6; 8:56), and thus are saved under the New Covenant inaugurated by Christ's death on the Cross. Yet they are saved by the New Covenant as it were applied retroactively – by the Covenant of Grace which God makes with His elect (Jer. 31:31-33; Eze. 36:24-29; Eph. 1:3-14).

believers were still very much enmeshed in their traditions and only by much sharing of God's miraculous work among the Gentiles, thus showing forth God's approval in reaching and saving Gentiles as Gentiles, were they finally convinced. The council then proclaims judgment in favor of Paul's position, with a few rules meant to eliminate unnecessary tension between Jewish and Gentile Christians such as abstaining from food offered to idols, strangled food and food with blood, which evidently were practices particularly offensive to Jews

### **Implications of the Council**

The verdict in favor of Paul has important implications for the Gospel message. For now the Gospel is emphatically stated to be one of grace apart from observance of the Mosaic Law and especially the rites and rituals of the Old Covenant. The split in the visible Church between the blind adherents to the Old Covenant and those who embrace the New Covenant was beginning. Future controversies will clarify to us more with regards to the Gospel, as we shall see as we look to the book of Galatians, written many years after the initial controversy began in Syrian Antioch.

### **EXPOSITION OF GALATIANS**

#### **The Epistle to the Galatians – the theme**

The Epistle to the Galatians marks the only letter whereby Paul focuses exclusively on one controversy, and it contains no commendation in any way. Gone are the 'flowery' language which permeates Paul's introductions as seen for example in Rom. 1:1-15 and 1 Cor. 1:1-9, or even Paul's exclamation of praise in Eph. 1 - 2:10, with a particularly long paragraph in Eph. 1:3-11. Instead of such exclamation of praise and preliminary words of greetings we are treated to the following:

Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— and all the brothers who are with me,

To the churches of Galatia:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (Gal. 1:1-5)

as compared to

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 1:1-7)

The brevity of the introduction is even more pronounced by the way Paul introduces himself. In this epistle, Paul introduced himself as "an apostle — not from man or through man, BUT through Jesus Christ and God the Father", certainly a phrase that forcefully asserts his apostleship as being from God. This assertion of his apostolic credentials is hammered into the audience in Gal. 2:1-10 once again, as Paul specifically mentioned that James and Cephas and John (who incidentally are ALL apostles) gave the right hand of fellowship to him Paul and his companion Barnabas (Gal. 2:9). An interesting thing to note here is that these three apostles were stated as "seemed to be pillars", or *stuloi* (στυλοι) in Greek. The same Greek word is used in 1 Tim. 3:15, in which the church of the living God is the *stulos* (στυλος) — pillar and buttress of the faith. This therefore shows us that Paul through this passage was asserting his apostolic authority as being recognized at the highest echelon of Apostolic Church leadership.

Such a strong assertion of Paul's apostleship and its recognition by the other Apostles makes sense only when one recognizes this entire letter as being one of almost total rebuke of the Christians in Galatia, and Paul is therefore using his apostolic authority as a basis to rebuke and judge them. Having no commendation and a short introduction, the next verse following the brief introduction is meant to shock the congregation. Verse 6 states the following:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel (Gal. 1:6)

To get an idea of the severity of this sentence as it was intended, it might help to remember that this whole letter was to be read in all its fullness on a nice Sunday morning in the midst of the assembled congregation. After brief, probably rather curt, greetings in verses 1-5, these words were spoken to the congregation of believers:

**Paul:** I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel (Gal. 1:6)

Suddenly the morning didn't seem that nice after all.

This verse is then followed by verse 7, which identifies some that are within the church as those who are troubling the Galatian believers with a false Gospel, which is no Gospel at all. To these believers, that Judaizer heretic may be their friend, their neighbor sitting there just besides you. Paul, this is going to be a recipe for how to engineer a church split, or don't you know that? After all, we are all supposed to be united, you know? How dare you create division in the Church?

Sarcasm aside, let us continue reading through the passage. Verses 8 and 9 contain one of the harshest judgments of Scripture on any person. The Gospel is the subject, and the apostolic curse is pronounced. The word *anathema* (αναθεμα) used here denotes devotion to God as being a sacrifice consumed by fire<sup>11</sup>, and in the context of the Gospel thus proclaims that such a person is beyond any hope of redemption; they are damned to hellfire without any hope of salvation. This strongest and harshest judgment finds an echo in the New Testament only in the book of Hebrews with its warning against apostasy (cf

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<sup>11</sup> The Greek word *anathema* is used to translate the Hebrew word *cherem* in the Septuagint (LXX) and thus has the same connotation. Josh. 6:17 and various other passages in the Old Testament use the word *cherem* to describe the process of devoting things to God; to devote to the LORD for destruction. Thus, the curse of anathema meant that the person under it is devoted to God for destruction without any possibility of redemption, just as the ancient Canaanites were utterly destroyed by Israel unto God.

Heb. 6:4-8; 10:26-30) which merits the same punishment, thus showing forth the severity held by Paul with regards to the twisting of the Gospel. The pronouncement is repeated twice — once in verse 8 and once in verse 9, thus showing forth the importance of this issue.

As it can be seen so far, Paul's manner of writing in this epistle and this opening salvo tells us the important issue Paul wants to address to the Galatians, namely the distortion of the Gospel, and to convey the seriousness of such a deviation. This sets the stage for the entire epistle to the Galatians, in that the whole Epistle would be almost entirely focused on the message of the Gospel, and the seriousness it should be held. Those who distort the Gospel according to Paul and are teaching others to do the same are damned unless they repent. In order to understand Galatians, we must do it in this light, and know that the primary focus is on the nature of the Gospel rather than on issues like the Law or the fruit of the Spirit. The theme of the Gospel therefore must function as the interpretive grid through which we engage and exegete the text of Galatians.

### **The argument started in Gal. 2**

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. (Gal. 2:11-21)

We have seen that the theme of this epistle the apostle Paul focused on was the Gospel, and he treated it very seriously. Whatever the error was, this error was a soul-damning error which distorts the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ into a false one which does not save. After spending an extended section establishing his apostolic credentials in Gal. 1:11- 2:10, Paul launches into a discussion of the Gospel with regards to the "works of the law", which will in fact continue throughout the next 3 chapters.

In Gal. 2:11-21, the passage begins with Paul taking upon himself to oppose Peter while Peter (or Cephas) was in Syrian Antioch. It must be noticed that this section flows immediately from the previous section in verse 9 in which Paul had named Peter as being a pillar in the church. This is especially remarkable since the original text did not consist of chapter and verse numberings, and paragraphing also, and therefore the whole thing

could very well be one chunk of text. Therefore although Paul uses Peter's name to assert the authenticity of his apostolic credentials, Paul was telling the Galatian Christians, and us, that the Truth of the Gospel is higher than the rank of apostleship. Truth is truth objectively apart from the actions of Apostles, much less Councils, Synods or individuals within the Church, in asserting or denying it.

