



THE GOSPEL
in
GALATIANS

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Introduction

In college I was friends with a princess... and I don't mean a Disney Princess. I mean a *real* princess. Her real name was Princess Sikhanyiso Dlamini, and she is the oldest child of the High King of Swaziland, Africa. We called her "Pashu." She was a singer, and I was a guitar player, and I once got to accompany her at an AIDS benefit concert in San Diego. A hush fell over the crowd as she walked across the stage. "*It is our honor to welcome Her Majesty, the Royal Princess Sikhanyiso of Swaziland.*" It was surreal. People literally bowed to her multiple times that evening. Pashu's *her-majesty-ness* was a direct result of being the child of a High King. Yes, she was heiress to considerable influence, wealth, and power – but people responded to her because of who her *dad* was. Years later, I recall her attitude: she didn't fight for attention or make people feel small in order to feel big, she was just herself. She knew who she was in relation to the King – a loved daughter. Pashu was free to be kind and humble, but also to be bold and confident.

Christians are like Pashu – or at least we should be. We're the sons and daughters of the High King *of the Universe*. We don't need to work or fight for our status as His children – it's ours, irrevocably, in Jesus. We didn't become God's children because of hard work – trying to obey all His laws. Instead, we came into God's family by *adoption* (Gal. 4:5). The only sensible response now is to come home with the Father and enjoy life with Him as a part of His Family. It would be completely unnecessary and 'foolish' (Gal. 3:1) to try behaving our way into a family we already belong to. In fact, it would spoil the whole experience for everyone. We need to listen to God's indwelling Spirit who's constantly reminding us that we're his Children (Gal. 4:6, Rom. 8:15-17), and then we need to walk with the Spirit who actually empowers us to *live like* His children (Gal 5:16). So, come home. Unpack your spiritual suitcase. Relax. Stop frantically working for your child-status. Instead, boast in what the Father's already done for you!

In the book of Galatians, Paul's brothers and sisters have gone back to the orphanage where God found them. And so the task of Paul's letter is to bring these believers back into the free and untethered experience of being God's blessed children. Herein, Galatians' place in the tapestry of the Bible cannot be overstated – God both inspired its author and then placed it like a sentinel into the Canon to safeguard His Church against the seductive draw of *legalism*. Galatians is Paul's stiff rebuke to a collection of churches who have been gulled into living as though they could possibly work their way into God's family. Using a barrage of contrasting analogies throughout his letter, Paul emphatically, urgently, and confidently aims to draw the Galatians away from living as cursed orphans enslaved to accomplishing the impossible demands of a stiff old tutor and back into a beautiful relationship as blessed and adopted children who are free to fulfill their Father's desires because they've inherited the Father's own Spirit who empowers them to do so.

This short survey will aim to give an overview of Galatians by exploring its context, structure, and main themes. You must know that a commitment to understanding Galatians is also a commitment to understanding Paul's three journeys through Galatia recorded in the book of Acts, and the events surrounding those journeys. Seven percent of Acts is dedicated to Paul's time in Galatia,¹ which is no small amount of ink given the length of the book. Acts colors in the contextual lines and brings us into the world as Paul found it to be in Galatia. Furthermore, a commitment to understanding Galatians is also a commitment to understanding the characters mentioned in Galatians: Paul himself, Paul's opponents, Barnabas, Titus, Peter, James, and John (and perhaps even Timothy; cr. 5:11). While I cannot explore all these characters at length, I will provide biographical sketches in an appendix.

¹ Paul's 3 visits to Galatia span 70 verses (Acts 13:13-14:24; 16:1-6; 18:23). There are 1,007 verses in Acts. $70/1,007 = 6.9\%$.

Part I – Vital Context for Understanding Galatians

The Audience of Galatians

While most of Paul’s epistles are addressed to individuals (eg. Timothy, Titus, etc...) or to individual cities (eg. Corinth, Ephesus, etc...), Galatia was neither a person nor a city, but an entire Roman province. The province of Galatia ran north-to-south through modern Turkey, from the Black Sea down to the Mediterranean. Though there was an ethnic group called the “Galatians” (Gauls) who lived in Northern Galatia², and though some scholars believe Paul could’ve addressed this letter to them (based on careless liberties taken with Acts 16:6), my work will operate under the more accepted and sensible understanding that Galatians is addressed to churches in the Southern region of Roman Galatia. Luke explicitly records Paul planting churches in the Southern cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 14:21-23).

This Southern region of Galatia held particular importance for Paul and his ministry to the Gentiles. In fact, this region is the only area Paul visited on all three of his famed “Missionary Journeys.”³ Not only did Paul demonstrate immense care for the churches of Galatia in his willingness to suffer terribly for them, but he must also have seen the cities of Galatia as strategic players in his westward-Gospel-campaign. Galatia had significant Roman establishments⁴ along with Roman infrastructure and roads which would have facilitated an easier distribution of ideas. This meant Paul’s work could be especially fruitful. However, the cities of Galatia were also home to a significant population of Jews,¹ which meant the work of Christian advancement would be zealously opposed – and for more than one reason.

² Carson, D A, and Douglas J Moo. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992, 291.

³ First - Acts 13:13-14:24; Second - Acts 16:1-6; Third - Acts 18:23.