Gal. 2:11 starts off with Paul informing us that Peter stands condemned, and the reason for this can be found in his action in being a hypocrite in living contrary to his convictions in the Truth. Although an apostle, Peter was still a man, and in this instance, he feared Man more than he feared God. Whereas previously he ate with the Gentile Christians, he withdrew and separated himself from eating with them when those who were "from the circumcision party" arrived in Syrian Antioch (v. 12). And such an action causes even Barnabas (who had formerly resisted the Judaists/ Judaizers cf Acts 15:2) as well as the Jewish Christians to follow suit (v. 13), resulting in Paul rebuking Peter publicly for his hypocrisy (v. 14).

This episode was used by Paul as an introduction to lead into the details of what was wrong among the Galatian Christians, and therefore we ought to examine what exactly happened here. It may be recalled that the historical timing of the book of Galatians was after the time of the Jerusalem Council, and that controversy was over the issue of circumcision (cf Acts. 15:1). Coming over to the book of Galatians, we encounter again, it seems, the same group of false teachers who are described as the "circumcision party". Paul's rebuke to Peter in verse 14 shows us also that the action which the circumcision party requires is the focus on living "like a Jew", as seen in the withdrawal of Peter and the other Jewish Christians who separated from the Gentile Christians who were obviously not living like Jews.

Paul then followed this narrative experience of his with an exposition on the nature of the Gospel with regards to Christian living in light of the Law of Moses, which we have seen is the error of the Judaists in Acts 15 in insisting that believers are to follow the Law of Moses to be saved. Gal. 2:16 shows us that for both Jews and Gentiles, works of the Law can never justify us, but rather we are justified by having faith in Jesus Christ. In fact, those who depend on obeying the Law (νομον) (practicing the works of the Law) can never be justified. Verse 15 further informs us that this is applicable to Jews as well, who are similarly not saved by obeying the Law of God.

The logical argumentation continues into verse 21 — stating that if obeying the Law could constitute righteousness, then Christ had died in vain because we would all have merited eternal life by our own merits. Verse 17 refutes those who may think that removing the Law from meriting salvation would result in Christ giving us a license to sin, yet Paul in turn states that using the Law to merit salvation in fact IS sin (Gal. 2:18). So therefore, far from multiplying sin, rejecting the Law as meritorious and embracing grace in living to God is the righteous thing to do. The godly life according to Paul therefore is not to be lived according to the works of the Law like what the circumcision party is adopting, but to be lived by faith in Christ and reckoning ourselves dead to sin (Gal. 2:19-20), echoing Paul's sentiments on this issue as seen in Rom. 6:1-2.

### **The Problem in Galatia**

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having

begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? (Gal. 3:1-4)

The problem that exists among the churches in Galatia is now revealed. Paul in this passage rebuked the foolish Galatian Christians who it seems are now adding the Jewish works of the Law to their faith, as seen in Gal. 3:3. The deluded Galatian Christians have started off their Christian walk in faith, but now they are turning to the works of the Law to "perfect" their Christian walk.

Here, we can start to see a slight difference between the 'doctrine' of the Judaists in Acts 15 and the false teachers in Galatians, who are formally given the title of Judaizers. Whether through mutation of their doctrine or that their objection was not exhaustively presented at the Jerusalem Council, the false doctrine of the Judaizers which was believed by the Galatian Christians was a salvation by faith **plus** works of the Law, not merely doing works of the Law without the necessity of having saving faith (salvation by works). Gal. 2:18 is thus clearer when seen in this light, and shows us why adding of works of the Law as being necessary for salvation is so detrimental to the Gospel, as it adds transgressions to the person instead of removing it.

Faith and works of the law are thenceforth coupled together as a thesis-antithesis pair in Paul's argumentation, thus setting them as opposite polarities; opposites of each other. Such was already implicitly stated in Gal. 2:16, and is found in Gal. 3:5 even. Gal. 3:12a however makes it very explicit that the law is NOT of faith, and therefore it is impossible for there to have law and faith together, as the presence of law would automatically removes faith and vice versa, and thus the two cannot coexist as instruments of salvation.

Since Law and Faith are stated by Paul to be antithetical to each other, why is the Law given such a prominent position in the Old Covenant in the first place? What is the purpose of the Law, and what exactly is its function for true believers under this New Covenant of grace?

## **The Law**

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"— so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.

Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Gal. 3:10-29)

The role of the Law for New Covenant believers, in fact for believers of all ages, is here revealed to us in this passage.

#### The Law: It can theoretically save

Gal. 3:10 allows for the possibility of salvation by the Law if one obeys **all** of them perfectly<sup>12</sup>, but it does not teach it as it is logically fallacious (Denial of the antecedent) to infer the inverse principle of Gal. 3:10 (ie  $p \rightarrow q$ , therefore  $\sim p \rightarrow \sim q$ ). Verse 21 however informs us that the failure of the Law was that it could not give life, otherwise the Law could otherwise suffice for righteousness and salvation, thus showing forth the theoretical potential of the Law to save.

For more explicit teachings on this aspect of the Law however, the passage of Rom. 2:6-11 should be referred to. As it is written:

He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality (Rom. 2:6-11)

I have explicated on this relevant passage in a previous article<sup>13</sup>, of which the main thrust of this passage has been summarized as follows:

Therefore, when Paul wrote verses 6-10, he is indeed affirming the viability of works in gaining salvation. He affirms with the Jews that truly if you want to be saved through works, then it is theoretically possible for such to be done (Gal. 3:21b).

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<sup>12</sup> Note that the Law has the innate potentiality to save, but as it will be seen later, it neither can nor was ever intended to save anyone. Potentiality implies the capability to do something if certain conditions are fulfilled – whether those conditions are able to be fulfilled is beside the point.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel H. Chew, *Review of John Piper's sermon on Rom. 2:6-10 given on 6th Dec 1998* ([http://www.angelfire.com/falcon/ddd\\_chc82/theology/Piper\\_sermon\\_Rom2\\_6\\_10.pdf](http://www.angelfire.com/falcon/ddd_chc82/theology/Piper_sermon_Rom2_6_10.pdf))

However, as he shows and will continue to show, what is demanded to earn salvation by works is perfect obedience to the Law, for a slight infraction would be as if the whole law was broken (Jas. 2:10). Since such is the case, no person can be justified by the law, for the Law condemns all who fail to meet up to its high standard (Gal. 3:10).

Thus, it can be seen that the Scriptures do teach that the Law have the potentiality for meriting salvation. In fact, the entirety of the concept of federal representation, of Christ functioning as a second Adam (cf Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:20-22), requires this concept as it is expressed in the Covenant of Works in order for the whole scheme of salvation to be theologically and logically coherent<sup>14</sup>.