⁴ Wright, NT. *Commentaries for Christian Formation: Galatians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2021, 22.

It would be a severe oversimplification to say that a Jewish presence in Galatia was an obstacle merely because Jews rejected the Christian Message of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. The more complete answer is that in Galatia, as in the rest of the Roman Empire, Jews were protective of their exemption from Caesar-worship.⁵ This was a stunning exemption, but also a fragile one. The Jewish exemption meant Jews didn't have to pray *to* Caesar as long as they prayed *for* Caesar.⁶ As long as Jews paid taxes, prayed for Caesar, and played ball with Roman representatives, everything would be okay.

Christians, many of whom were ethnic Jew, didn't see themselves as religiously non-Jewish. They saw themselves as falling in line perfectly with all Jewish prophecies and hopes by believing in a Jewish Messiah named Jesus. So, Jesus-followers could often get away with claiming to be a *kind of* Jew. Under this claim they'd be safe within the protection of the Jewish-exemption – and even those upset by the Christian message couldn't do much about it on any official level (good examples of this include the Corinthian lawsuit in Acts 18:12-17⁷ or even the Ephesus riot of Acts 19). The problem was that Christians would not say, “Caesar is Lord” and instead asserted that only Jesus, the peasant from backwatersville, was “Lord.”

And so, in areas like Galatia, Jews wouldn't let Christians get away with claiming the exemption. The Jews of course saw the Christians as jeopardizing their exempt-status with a perversion of their own faith that was too dissimilar to ignore: Christians were converting Gentiles without circumcising them or requiring them to follow Mosaic Law, and unnecessarily rocking the boat by refusing to admit Caesar's Lordship. To Jews, Paul's Christian message wasn't just absurd or offensive, it was dangerous. Paul was playing with matches and it was believed that, once a fire started, Rome would blame and punish the Jews.

⁵ Ibid., 22-23.

⁶ Ibid., 24.

⁷ Ibid., 24. Wright points out the example of Corinth, but not of Ephesus.

Often, when Jews would share with Gentiles their perspective that “Christians aren’t actually Jews at all” it was enough to get the Gentiles on board with persecuting the Christians (eg. Acts 14:2) and driving them to recant or at least leave town. One can nearly hear a Gentile saying, “One exemption is enough! If you’re not a Jew then you’d better be worshipping Caesar!” This kind of fierce Jewish opposition in Galatia started almost immediately after Barnabas and Paul stepped foot in Galatia for the first time in Acts 13.

Of Paul’s three journeys in Galatia, the record of his first visit contains the most hostility. While reading the account, one can hardly help but picture Barnabas and Paul preaching the Gospel on the run while being chased across Southern Galatia by stone-throwing Jews. Eventually they succeed in stoning Paul in Lystra – his third major stop after being chased off by hostile Jews in Pisidian Antioch and Iconium (Acts 14:19). Later in the same journey Paul courageously travels back through the Galatian cities that had nearly killed him, preaching the message that “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

So intense were the “tribulations,” in fact, that Paul thought it best to not take John Mark along in future journeys since he had bailed out of the first trip before the going got tough (Acts 15:38). Paul’s sufferings had not only caused deep physical trauma but had carved themselves into the recesses of his mind as he specifically recalled those first-journey-persecution-events in Galatia at the end of his life to Timothy (2 Tim. 3:11) who himself was from Derbe – a Galatian town. When Paul thought of Galatia as an old man, amongst other thoughts, he thought of suffering.

A careful reading of that first Missionary Journey reveals much about the Galatian disposition towards the Gospel Paul preached. Barnabas and Paul’s first Galatian preaching-stop was in Pisidian Antioch’s synagogue (Acts 13:14). The Jews there were so galvanized by the Gospel Paul preached that they “begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath” (Acts 13:42). And yet, the story ends with Gentiles rejoicing and Jews “stirring up persecution”. Why? First,

Gentiles showed up to the second Sabbath gathering, and Paul refused to shoo them away – to the Jews’ severe disapproval. Second, something Paul said during his first sabbath message was probably said again now: “...by [Jesus] everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39). So, why was the Gospel preached in Pisidian Antioch so revolting to these Jews? Because Paul’s Gospel was (1) Gentile-friendly, and (2) anti-Moses.

The negative attitude developed amongst Jews there in Pisidian Antioch followed Paul. It followed him to Iconium, and then to Lystra where Jews from both Pisidian Antioch and Iconium persuaded the crowds to stone Paul. This drama – of being labeled “not Jewish enough” – followed Paul into the pages of his letter to the Galatians. In Galatians, Paul opposes the attempts of so-called-‘Christian’ Jews trying to solve the persecution problem (Gal. 6:12) – but their solution involves using a distorted Gospel (Gal. 1:7). In Galatians 6:12 Paul makes it clear that his opponents are forcing circumcision on new Christians “only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.” His opponents were those forcing Gentiles to “live like Jews” (Gal 2:14), or, literally, to “Judaize” (Ἰουδαΐζειν). And so, Paul’s Galatian opponents are appropriately called “Judaizers.” They’re Jews that on some level believe that Jesus really is the Jewish Messiah but, out of fear (and a seriously twisted understanding of the Gospel) feel they must keep living as if He hadn’t come.