#### The Law: It brings judgment

Verse 10 of Galatians 3 pronounces a curse on the those who rely on the Law for their salvation, by pronouncing judgment on all who do not do **all** the works of the Law. Verse 12 states also that those who desire to practice the Law in the context of salvation and gaining righteousness would live according to its dictates for salvation, which is impossible given the impossibility of fallen Man to follow **all** the commandments perfectly. This is confirmed especially in passages like Rom. 2:12-3:18 as it depicts the reality of the total depravity of Man. Man therefore is incapable of following the Law and will be judged by whatever law they have, whether the one of the conscience or the one revealed by God (Rom. 2:12-16), and thereby are under the judgment of God as we have all fallen short of God's perfect righteousness (Rom. 3:23)

#### The Law: It prepares the way for the Gospel

Paul continues on in verses 19-26 to reveal to us this aspect of the Law. The Law as stated in verse 24 was our guardian or tutor (NASB) **until** Christ came. In the ancient Roman culture, this guardian or tutor was an older person hired to bring up the child and teach the child various skills etc in order to prepare him for life as he grows up to be his father's heir. The Law therefore is said to function in such a way to prepare us for life as children of God, which is by faith and faith alone. In other words, life under God's free grace is made available in the Gospel for those whose hearts have been prepared for it by use of the Law as a tutor to prepare us for the Gospel. But what kind of preparation was the Law meant to give?

Verse 19 shows us that the law was added because of transgressions while awaiting the arrival of the Messiah of promise, while verse 22 in conjunction with verse 21 inform us that the Law imprisoned everything under sin so that the promise of eternal life which is by faith in Jesus Christ would be available to those who believe. This therefore shows us that the Law through placing everyone under the concept of sin and judgment prepares the way for the Gospel to save us who believe. Referencing back to Paul's own teaching on the subject in Rom. 7: 7-13

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<sup>14</sup> Daniel H. Chew, *On the Covenant of Works*

([http://www.angelfire.com/falcon/ddd\\_chc82/theology/CovenantOfWorks.html](http://www.angelfire.com/falcon/ddd_chc82/theology/CovenantOfWorks.html)). Referencing Robert Reymond's excellent book *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.* (Nashville, TN, USA: Thomas Nelson, 1998), Reymond says that "if Christ's obedience has no meritorious value, neither has a penal substitution been made for our sins nor is there a preceptive righteousness available to be imputed to us" (p. 433)"

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure (Rom. 7:7-13)

The Law of God therefore produces in Paul the awareness of sin, for apart from the Law, Paul would have still sin but he would not have **known** sin as sin (Rom. 7:7), so that sin might be **shown** to be sin (Rom. 7:13). In figurative language, Paul describes this awareness of sin as sin coming seemingly alive when the Law was heard and understood (Rom. 7:9), and thus bringing knowledge of condemnation.

So therefore to the question of how the Law prepares the person for the Gospel, it can be seen especially in Rom. 7 that the Law does this by showing us our sinfulness and inability to save ourselves, thus precipitating our need for an external Savior to save us from our sins<sup>15</sup>. It is thus in this way that the Law is needful for all of us who believe, and apart from going through the school of the Law, we cannot "graduate" to the inheritance of grace.

#### The Law of God: Against Antinomianism

As the imagery of the schoolmaster or tutor or guardian in Gal. 3:23-25 shows, the way to the inheritance of grace is by "graduating" from the school of the Law. If this is so, then the teaching of Antinomianism will be severely undermined here. Although the epistle to the Galatians mainly addresses Legalism in all its forms, yet in this passage especially the usage of the Law undermines the claims of Antinomianism. For if the Law's usage is likened to a Roman tutor, then the nature of those who are saved are those who have been trained by the Law, thus the Law does train believers for the Gospel, not that it has no bearing whatsoever on the believer. Thus the entire enterprise of Antinomianism, in which there is no place for the Law at all in the lives of believers, is undermined.

That said, it may be counter-argued that the Law's function as a tutor ceases when the promised Messiah Jesus came, and therefore this function of the Law only applies to Old Testament Jews and not to New Testament Christians. Notwithstanding the obvious Dispensational error of dividing the people of God, this does not hold in light of Scripture in passages such as Rom. 7 in which Paul shows this function of the Law working out in his own personal life, which surely occurred after Jesus' death and resurrection. It is therefore true that the function of the Law as a tutor ceases in principle when Jesus comes, but this just means that the New Covenant makes available the cessation because now the way

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<sup>15</sup> The true use of the law cannot be enough esteemed, namely, that when the conscience findeth itself shut up, it may yet not despair, but being instructed of the Holy Ghost, concludeth after this sort: I am indeed a prisoer, shut up under the law, but not for ever; yea, this shutting up shall turn to my great profit, because I am hereby driven to sigh and seek for a helper. So the hungry soul is brought to Christ, who will satisfy him with good things. Therefore, the law doth not only kill, but it killeth that we may live.

[Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Kregel Publications, 1979), p. 216]

for salvation is proclaimed and manifested. This reality therefore plays out in the heart of every individual who likes Paul therefore utilizes the Law to prepare him for the Gospel of grace, which in turn ceases the guardianship of the Law. The alternative interpretation therefore is untenable in the light of Scripture, and the usage of the Law to prepare us who will believe for the Gospel is thus still valid.

### **The problem in Galatia - in more detail, and its remedy**

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain (Gal. 4:8-11)

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves! (Gal. 5:1-12)

Paul, after finishing delineating the purposes of the Law with regards to the Gospel, continues calling the Galatian Christians to stop following the Law but instead live the Christian life by faith. In the process, Paul gave us the final clue into the exact nature of the problem in the Galatian churches.

We have earlier seen in the exposition of Gal. 3:1-4 that the Judaizers were deceiving the Galatian Christians into adding works to their faith for salvation. Such works were called works of the law because they were based on the Mosaic Law, or the Law of the Old Covenant. Here, we are given more insight into the specific works called for by the Judaizers.

Seeing that the proto-Judaizers or Judaists at the Jerusalem Council had emphasized the ritual of circumcision, it should not be surprising that the Judaizers here emphasized circumcision too. In fact, they brought in quite a lot of the rituals of Judaism for the Galatian Christians to observe. In Gal. 4:9, Paul called such works of the Law "weak and worthless elementary principles". Such observing of the law was concretely set forth as

observation of "days and months and seasons and years"; religious holy days (Gal. 4:10)<sup>16</sup>, causing Paul to worry that his labor might be in vain (Gal. 4:11).

It is indeed shocking to see Paul referring to the teachings of God's holy Law given by God Himself as being "weak and worthless principles". But yet when we realize what the role of the Law is, and what the Judaizers were making of the Law, then such a denigration of the Law is understandable in that context. For the Law was never meant to be used to save anyone, for the simple reason that no one can fulfill its perfect requirements, ever (except Jesus Christ). The Law was meant to prepare the way for the Gospel, not to save. And since the Gospel and Law are antithetical to each other, smuggling in the Law in an attempt to contribute in some manner in our salvation would be to deny the Gospel, for the two cannot coexist. It is on this understanding that the Law is considered "weak and worthless principle", for it are powerless to save (thus weak), and has no use unto (not for) salvation (thus worthless).

The Jews then have started to treat their walk with God as just another religion, as we can see from the Pharisees in which the keeping of rules and regulations are vital but a relationship with God is not (eg. Mt. 6; 23:1-36). Such religiosity is prevalent in almost every false religion in the world — a religion of do's and don'ts. The Gentiles Christians in Galatia were saved out of this legalistic works-righteousness, yet here they were going back to it again; exchanging one type of works-righteousness (paganism) with the Jewish form of works-righteousness (conditional Covenantal works righteousness). This shows us the reason why Paul contrast their former pagan state of enslavement with the state of the Judaizers and their followers, which constitute another form of enslavement. Instead of being in bondage to such outward forms of religion, Paul calls them to stand firm in Christian liberty and not to submit to a (new) yoke of slavery (Gal. 5:1). In Paul's view therefore, any time any outward form of religiosity is made necessary for salvation, that doctrine and gospel based upon that teaching is false and must be opposed as being a damnable works-righteousness false 'Gospel'.

From inveighing against making religious holy days mandatory, Paul in the passage in Gal. 5:2-3 makes the same objection to the keeping of the Old Covenant sacrament of circumcision. Following the exact same reasoning which denigrates the keeping of religious holy days unto salvation, Paul here rightly perceives that the insistence on the keeping of circumcision is done out of obedience to the Law. Being therefore a work of the Law, those who desire to be circumcised are obliged to keep all of the law, for Law and Gospel are opposites. Following the Law would therefore entail rejection of the Gospel and thus rejection of Christ, thus resulting in being severed from Christ the only means of salvation (Gal. 5:4). Due to the severity of the issue and his anger at these false teachers, Paul sarcastically called upon the Judaizers to emasculate or castrate themselves (Gal. 5:12), as if to say: 'Since you desire to cut and remove the foreskin, you might as well just cut through and remove the whole thing so that you can boast in the flesh'.

Now, it must be noted that Paul himself is not against circumcision or any observation of religious holy days etc per se, but only when believers are coerced to do them unto salvation. Gal. 5:6 shows us that the whole ritual of circumcision by itself is nothing, for Paul had in fact circumcised Timothy previously even (Acts 16:3). Rather it is faith which

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<sup>16</sup> In Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 262-3, in discussing this verse, Luther summarily dismisses the keeping of even the Sabbath if it is kept as being "necessary to righteousness". Elsewhere on p. 206, Luther denies that one can differentiate the Law as stating that only the ceremonial law is denigrated by Paul in this epistle and not the moral law. Paul "excepteth no part of the law", and therefore entire Law *en toto* has no power to save.

works through love that is important, not any type of works, in the domain of salvation. Similarly for us therefore, nothing that pertains to the **practice** of religion in rites and rituals should be made binding upon the Christian for salvation. Besides the obvious ritual of circumcision, no one holy day observance is binding upon the Christian, and that includes Easter and Christmas. It is not wrong (or right) to do any of these things, or to follow the OT ceremonial laws with regards to not eating pork etc, but we must oppose such practices whole-heartedly when they are made part of a criteria of being a Christian.

In the course of looking at the interaction between Law and Gospel, there is an interesting allegory introduced by Paul, that of Sarah and Hagar in Gal. 4:21-31.

### **Allegory of Law and Gospel**

Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written,

“Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.”

Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.” So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. (Gal. 4:21-31)

In an effort to make a point about the relation between the Law and the Gospel, the Apostle Paul resorted to making an allegory of the narrative account of Sarah and Hagar, in the hope that perhaps through using this literary device he would be able to make the antithesis between Law and Gospel clearer. Having shown that the Law was unable to save, and that Law and Gospel do not mix, Paul proceeded here to plead for the Galatian Christians to reject the Law as unto salvation, and instead follow the Gospel of grace, so that they might truly be on the correct path of salvation.

Abraham is indeed the common father and originator of both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant as it were, for the former coming from the children of Abraham by natural descent, and the latter being the antitype of Abraham's true religion as required by God (cf Rom. 4:3). It is in such a setting that Paul begins his allegory, using Abraham's two sons as examples of the Old and New Covenant to make his point. Historically, Abraham had two important sons Ishmael and Isaac, the former conceived through natural means by a concubine Hagar while the latter was conceived through supernatural enablement (in old age) by his wife Sarah. Hagar furthermore was a slave woman, servant to Sarah.

This historical data was conveyed to the Galatian Christians in verses 22-23, stating only the major facts that Paul requires for his analogy. Two different sons were described, with

the emphasis being on their circumstances of birth. The first one, Ishmael, came from a slave woman and was born naturally (according to the flesh), while the second one, Isaac, came from a free woman and was born according to the promise of God.

Having established the two sons as the basis for his allegory, Paul shows how each son relates to Christians and to the Law. Paul links Mount Sinai which symbolizes the Law with Hagar and the circumstance of her slavery in verse 24, and then follows through with his identification with the present day Jewish religion in verse 25, as if the reference to Sinai was not clear enough. It can thus be seen that Paul here equates following of the Law with being in a condition of slavery. Conversely, the New Covenant way is linked to the heavenly Jerusalem, where God lives and reigns (cf Rev. 21:1-4)

The relationships drawn up by Paul can be seen in the following table:

<b>Old Covenant</b>	<b>New Covenant</b>
Hagar	Sarah
- slavery	- free
- according to the flesh	- according to promise
Mount Sinai/ present Jerusalem	Heavenly Jerusalem
- Law	- faith

Quoting Is. 54:1 in Gal. 4:27, which begins the passage describing the New Covenant relationship, Paul uses this prophetic Old Testament text to prove to us that the true religion that God has planned is that of promise not via natural means, in an effort to refute the Judaizers. For how can the desolate one who has not physically bore any children have more children than those who are married, unless by supernatural means? And that is precisely the point that Paul makes in quoting this text from Is. 54, in order to show that the (Old Testament) prophet Isaiah have already prophesied this coming of a New Covenant which is described in the rest of Is. 54, that is not according to the flesh but according to God who promises and fulfills it. So if the OT prophet has already prophesied the coming of the Gospel of grace, why are the Galatian Christians therefore following the Judaizers, who most definitely cannot hold a candle to the prophet Isaiah?