Dating Galatians

Just how far did the influence of the Galatian Judaizers reach backwards and forwards into the storyline of the early church? Had they “slipped in” (Gal. 2:4) to the Galatian church weeks after Paul’s first visit with Barnabas? Months later? Years? We know that the Judaizers were in Syrian Antioch soon after the first journey (Acts 15:1), but had they made it all the way to Galatia too? Dating Galatians is contested amongst scholars; and unlike some Biblical books where the effects of uncertain dating on exegesis are not a serious issue, Galatians is different. Commentator Moisés Silva says it this way:

*“The controversy about the date of Galatians is not a mere scholarly game. Certain subtleties about the meaning of the letter – to say nothing about the larger questions regarding the history of the early church – are indeed affected by one’s view of its relationship to the Jerusalem council.”*⁸

Since we haven’t made it into the actual content of the book of Galatian, I will keep my comments on dating brief here but I will also attach all of my personal notes on dating in the appendix. I agree that one’s stance on this issue is as important as Silva points out above. My dating-stance favors commentators like Martin Luther, Craig Keener, and Moisés Silva and differs from the stances of those like NT Wright and D.A. Carson.

It is enough to say here that the early date (just after the 1st Missionary Journey, circa 47-48^{AD}) presents a number of issues. While I list 5 issues in my research notes, I will mention only one here: If the “Titus-versus-the-circumcision-party” incident (Gal 2:1-10) happened years before the Jerusalem Counsel of 48-49^{AD}, happening rather during the “Collection Visit” of 46-47^{AD} (Acts 11:27-30) as early-daters suppose

⁸ Silva, Moisés. *New Bible Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994, 1207.

it did, then why did it take so long for Jerusalem's leaders to take an official stance on Gentile circumcision? It just doesn't add up. Why do the leaders in Jerusalem seem to treat the issue-at-hand with such novelty if they'd already made a judgment regarding Titus a couple years earlier?

In my judgement, little substantive evidence in Acts points to an early date, while a later date – after the 2nd Missionary Journey (circa 50-55^{AD}) fits seamlessly into the Acts storyline. Therefore, a later date is the most straight-forward reading of the text. Most importantly this means that Galatians 2:1-10 should be understood as a *documentation of Jerusalem Counsel events* which are also recorded in Acts 15.

The Structure of Galatians

Editors of the ESV Study Bible point out that “*It is difficult to divide Galatians into neat sections, since Paul returns to the same themes on numerous occasions and often moves gradually into different topics rather than breaking off sharply to address a new theme.*”⁹ Indeed, not one commentator seems to wholly agree with another’s divisions. My conviction is that Paul traces one singular line of thought through his letter – namely, his thoughts on justification by faith leading to spirit-empowered godly living. He bookends his argument with a surgically precise Introduction and Conclusion which are laced with “Programmatic Elements” meant to expose the thrust of the letter’s body (see next page). Paul builds his argument in the body of the letter by laying an authoritative foundation, adding theological substance, and then exploring the theological results of that argument. Galatians is like a sturdy house – built by a credentialed builder, with reliable materials, for the joy of its dwellers. Here is how I divide the book:

*Chart 1*¹⁰

Introduction	1:1-9	Programmatic Elements: 1:1-5
Section #1 The Authority of Paul’s Gospel	1:10-2:21	Rhetorical Climax: 2:19-21
Section #2 The Substance of Paul’s Gospel	3:1-5:12	Rhetorical Climax: 4:4-7
Section #3 The Results of Paul’s Gospel	5:13-6:10	Rhetorical Climax: 5:22-24
Conclusion	6:11-18	Programmatic Elements: 6:14-16

The ‘Rhetorical Climaxes’ are highpoints in the letter at which Paul gives a quick literary crescendo in order gloriously and passionately make his point before moving onto the next. The three rhetorical climax passages will be explored in Part IV.

⁹ Crossway Bibles. *ESV: Study Bible : English Standard Version*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2007, 2244.

¹⁰ Chart 1 is my own. Many commentators had something similar, but none exactly like this.

The ‘Programmatic Elements’ of Galatians

In his introduction and conclusion, Paul only touches on topics which he explores in more detail in the body of his letter. These ‘touches’ at the beginning and ending of Galatians can be called “Programmatic Elements.”¹¹ They are ‘programmatic’ in that they serve a purpose – both preparing us for and reminding us of what the letter is all about. Simply put, these are *small verses in the intro and outro that represent the larger idea-sections in the body of Galatians.*

*Chart 3*¹²

Introduction		Body	
<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Concept presented:</i>	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Concept explored:</i>
1:1-2	Authority of Paul’s Apostleship and message	1:11-2:10	Authority of Paul’s Apostleship and message
1:3-4a	Abbreviated Gospel Message	3:1-5:12	Expanded Gospel Message
1:4b-5	Freed from old ways	5:13-6:10	Freed to new ways
Conclusion		Body	
<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Concept presented:</i>	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Concept explored:</i>
6:14	Boast in cross/ crucified with Christ.	1:11-2:21	Crucified with Christ
6:15a	Circumcision is useless	3:1-5:12	Argument against circumcision/ Law
6:15b-16	New creation living/ blessing	5:13-6:10	New creation living, through the Spirit

¹¹ Wright, 2021: 32. The term “Programmatic” is Wright’s, but the way I explore that is my own. I also differ on his division of the Programmatic Introduction section.

¹² Chart is my own.

Contrast-Style in Galatians

I've always been struck by Paul's sweeping use of positive-negative contrasts in Galatians. They're Paul's favored literary device in this letter, meant to hope the reader feel Paul's bone-deep opposition to the Judaizers as well as his polarizing feelings about them. These contrasts vividly color the major themes that the book explores in each of its sections. I'll simply share my list here:

Chart 2 ¹³

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	REF.
Paul's Gospel/ teaching	Judaizer's Distortion/ teaching	1:1, 6-9; 2:1-9; 4:16-18; 5:8-9 6:12
Kingdom of God	Present Evil Age	1:4; 5:21
Blessed	Cursed	1:8-9; 3:9, 10, 12, 14 4:15; 5:4; 6:16
God-Pleasing	Man-Pleasing	1:10, 4:17-18
No partiality before the God	Insecure desire to be influential	2:2, 6, 9; 3:28; 6:3
Justification & Righteousness by Faith in Christ	Justification & Righteousness Works of the Law	2:16, 20-21; 3:2, 5- 6 11-12; 14, 21-22, 26 5:4-6
Christ is of Benefit	Christ is of no benefit	2:21; 5:2-4
Died to Law/ Alive to Christ	Rebuilding what I tore down	2:18-19; 3:27; 5:24; 6:14
Spirit/ Spirit's Work	Flesh/ Works of the Flesh	3:3; 5:2-6, 5:13, 5:16-26; 6:8
Lasting Promise/ Inherit Spirit	Temporary Covenant	3:14, 15-19, 21-25
Sons of God (by faith)	Children with Slave-Tutor (Law)	3:25-26
Heir	Slave	3:29, 4:7
Inheritance-Aged-Children	Inheritance-stifled-children	4:1-2
Freedom	Slavery	4:1-2, 8; 5:1; 5:13
New Creation	Old Elementary Principals	4:3, 8-10; 6:15
Hearts that cry "Abba"	compulsory obedience to the Law	4:4-7
New Cov. / Free-Sarah/ Heir- Isaac/ Birth-of-promise/ Spirit/ New Jerusalem	Old Sinai Cov. / Slave- Hagar/ Castaway-Ishmael/ Ordinary Birth/ Flesh/ Present Jerusalem ¹⁴	4:21-31
Persecuted	Persecutor	4:29; 5:11; 6:12
Sow/ reap in Spirit: Eternal Life	Sow/ reap in Flesh: Corruption	6:6-10
Boasting in the Christ/ Cross	Boasting in the flesh	6:12-14

¹³ This chart is my own.

¹⁴ Some ideas in this cell were taken from Silva, 1994: 1217.

Part II - Major Themes in Galatians

Paul uses these contrasts (above) to fuel the major themes he explores throughout his letter. I have categorized the themes of Galatians into 4 meta-themes (laid out below) and will use them to frame up the way readers should understand the message of Galatians.

Theme #1 – Approval and Authority of Paul and His Gospel (versus the Judaizers)

Throughout his letter, Paul contrasts himself and his message against the Judaizers and their message. He describes the Judaizers as smooth-talking, double-cursed, man-pleasing, flesh-sowing, flesh-boasting persecution-avoiders with superiority complexes (see the “negative” column on chart 2, above). On the other hand, Paul himself is a truth-speaking, blessed, God-pleasing, Spirit-sowing, cross-boasting, persecution-receiver who has long since stopped dropped his pursuit of superiority (see “positive” column). Similarly, the message of the Judaizers is described as works-based, useless, slavery-bound, and corruption-producing. Again, Paul’s message is described in blatant contrast – his message is faith-based, beneficial, freedom-bound, and eternal-life-producing.

This theme is drawn from the letter’s Introduction (1:1-9) through to its Conclusion (6:11-18). Paul and his message are from God and approved by God, but that the message of the Judaizers is a distorted message that receives God’s curse (1:8-9) and ought to be cast out and resisted (4:30; 5:1). Paul makes his greeting as bare as possible, replacing his customary thanksgiving with a harsh rebuke, saying, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting [God] and are turning to a different Gospel” (1:6). This departure from his normal pleasantries give us the picture that this contrast is one he urgently desires the Galatians to see and then act upon by rooting out the venom now spreading through their spiritual veins.

Theme #2 – Salvation is by Faith in Christ’s work alone, while Circumcision is a Destructive Addition

Paul’s letter is clear from beginning to end that Christ’s death for our sins was *for* us, but completely *by* Him.¹⁵ A key verse for understanding this theme is 2:16-17 – “We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ... because by works of the law no one will be justified.” Conversely, circumcision, far from having any “positive value... is actually harmful.”¹⁶ Circumcision may seem like one little line-item in the Law, but it obligates the practitioner to abide by the whole thing – Yikes! This fact is demonstrated throughout Paul’s letter but said most clearly in 5:3-4 – “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.” The fact is that no one keeps the whole Law (6:13) and breaking any part of the Law is wholly damnable (3:10 quoting Deut. 27:26).