Having made the clear identification of Christians as being those of the promise (Gal. 4:28), Paul used the historical narrative to push his allegory further. Just as Isaac was persecuted by Ishmael (mocked at cf Gen. 21:9), so also those who are according to the flesh (all adherents of works religions) would persecute those who follow the Spirit (Christians). In finishing the allegory, Paul states how the slave woman and her son was cast out after the heir of the free woman arrived on the scene (Gal. 4:30), and in so doing sets forth plainly the antithesis between works/Law and faith. When faith or the promise comes, there is no room for the Law or works, and these things are to be cast aside. There would thus be absolutely no mingling of the two unto salvation, as Paul had stated again and again various ways in this epistle of his in order to emphasize the seriousness of this issue to the Galatian Christians.

This allegory therefore teaches the exclusivity of Law and Gospel in salvation. Linking the Law and the earthly Jewish religion with Hagar was an insult to the unbelieving Jews, yet such was indeed the case, for the Jews in rejecting their Messiah and trusting in themselves had become a stench to His nostrils, incurring God's wrath as seen in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70.

As we look at the form of this allegory, let us consider two sub-points, namely: the Jewishness of the allegory, and the allegorical method itself.

The Jewishness of the allegory may not seem to be an issue until we realize that the Galatian Christians were almost all Gentiles who would not have read the Old Testaments before they were converted. Yet, Paul did not think it mean to refer to biblical characters such as Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Ishmael and Hagar. Notwithstanding the fact that there may be some Galatian Christians who may have read through the Old Testaments by then, the fact of the matter is that these figures would not be very familiar to them compared to the Jews who were brought up memorizing the Torah. This show us that content is more important than delivery, and although they may struggle to remember the history behind these people, Paul expects them to read up the Old Testament Scriptures if they do not know or cannot remember the narrative behind his allegory.

Similarly in our time and age, it is more important for us to focus on getting the message that we want to convey right first before working on our delivery. Also, dumbing down the message to appeal to the crowd/ congregation is the wrong way to go. Rather, we should expect the congregation to rise up to the standard of the Scriptures as they are expounded on.

The allegorical method is a problem in itself, for this is by far the only allegory used by Paul, and in is canonized as Scripture. This allegorizing of narrative accounts in the Bible to teach biblical lessons seem to be what Paul is doing, and it has been suggested that such a method would be a legitimate method of reading, interpreting and teaching the Scriptural narratives. However, all of them forget one major thing, which is that Paul's allegorizing is itself inspired and not merely another allegorizing, and therefore not all allegorizing is de facto ok simply because Paul did it in this passage.

More devastating to the promoters of the allegory method is the fact of how Paul allegorized the narrative of Abraham and his two sons. Paul did not simply take any narrative in Scripture and allegorized it, but one in which the situation does speak to the issue at hand – having a similar subject matter. Although not directly relevant to the issue, the contrast between works and promise in the example of Hagar and Sarah, Ishmael and Isaac, dovetails neatly with the contrast between works-righteousness and grace through faith in Paul's controversy with the Judaizers. Similarly, as I have shown, both appeal to the same father in Abraham. Paul therefore uses Abraham as an example to show that although it is indeed true that the Law does come from Abraham, it is nonetheless obsolete now as it is tied in with his son through Hagar, Ishmael.

With similarities in subject matters and circumstances, plus the apologetic value against the Judaizers who are Jews by birth, Paul decided to use this narrative as an allegory. It is therefore seen that this allegory is carefully chosen by Paul more to make a point against the false "gospel" proclaimed by the Judaizers (ie its apologetic value) and to make it very plain to the Galatian Christians both the proper relation between Law and Gospel if they haven't gotten it yet, and the OT anticipation of the New Covenant thus proving that the Judaizers were ignorant and/or lying in their teachings of the OT Scriptures.

There is no basis therefore for promoting the allegorical method of Scripture interpretation. Certainly, this is not to say that certain Scriptures cannot be interpreted allegorically, but there are strict criteria to do so like subject matter alignment. Plus, it is to be used mainly for apologetic value, which makes such allegorical interpretations even rarer. It must be noted also that Paul did not deny the normal narrative reading and in fact it must be

present before it can be interpreted allegorically otherwise the alignment is non-existent. This indeed undercuts all systems that promote allegorical interpretations of Scripture, especially the liberal ones which deny the historicity of the text of Scripture, and treat parts of Scripture as myths not facts like the first 11 chapters of Genesis<sup>17</sup>. Neo-Orthodoxy similarly has no basis for utilizing the allegorical method as it is meant to be used, for they deny that all that is in Scripture is without error and there can be errors within the historical facts found in Scripture.

### **The practice of Christian Liberty**

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (Gal. 5:1)

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. (Gal. 5: 13-26)

As we come to the end of our look through the book of Galatians on the topic of Law and Gospel, let us finish with a look at the practical implications of this topic for Christian living.

Previously, we have shown that the idea of the Law being the schoolmaster or guardian is a guard against the heresy of Antinomianism. Even when Paul was focused on condemning Legalism and works-righteousness in the Epistle to the Galatians, he did not for once give any leeway to its opposite error, Antinomianism. Rather the Law still had value in Paul's eyes and in the sight of God too, though not for salvation through our justification before God.

In the passage further down in Gal. 5, Paul approached the Christian Life from a different point of view. Having destroyed the Law as an instrument of salvation, Paul did not attempt to set forth a new law for Christians based upon the Gospel for obedience. For doing so would not only confuse his audience and remove the force of his previously strong denunciation against Legalism and works-righteousness, but he did not have to do so at all.

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<sup>17</sup> Besides Theistic Evolution, Old-Earth Creationism, Day-Age theory and the Framework Hypothesis deny the historicity of the first 11 chapters of Genesis. For a refutation of the most 'biblical' compromising theory, Old-Earth Creationism, see Jonathan Sarfati, *Refuting Compromise* (Masters Books, 2004)

After all, the important thing in the Mosaic Covenant was never the letter (which Paul denounced strongly), but the spirit behind the letter of the Law (cf Deut. 10:12; Ex. 34:5 - note especially its context). The letter of the Mosaic Law was the "scaffolding" necessary to point towards its inner reality<sup>18</sup>, the spirit of the Law, which is now being fully revealed in the New Covenant.