This second theme also helps us understand the inclusion of Paul’s personal testimony spanning 1:11-2:14. Is Paul simply saying, “I’m an Apostle accepted amongst other Apostles, so listen to me”? No - it’s rarely just that shallow with Paul. Of course, Paul’s three negative statements are revealing: the Gospel he preaches is *not* man’s gospel (1:11), *not* given by man (1:12a), *not* taught (1:12b), but was received by revelation from Christ (12c).¹⁷ Paul is weaving his own testimony into the main message of Galatians – namely that salvation comes through a God-originating faith in Christ’s work rather than the works of the Law. In essence, Paul’s story says to the Galatians: “I am an example of exactly what I’m trying to tell you: if anyone could be saved by works of the Law it was me. But that attitude actually made me zealously opposed¹⁸ to

¹⁵ Crossway, 2007: 2242

¹⁶ Silva, 1994: 1218

¹⁷ Ibid., 1210.

¹⁸ Gombis, Timothy G. *Power in Weakness*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2021, 38.

God's real blessing-plan." Now a direct quote: "But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone..." (Gal 1:15-16). Paul didn't earn God's grace, in fact he'd been working against it. Salvation, Paul now knows – originates with God, is secured by Christ, is received by faith, and then empowered by the Spirit.

There is cooperation between the first and second themes - Galatian readers can trust Paul over the Judaizers because Paul's message stands on the work of God while theirs stands on the work of men.

Theme #3 – Christians are Freed from the Law of Moses

Another meta-theme is that the work of Christ, received in faith by Christians, frees Christians from the Law of Moses so they can enjoy an Abrahamic type of faith and dependence upon God. Paul handles this concept most systematically in 3:15-4:7.

The Law, Paul says, was designed by God to be temporary.¹⁹ Seeing the Law’s temporal nature in the text can be difficult but helped along by pointing out a couple simple grammatic and illustrative elements used in 3:15-4:7.

Twice (in 3:19 and 4:1-2), Paul says that the Law was in effect *until* Christ. “Until” is a common preposition, though here it’s a pretty significant one.²⁰

“Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made.”
– Galatians 3:19

“The heir... is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.”
– Galatians 4:1-2

Another preposition is used (also translated “until”) in 3:23 and 3:24 to the same exact effect.²¹

“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.”
– Galatians 3:23-24

¹⁹ *Galatians*. Directed by The Bible Project. Performed by Tim Mackie, & Jon Collins. 2016, Time Stamp: 5:11-5:20.

²⁰ ἄχρις – Strong’s #891.

²¹ εἰς – Strong’s #1519.

Paul uses these prepositions in the context of strong word-pictures. First, in 3:24, Paul says that the Law was our *guardian* – that is, our *paidagōgos*.²² The picture here is of a strict slave-tutor who accompanies a child to teach them obedience to rules until they are old enough to obey independently. Second, in 4:2, two additional types of “guardians” are used to personify the Law – *epitropous* and *oikonomous*²³ – these give the sense of someone who guards a child’s inheritance until they come of age. Paul says that this dynamic – being controlled by slave-tutors and inheritance-managers is no different than slavery (4:1-2), and now that Christ has come we are freed from their control and obligations (4:4-7; 5:1).

²² παιδαγωγός – Strong’s #3807.

²³ ἐπιτρόπους – Strong’s #2012; οἰκονόμους – Strong’s #3623.

Theme #4 – The Spirit Enables Christians to Live Godly Lives

So we've been saved by faith in Christ's work and now we're freed from the old tutor that used to keep us enslaved. That seems like good news to us, but not to many Jews. If living a holy life were like bowling, then the Law was like bumpers – designed to *guard* bad players from throwing gutter balls and to *instruct* them on how to throw strikes. But now, in Christ, the bumpers are off – we're free to play the game the way it was meant to be played... This is both liberating and concerning.

If the bumpers of the Law were keeping us from screwing things up too badly, then the Law being retracted down into the floor of my life can only mean one thing: I'm much more likely than I was before to fail at living a life that is pleasing to God. In the Jewish mind, the Law was safe, and the concept of 'freedom from the Law' sounded a lot like testing God with bad behavior. The only outcome would be exile. Again.

So, freedom from the Law actually a good thing if it was teaching us how to live in the ways of God? How can we live in God's ways if the Law is gone? This important question is met by an equally important answer: Paul says that God's Spirit, dwelling within us, is now aiding (4:6) and empowering us to live like His children. What the Law did by rigid compulsion, the Spirit now empowers organically. Receiving the Spirit at adoption, our hearts begin to cry "Abba, Father" (4:6). And rooted in the Spirit, we begin naturally growing godly thoughts and actions (5:6, 16, 18, 22-25). As the "bumpers" go down, something else comes up – empowering us to do what we were never truly capable of doing before.

All throughout his letter, Paul pits 'the Spirit' against 'the flesh.' That is – God's ongoing work against man's ongoing work (see *chart 2* for several spirit-flesh type contrasts with their references). And how does one get the Spirit? It doesn't depend on circumcision – Peter knew this, especially when the Spirit fell on unbaptized and uncircumcised Gentiles in Cornelius' house (Acts 10:44-48); hence the drama of his

hypocrisy in Antioch (2:11-14). Rather, it depends on faith in the work of Christ alone. Two natural conclusions flow out of this wonderful truth:

First, Paul know his opponents would speculate – “but what happens if one of your *lawless* people sins?” Paul’s solution in 6:1-5 is in harmony with what Christ himself taught: “you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness” (cr. Mt. 18:15-17). It’s really not that complicated – when a brother or sister throws a gutter ball, coaches should get in there and gently coach them. Easy! A good coach reminds a disciple that to “not use [their] freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (5:13).

Second, it’s no wonder that Paul concludes his letter by drawing a nearly comical contrast between his boast and the boast of the Judaizers (6:12-15). Paul’s boast: the Cross of Christ which took the full weight of his sin and extended to him the full measure of God’s Spirit and peace. The boast of the Judaizers: circumcision which counts for absolutely nothing and condemns the people who trust in it for justification. The Judaizer’s boast is laughable. If the they want to boast in their circumcision, says Paul in 5:12, they ought to just go all the way and *castrate* themselves!

If our ongoing works of righteousness are produced by the Holy Spirit, then we have no boast but the Cross which made it all possible.

*Sarah & Hagar – Paul’s Multi-Theme Example
(4:21-31)*

Before I conclude this section on Galatians’ themes, I would like to point out, only briefly, that the extraordinary example Paul gives of Sarah and Hagar in 4:21-3. To the modern reader this example may seem only peripheral to Paul’s main argument. It would be unlike Paul to waste ink on something tangential. Paul carefully chooses the story of Sarah and Hagar, and through it unleashes a nearly overwhelming barrage of contrasting images that possess traits from all four meta-themes. Several of Paul’s core ideas in the book of Galatians converge in 10 verses about these two mothers (and their sons).

vs.	Hagar/ Ishmael	vs.	Sarah/ Isaac
24	Picture of Old Covenant	24	Picture of New Covenant
23	Naturally born (the flesh)	23	Supernaturally born (God’s Promise)
23	Slave Child	23	Free Child
30	Not heir: cast from family	30	Heir: part of family
25	Earthly Jerusalem (copy)	26	True Jerusalem (real)
29	Persecuting Nation	29	Persecuted Nation
29	Born according to flesh	29	Born according to the Spirit
29	Judaizers	28	Christians

The Judaizers message is: salvation by natural means under slavery to the Law of Moses. However, Christians have a grounded message: salvation (new birth) via supernatural means (God’s promise in Christ and the regeneration of the Spirit) resulting in freedom from Moses’ Law and the ability to act like God’s children.

In one brilliantly chosen example from the Old Testament, Paul captures all 4 of the major themes we’ve explored. In Christ alone we have a sure-message leading to salvation, freedom from Moses’ Law, and a Spirit-filled life.

Part IV – Three Crucial Passages

It can be perceived that there are three ‘Rhetorical Climaxes’ in Galatians – points at which Paul brings a thought to a climax before exploring another one. These climaxes are quick upsurges in thought that explode in a brief summation of all that Paul desires the Galatians to understand.

Rhetorical Climax of Section #1: The Authority of Paul’s Gospel (2:19-21)

¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

The demands that the Law laid upon Paul and the curse of not meeting those demands were met and paid for in Christ. Paul identifies himself as living-breathing proof of Christ’s work – an object of Christ’s great affection and the new product of Christ’s design. The life he’s living is completely different than it was before. Before he’d been living as though his hard work and personal righteousness could save him, but now he is gloriously awake to his own inadequacies and conversely to the adequacy of Christ’s work and righteousness. To Paul the idea of Good News in which Jesus came and changed nothing (leaving us to continue laboring under the laws demands in pursuit of righteousness) is not “Good News” it is Useless News. As Campbell says, “To supplement the work of Christ is to supplant it.”²⁴

²⁴ Campbell, 1983: 296.

*Rhetorical Climax of Section #2:
The Substance of Paul's Gospel (4:4-7)*

⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

The crescendo of Paul's reasoning gives way to a glorious culmination: God has adopted us as his children by the redemptive work of His own Son. Nijay Gupta points²⁵ out that the word "adoption" (υιοθεσίαν, lit. "son-placement") is a type of adoption that modern westerners are wholly unfamiliar with. In Roman "son-placement" is one in which a grown man is transplanted from one family into another to become the heir of the new family. In Christ, we have been transferred out of one family, and placed into God's family as sons. And we are now heirs. And in the transaction we have received God's own Spirit which cries out from within us testifying to our sonship. Romans 8:15-17 makes the picture even more clear that the Spirit is actively testifying to our spirits that we are God's children. The Holy Spirit empowering us, in great part, by helping us to live unleashed in the understanding that we belong to God's family.

²⁵ Gupta, Nijay. "Applied Integrative Biblical Literature: Acts to Revelation." *BL593*. Portland, OR: Guest Lecturer at Western Seminary, June 4, 2021.

*Rhetorical Climax of Section #3:
The Results of Paul's Gospel (5:22-24)*

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

The glorious result of the Spirit's indwelling and empowering is that we begin to naturally and increasingly bear fruit that is in line with the character of God! This is tremendous news – and evidence that the work of Christ was effective. As we listen and stay in step with the spirit's constant reminders that we are children of God, we begin to actually act like children of God. Our old self is dead and something totally brand new and wonderful has been born and begins to grow in its place. There is no law against the characteristics listed in these verses – rather, they harmonize perfectly with God's desire for creation.