Paul's manner of approaching the topic of Christian living therefore went straight to the heart of the issue — the spirit of the Law, without using those terms as such since the terminology is not that important. This has the advantage of not needlessly causing confusion by using the term "Law" in more than one sense. We can however see that this is what Paul was getting at as seen in Gal. 5:14, in which Paul states that the Law is fulfilled in the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves, thus in this case focusing on the horizontal aspect of Christian living. Like Jesus who mentioned that first in response to a question from the Pharisees (Mt. 22:35-40), the essence of the Law or the spirit of the Law is here put forward as the way of living the Christian life. Christian liberty therefore is to walk in the Spirit and not by the letter (Legalism), or by the flesh (Antinomianism) (Gal. 5:13, 16)

When discussing living the Christian life, Paul uses the direction of the Spirit- flesh divide to convey the idea of the spirit of the Law as against lawlessness. In Gal. 5:17, Paul depicts the both of them at war against each other. After adding a reminder to be led by the Spirit and not by the letter of the law (Gal. 5:18), Paul waded in and showed us the way of Christian living. We are not to indulge in the works of the Flesh in any shape reformed, of which an entire list of sins is given us in Gal. 5:19-21. What is shocking here given the theme of Christian liberty is that those who practice such things are stated as **not** inheriting the Kingdom of God (Gal. 5:21ff), which means they would not be saved. But we do know that Paul is not advocating works salvation here since he has already denounced it in the previous four chapters, so what is he getting at? In light of the Spirit/flesh dualism stated earlier in Gal. 5:17, which parallels the faith/works dualism in Gal. 3:12a, Paul is here suggesting that walking according to the flesh is **evidence** that one is not walking according to the Spirit and therefore not saved. In other words, if we are saved, we will walk according to the Spirit, and then we will not produce bad fruit. And therefore producing bad fruit would mean that we are not walking according to the Spirit, and are therefore not saved (Modus Tollens: If p, then q. ~q. → ~p)

In contrast to the evil fruit of an unregenerate heart that does not walk according to the Spirit, the Scripture shows us the nature of the fruit (singular) of the Spirit which all believers will have in an ever-increasing manner as we walk in the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. (Gal. 5:22a). Switching between the Spirit/flesh and the faith/law dualisms, Paul declared that there is no law [letter] operative on the things of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22b). Rather, Christians neither live according to the [letter of the] Law nor the flesh, but according to the Spirit [of and behind the law].

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Gal. 6:9-10)

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<sup>18</sup> C. Matthew McMahon, *A Simple Overview of Covenant Theology* (New Lenox, IL, USA: Puritan Publications, 2005), p. 58

As Paul wraps up the Epistle to the Galatians proper, Paul exhorts the Galatian Christians to walk by the Spirit as they have lived by the Spirit (Gal. 5:25), of which examples that they are not to be conceited, provocative or envious of each other were given (Gal. 5:26). Good works therefore as designed for believers (Eph. 2:10) is nothing more than living out the Christian life by the Spirit. We are all, like the Galatian Christians whom Paul addressed, exhorted to do good to everyone, especially to our fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord; the household of faith (Gal. 6:10).

Let us hereby conclude and see the relevance of the epistle of the Galatians to all of us especially to the modern movements of our day.

### **Application in an analysis of various movements**

The Epistle to the Galatians — the harshest letter ever written by Paul in the Scriptures. Yet all of this was necessary because of the vital importance of the doctrine being subverted by the Judaizer heretics. The doctrine of salvation by faith alone apart from works and law-keeping is the doctrine by which the Church stands or falls, and also the doctrine by which the salvation of each individual believer stands or falls too. Paul pronounced an anathema against the Judaizers for distorting the doctrine of salvation as their false "gospel" distorts the true Gospel message. This message of Paul is as relevant to us today as it is to the Galatian Christians of that time.

In our times, a multitude of false "gospels", all deserving the anathema of God, have spread across the land. Such false "gospels" divert people from the true Gospel which saves, and we would look at some examples here: Strict Sabbatarianism, Roman Catholicism and Purpose-Drivenism aka Warrenism.

#### Strict Sabbatarianism

The issue of a **mandatory** keeping of the Sabbath on a **particular day** in a **particular manner**, whether it be the seventh-day variety as seen in Seventh-Day Adventism, or of the more historically reformed heritage of the first-day Sabbath, constitutes strict Sabbatarianism. Besides being impractical and absurd<sup>19</sup>, such strict rules invariably breed

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<sup>19</sup> Robert D. Brismead, *Sabbatarianism Re-examined* (Australia: Verdict Publishing, June 1981). Published online at <http://www.quango.net/brinsmead/Sabbatarian.htm> . In Chapter 9, it is written

Where does this original seventh day begin on a round world? Where does the sun rise first? Does the seventh day begin in Palestine, in Greenwich or at a place that our modern society calls the International Date Line? How do we know that the international community fixed the date line (which is not even a straight line) where God decreed it should be? The World Book Encyclopedia says that the "International Date Line is an imaginary line which marks the spot on the earth's surface where each new calendar day begins."

Some Sabbatarians argue that since God Himself designated the seventh day in Palestine, we should reckon that each new calendar day begins in the Middle East. Since the earth rotates so that the day moves westward, the Sabbath in Australia would begin six hours after it begins in California, not eighteen hours before. This would make Sunday the seventh day for Australians

A few years ago I met a seventh-day Sabbatarian who had given serious thought to this question. He argued that if we followed the letter of the law, Australians and all others on the same side of the International Date Line would keep the Sabbath after instead of before it is kept in the Western world. According to this reasoning, Sunday would be the Australians' seventh day. The fact is that calling any twenty-four-hour period the seventh day is both arbitrary and imaginary.

a form of Legalism. This can be seen explicitly in the case of Seventh-Day Adventism with its emphasis on Sabbath keeping being necessary for continuation in the state of being saved, as Sabbath-keeping is God's mark of salvation<sup>20</sup>. As opposed to this form of hard legalism, the reformed variety is expressed most strongly in the example of the Puritans, who sometimes (due to their focus on the biblical regulatory use of the Law for Christians<sup>21</sup>)

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There seem to be about four ways to follow the letter of the Sabbath law on a round world. Three have been seriously proposed by groups of Sabbatarians. The first is to keep the Sabbath when those in Jerusalem keep the Sabbath. The second is to begin the Sabbath in the Middle East (assuming that the first day began in Eden and assuming that Eden was somewhere in the Middle East). This would not affect Western Sabbatarians, but it would mean that all Sabbatarians in the Far East would have to move the Sabbath forward one day. The third possibility is to begin the Sabbath at that "imaginary line" called the International Date Line. This would give us an "imaginary" seventh day. The fourth possibility is for the international community to alter the "imaginary line," which would require many Sabbatarians to change their day of worship. And why not, since they gave the international community the right to decide where to put the "imaginary line" in the first place? Would not one "imaginary line" be as good as another?

Determining the time to begin the Sabbath is also a problem. Seventh-day Sabbatarians generally prefer sunset, while first day Sabbatarians generally prefer midnight. The Bible seems to indicate that the Sabbatical period extends from "even to even." But when is "even"? Early Seventh-day Adventists hotly debated whether "even" meant six o'clock in the evening or sunset. Ellen G. White's vision in which she saw that "even" was sunset settled the question. But in recent years some specialists in the history of the ancient Middle East have shown that the Semites considered it to be "even" when they could see the stars, some time after sunset.

But what are Sabbatarians supposed to do north of the Arctic Circle, where it remains dark for several months each year? "Easy," some tell us. "Just calculate from the lowest and highest points of the sun." When I was in Norway recently, the Adventist Sabbath began in the Arctic Circle at 11:30 Friday morning. Sabbatarians were required to lose Friday as either a working day or a school day. Some were agitating a return to a six p.m. Sabbath commencement as a solution to this difficult problem. One of those pressing for a more liberal interpretation of the law was a high-school teacher. He said, 'We have to recognize that the law was drafted to suit the needs of an agrarian people living in Palestine, not a highly industrialized society living within the Arctic Circle.' A measure of sanity indeed!

Then we could ask about applying the letter of the Sabbath law to airline pilots, international travelers or astronauts.

Even Sabbatarians may now say, "these are silly, nit-picking questions". Of course they are! But those who choose to apply the letter of the law must find an answer to such silly, nit-picking questions. Letter-of-the-law Sabbatarianism is as viable in our modern world as the Flat Earth Society.

Of course, the day stated here can be either the seventh day (Saturday) or the first day (Sunday) and the logic still holds. Those who insist on strict Sabbatarianism should realize the practical absurdities their position entails.

<sup>20</sup> See the teaching of SDA apologist Walter Veith's teaching here on the traditional SDA doctrine on the Great Controversy, which I have refuted here (<http://puritanreformed.blogspot.com/2008/07/rebuttal-to-walter-veiths-presentation.html>). Also see Ellen G. White's teaching on the subject in *The Great Controversy* (Altamont, TN, USA: Harvestine Books, 1998), p. 69, 641

The Sabbath will be the great test of loyalty; for it is the point of truth especially controverted. When the final test shall be brought to bear upon men, then the line of distinction will be drawn between those who serve God and those who serve Him not. While the observance of the false sabbath in compliance with the law of the State, contrary to the fourth commandment, will be an avowal of allegiance to a power that is in opposition to God, the keeping of the true Sabbath, in obedience to God's law, is an evidence of loyalty to the Creator (p. 641)

<sup>21</sup> The regulatory use of the Law can be seen in for example the Westminster Confession of Faith, it is written

Although true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned (Rom.. 6:14; Gal. 2:16, 3:13, 4:4-5; Acts 13:39; Rom. 8:1); yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in

have the tendency to focus on keeping the law till they fall into soft legalism<sup>22</sup> — keeping the rules and regulations otherwise one is deemed to be disobedient towards God and thus not in a right standing with Him.

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that, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly (Rom. 7:12, 22, 25; Ps. 119:4-6; 1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 5:14, 16, 18-23) ...

(WCF, Chapter XIX: *Of the Law of God*, Paragraph VI)

<sup>22</sup> In *The Future of Justification: A response to N.T. Wright* by John Piper (Nottingham, England: IVP, 2008), Piper wrote in a footnote:

The essence of legalism is the belief that our right standing with God is based on, comes by means of, or is sustained by our works — regardless of whether these works are self-produced (hard legalism) or whether they are completely produced by God's grace in us (soft legalism). (p. 152, Footnote 14)

...while legalism involves the view that 'salvation consists of the observance of precepts,' boasting and self-righteousness may, but do not always, accompany this motion. When they do not, we may speak of a 'soft' or 'torah-centric' form of legalism; when they do, we have a 'hard' or 'anthropocentric' legalism. To this, we may add that 'soft' legalists, who try to obey God's law because they believe that God has commanded them to do so, may not believe that they are thereby 'earning' their salvation, still less that they are 'establishing a claim' on God based on their own 'merit'. Surely love for God, or even fear of his judgment, are adequate motives for obedience to his commands. No such explanation as hypocrisy, self-seeking, merit-mongering, and outright rebellion against God need be invoked to explain why religious people would attempt to do what they believe God has commanded them. To think otherwise is to insist, for example, that Psalm 119 expresses the religion of a sham, and that Deut. 30:16 commands it.

Unfortunately, in most definitions of legalism by New Testament scholars, the possibility of 'soft' legalism is not even considered. The 'legalist', for Cranfield, is the one who tries to use the law 'as a means to the establishment of a claim upon God, and so to the defense of his self-centeredness and the assertion of a measure of independence over against God. He imagines that he can put God under an obligation to himself, that he will be able so adequately to fulfil the law's demands that he will earn for himself a righteous status before God.' For Moule, legalism is 'the intention to claim God's favour by establishing one's own rightness.' For Hübner, those who see righteousness as based on works define their existence in terms of their own activities, leave God out of consideration, and, in effect, 'see themselves as their own creator.' For [Daniel] Fuller, legalism 'presumes that the Lord, who is not 'served by human hands, as though he needed anything' (Acts 17:25), can nevertheless be bribed and obligated to bestow blessing by the way men distinguish themselves.'

Such definitions would be innocent enough if they were accompanied by an awareness that 'legalists' of this kind represent only some of those who interpreted Deut. 30:16 as saying that obedience to God's law was the way to life. But all too frequently there is no such awareness. The alternative to faith is not (as it is in Paul) simply 'works', whether they are 'good' or 'bad' — a statement which embraces both 'soft' and 'hard' legalism — but rather the sinful, self-seeking, merit-claiming works of the (necessarily 'hard') legalist. Whereas Paul can contrast faith in Christ with 'the works of the law', and mean by the latter no more than the deeds commanded by the law, the very notion of 'works' is so inextricably in the minds of some scholars with self-righteousness and pride that (as we have seen) the 'works of the law' can only be conceived as sinful. It is no surprising that for such scholars, the 'law' whose works are conceived as sinful cannot be seen as divine, but inevitably becomes the legalistically distorted form of God's law which prevailed (we are confidently told) among the Jews of Paul's day. But — it must be emphasized — in Paul's argument it is human deeds of any kind which cannot justify, not simply deeds done 'in a spirit of legalism'. *Paul's very point is lost to view when his statements excluding the law, and its works from justification are applied only to the law's perversion.* (Stephen Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998], 132-134)

(p. 158-159, Footnote 24)

As it can be seen, soft legalism is seen in the fact that one does works even in a spirit of obedience as part of one's standing before God. And as Westerholm states so clearly: **Paul's very point is lost to view when his statements excluding the law, and its works from justification are applied only to the law's**

As we have seen throughout the exposition of Galatians, Paul's contrasted the law with grace, works of the law with faith, and never the two shall meet (being antithetical to each other), at least not in this plane. Our salvation and standing before God is all of grace, and none of works. The Scriptures do not differentiate between various aspects of the law, nor do they differentiate between works done for salvation and works done for the continuation of salvation. In fact, as we have already seen, the error of the Judaizers IS precisely salvation by faith PLUS continuance in works. Hard legalism as seen in Seventh-Day Adventism thus fall into the exact same error as the Judaizers, and are therefore subjected to the same anathema as them. Ditto for soft legalism, except that the reformed variety typically inconsistently embraces the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and therefore the problem arise only in those who emphasize more on their legalism at the expense of the doctrine of free grace.