Appendix

Paul's Journeys Through Galatia

1st Journey in Galatia (c. 46-47AD)		Acts 13:13-14:24
Place	Event	Reference
	Paul & Barnabas enter the region of Galatia after a seemingly successful time on the Island of Cyprus. They'd preached all across the Island, and even had a chance to preach to the proconsul (Roman Governor of the region) - and they'd exercised spiritual authority over an influential magician there.	
	But when they got to the mainland (Perga in the district of Pamphylia) John Mark decided to leave Paul and Barnabas. He left them, seemingly for personal reasons, not because they wanted him to. He had been there "to assist them" (13:5) and now he left.	Acts 13:13; 15:38.
	It is possible Titus was with them as early as the 1 st Journey, though it's not explicitly stated. It's possible Titus stayed in Antioch to take care of the church there.	
Antioch	Paul & Barnabas went into the synagogue on Sabbath (this became his custom according to Acts 17:2).	Acts 13:14
	The rulers of the synagogue invited Paul and Barnabas to speak. Possibly because Paul and Barnabas clearly knew their Torah very well... perhaps they knew Paul had been a Pharisee by the way he spoke or dressed.	Acts 13:15
	<i>Paul's Message:</i> Paul eloquently shares the entire Jewish history – it's compelling. He hits all the major milestones: Being a chosen	Acts 13:6-41

	<p>people (Abraham); Being rescued from Egypt (Moses); The wilderness to the promised land in Canaan; The Judges; The Kings – especially the great King David. Then he shows Jesus as the continuation of O.T. history: He is the promised Savior, a son of King David who was heralded by a famous teacher named John the Baptizer. But the Jews in Jerusalem rejected him because they didn't understand the prophets despite reading them every week. They scandalously executed the Messiah – not realizing that they were fulfilling more prophecies by doing so. And God raised Jesus from the dead – and his students and a bunch of other people saw Him for many days after this. It's like Paul says: See, even the prophets told us about this – the Messiah/ Son of David would die, but yet never die – in fact He would reign forever. It has happened. The Savior, Jesus, frees us from our rebellion – He fully bridges the gap between man and God in all the ways Moses' Law could not (Acts 13:39). Now be careful: one last prophecy says that us Jews will have a hard time believing this Good News – that we'll tragically miss our own Messiah. DON'T MISS IT!</p>	
	<p>The Jews in that synagogue were so amped about Paul's message that they begged him to come back the following week! It became the talk of the town. In fact, most of the city – including gentiles - came back the following week to hear his next message. There were so many gentiles – and the Jews hoped and expected that Paul would condemn them and shoo them off... but instead he made it out</p>	<p>Acts 13:42-47</p>

	like the Jewish Savior was the Savior of the whole world. They thought the Messiah would save the Jews <i>from</i> the Gentiles, but now Paul said that the Messiah came to save <i>both Jews and Gentiles from sin!</i>	
	The Gentiles rejoiced and the word started getting out to the whole region!	Acts 13:48-49
	The Jews, who at first were excited, totally rejected the idea that God was saving both Jews and Gentiles from sin. They were not interested! Some noble women and leading men started a mass hysteria, started persecuting Paul and Barnabas, and ran them out of the area!	Acts 13:50
	Paul and Barnabas, filled with the Spirit's joy, shook the dust from off their sandals (like Jesus said in Mt. 10:14, Mk. 6:11, Lk. 9:5) and went on ahead to Iconium.	Acts 13:51-52
Iconium	Paul and Barnabas spoke in the synagogue and a "great number" of people (Jews and Gentiles) believed.	Acts 14:1
	But some of the Jews who rejected the Gospel "poisoned" the "minds" of the gentiles against Paul, Barnabas, and the new believers.	Acts 14:2
	Paul and Barnabas stayed "a long time" continuing to preach boldly. They did signs and wonders.	Acts 14:3
	The unbelieving Gentiles and Jews tried to get permission from city officials to stone Paul and Barnabas.	Acts 14:5
	But they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe in Lycaonia (central/ eastern part of Galatia).	Acts 14:6
Lystra	Paul heals a cripple (unable to walk)	Acts 14:8-9

	The Lystrans worship him in Lycaonian – saying Barnabas is Zeus and Paul is Hermes. They even tried to offer sacrifices to them. It’s possible that Paul, being from Tarsus (on the other side of a mountain range from Derbe) knew how to speak some Lycaonian. They all probably spoke Greek though.	Acts 14:11-12
	Paul and Barnabas told them to stop: They invited them to serve the Living God who made everything. They said that this True God had been kind and gracious to them (giving rain, crops, and gladness) even though they’d totally missed Him. But the Lystrans could hardly stop themselves from worshipping them.	Acts 14:14-18
	There were Jews there from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium (where they’d just been – and where, in Iconium, they’d barely escaped a stoning).	Acts 14:19
	Those Jews “persuaded the crowds” - Maybe said something like: The Jews were probably saying: “Don’t believe it that these guys are Jews! If they were Jews they’d be making everyone get circumcised. Their ‘Messiah’ is a cursed tree-hung poor man. Don’t be deceived – they don’t get the same exemption as us Jews. Either they worship Caesar, or they fall in line as obedient Jews who are the only ones who get exemption!”	Acts 14:19
	They stoned Paul until they thought he was dead and dragged his body outside the city.	Acts 14:19
	The disciples surrounded Paul and he got up and walked back into Lystra.	Acts 14:20
Derbe	Paul got up the next day and walked to Derbe – roughly 70 miles away! (Most likely not	Acts 14:20