### Roman Catholicism

If strict Sabbatarianism is analogous to the Galatian heresy, Roman Catholicism with its express denial of the doctrine of Justification by Faith alone, coupled with the attendant doctrines of the Treasury of Merit, Indulgences, Purgatory, Penance etc make the Judaizers look like children with regards to false doctrine. Roman Catholicism not only (officially) proclaims salvation by faith plus works<sup>23</sup>, they oftentimes unofficially practice salvation by works especially with regards to their laity. Romanism far surpass the Judaizers in their heresy, and the biblical judgment against her is therefore a strict anathema<sup>24</sup>.

### Purpose-Drivenism aka Warrenism

Notwithstanding Rick Warren's profession to be a Protestant (and a Southern Baptist at that!), Warren through his behavior does not show the genuineness of his profession. The compromise with Rome logically leads to a denial of the Gospel, and Rick Warren through partnering with Romanism practically denies the Gospel<sup>25</sup>, not to mention Warren's deplorable conduct at the World Economic Forum 2008 at Davos, Switzerland in which he says that "The future is not about secularism but religious pluralism"<sup>26</sup>. This is not to

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**perversion.** Therefore, it is not even a distortion of the Law that Paul is against, but even the fulfillment of the Divine and Holy Law in obedience for one's standing or justification before God. And therefore those who base God's acceptance of them and/or anyone based upon their obedience of His commandments are legalistic heretics in the same spirit as the Judaizers. For anyone to demand the keeping of the divine and holy Law as being contributing to one's standing before God (not even necessarily salvific) is to commit the deadly error of legalism, and depending on the consistency upon which this position is held, can damn the person who believed it to eternal hellfire (cf Gal. 1:8-9).

<sup>23</sup> See the Council of Trent, The Sixth Session: On Justification

CANON IX.-If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema.

<sup>24</sup> For a good overview of core Roman Catholic beliefs with regards to authority and salvation, and a biblical rebuttal, check out Robert L. Reymond, *The Reformation's Conflict with Rome – Why it must continue* (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2001)

<sup>25</sup> See my article logically demonstrating Warren's serious compromise of the Gospel here ([http://www.angelfire.com/falcon/ddd\\_chc82/theology/WarrenCompromise.html](http://www.angelfire.com/falcon/ddd_chc82/theology/WarrenCompromise.html))

<sup>26</sup> Check out Warren's compromising message at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGytW4yhoC8>, an uploaded video of the session on Faith and Modernism held on Jan 25<sup>th</sup> 2008 at the World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland

mention the entire focus on works that his PEACE plan is based upon: a "second reformation" that is based on "deeds, not creeds". The Bible is most certainly interested in our true beliefs as opposed to our professed beliefs, and Warren's works do show that his profession is just "lip-service" and cannot be a belief from the heart (Is. 29:13), as his life is not consistent with his orthodox profession of faith.

Even in his teaching, Warren with regards to the topic of the doctrine of salvation teaches the heresy of Pietism, or Sanctification being something extraneous to salvation. This can be seen in both of his best-selling books *The Purpose Driven Life*<sup>27,28</sup> and *The Purpose Driven Church*<sup>29</sup>. Warren through the use of concentric circles splits people inside and outside the church methodologically for the purpose of ministry, a modernistic paradigm<sup>30</sup> he conveys to others in his book *The Purpose Driven Church*. He describes the Committed group as being distinct from the Congregation<sup>31</sup>, with the Committed being the target for discipleship and the Congregation for worship. Therefore, in Warren's view it is perfectly fine for a person to be saved and committed to the purpose of fellowship (Congregation) but not to discipleship (Committed), creating a two-tiered Christianity which is the hallmark of the error of Pietism. This is of course not to mention promoting the cheap grace or anti-Lordship position where people can receive Jesus Christ as their Savior but not their Lord, a position demolished by fellow Dispensationalist John MacArthur in his books *The Gospel according to Jesus*<sup>32</sup>, *The Gospel according to the Apostles*<sup>33</sup>, and *Hard to Believe*<sup>34</sup> just to name a few.

Warren's forked tongue will not do him or his followers any good in the end when he faces God in judgment. For God pays no regard whatsoever to what we pay lip service to, but to what we actually believe in as shown through our actions. If we claim to believe in salvation by faith alone yet deny it through our actions, the Lord who knows the heart will judge us accordingly to our true beliefs. Warrenism, thus being laden with deceit with respect to the Gospel of Christ, playing as it were a game of dialectics, is a most pernicious movement which God condemns. For no matter how one plays the game of dialectics in affirming salvation by faith alone in one instance while denying it in the next, the nature of the Gospel and of faith is that it would not tolerate the presence of works in whatever form (cf Gal. 3:12a), and therefore the Gospel would be corrupted no matter how much spin is placed in an attempt to hold the two contradictory positions together.

## Conclusion

In conclusion therefore, let us learn to run the race of faith, and avoid these false movements. Let us learn not to trust in our works to save us or even to put in a better

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<sup>27</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven® Life* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Zondervan, 2004; Campaign Edition, published by Campus Crusade Asia Limited, Campaign Edition, 2004)

<sup>28</sup> For proof of Pietism being taught in the Purpose Driven Life, see my book: Daniel HC Chew, *Driven Away by Purpose – An Analysis of the Purpose Driven Life and Related Issues* (Xulon Press, 2006), p. 24.

<sup>29</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church – Growth without Compromising your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Zondervan, 1995; IMPrint Edition, Campus Crusade Asia Limited, Singapore, 2005)

<sup>30</sup> For a biblical critique of Warren's modernistic methodology and ministry philosophy, and how it undermines biblical Christianity, see Bob DeWaay, *Redefining Christianity – Understanding the Purpose Driven Movement* (Springfield, MO, USA: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Press, 2006)

<sup>31</sup> Warren, *Purpose Driven Church*, p. 133

<sup>32</sup> John F. MacArthur, *The Gospel according to Jesus – What is authentic faith?*, Revised and Expanded Ed. (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Zondervan, 1988, 1993, 2008)

<sup>33</sup> John F. MacArthur, *The Gospel according to the Apostles* (Nashville, TN, USA: Thomas Nelson, 2005)

<sup>34</sup> John F. MacArthur, *Hard to Believe – The High Cost and Infinite Value of Following Jesus* (Nashville, TN, USA: Thomas Nelson, 2003)

standing with God, but to trust in Christ who is our perfect imputed righteousness. May we learn from this epistle to the Galatians and know the functions of Law and Gospel, so that we can be more firmly rooted in living the Christian life to be one of faith and lived by the Spirit, and not to be one burdened by the demands of the Law. Amen.

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