	over a mountain range as some have suggested).	
	They preached the Gospel and “made many disciples”	Acts 14:21
	<i>PAUL SPECIFICALLY REMEMBERED THESE SUFFERINGS AT THE END OF HIS LIFE. He recalls them for Timothy – who was from Galatia (Derbe) – in 2 Tim. 3:11. They may have been the worst he ever suffered.</i>	
The 3 cities	They went back through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. They “strengthened the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith...”	Acts 14:21-22
	They also said that we must suffer on the way to the Kingdom of God.	Acts 14:22
	They appointed elders in every church, committing them to God with prayer and fasting.	Acts 14:23
Jerusalem Council (c. 48-49 AD)		
Antioch in Syria	Paul returns to Antioch to find that believing Jews from Judea had been coming up to Antioch to tell Gentile Christians that they couldn't be saved without being circumcised according to the law.	Acts 15:1
	Paul and Barnabas are appointed to go to Jerusalem to get answers from the (other) apostles.	Acts 15:2
Phoenicia/ Samaria	They share the Gospel and what God did on the first journey as they go down to Jerusalem	Acts 15:3
	When the conversation starts, some believing Pharisees speak up to say it's necessary for new believers to be circumcised AND to keep the law of Moses.	Acts 15:5
	Peter and James confirm that circumcision is not what saves.	15:6-29

	Peter says to the believing Pharisees: “Now, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the [Gentile] disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? We believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”	15:10-11
	Paul, Barnabas, Judas (Barsabbas), and Silas – take the verdict back to Antioch.	15:22-32
	Paul and Barnabas stay in Antioch teaching for a while and begin planning another journey – especially to get the verdict to the Galatian churches.	15:33-35
	They cannot agree on whether to take John Mark – who bailed just before getting to Galatia, where things got really difficult (run out of town, attempted stoning, actual stoning) – so Paul and Barnabas split.	Acts 15:36-39
2nd Journey in Galatia (c. 49-51 AD)		Acts 16:1-6
	This time, Paul goes by land while Barnabas goes through Cypress again.	15:40-41
	Paul probably would’ve stopped in Tarsus (his hometown), then walked over the mountains to Derbe. They travel straight for Galatia, strengthening the churches in Syria and Antioch on their way.	Acts 15:41-16:1
Derbe/ Lystra	Paul and Silas came in contact with a young disciple named Timothy. His Dad was Greek, his mom was a believing Jew.	Acts 16:1
	Paul had led his grandmother, Lois to the Lord, a few years earlier. His Jewish mother, Eunice, had also discipled Him.	2 Tim 1:5
	Timothy knew well of how Paul was treated in Galatia the last time – either because he	2 Tim 3:11

	witnessed it or heard all about it. Timothy would've been 2-5 years younger the last time Paul came through Galatia.	
	He was not circumcised and everyone knew it.	Acts 16:3
	Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.”	Acts 16:3
	Paul and Silas begin to deliver the news about the Jerusalem Council to Galatia at this time.	Acts 16:4
	The churches of Galatia kept growing.	Acts 16:5
	It seems Luke joined right after this trip.	Acts 16:10
3rd Journey in Galatia (c. 52-57 AD)		Acts 18:23
Galatia	Paul strengthened the disciples in Galatia, going from place to place.	Acts 18:23

Biographical Sketches of Titus & Timothy

Who was Titus?	
We don't know at what point Titus joins Paul, or from where. We just know that he joins the storyline when Paul and Barnabas take him to Jerusalem (possibly for the council)	Gal 2:1
An uncircumcised Greek	Gal. 2:3
Paul took Titus to Jerusalem with Barnabas to the Jerusalem Council - because of a revelation wanted to make sure he wasn't "running in vain."	Gal. 2:1-2
In Jerusalem "false brothers" tried to pressure Paul into circumcising Titus - he absolutely refused to give in. He won the support of the Apostles in this decision.	Gal. 2:3-5
Paul and Titus seemingly lost track of each other in their travels at some point during the 3rd Missionary Journey. Paul was pretty troubled - thinking he'd find Titus in Troas. But he did find him in Macedonia - the district to the north of Corinth.	2 Cor. 2:13; 7:6
When they reunited in Macedonia, Titus gave Paul a positive report of the church in Corinth - that after 1 Corinthians was delivered to them, they responded well to Paul's rebuke - with repentance. He also told Paul that he was refreshed by them.	2 Cor. 7:6-9, 14
Paul had urged Titus to get the Corinthian church to follow through with their commitment to take and send donations to help the severely impoverished Jerusalem church. Titus went totally of his own accord, not being required, because he was passionate about the Corinthian Church.	2 Cor. 8:6, 16-17; 12:18
Paul sent Titus to Corinth with a couple of very gifted apostles (one a famous preacher, and the other just very faithful) - sometime after the 3rd Journey. (Titus probably hand delivered Paul's letter - 2 Corinthians - on that trip).	2 Cor. 8:18-24; 12:18

Paul left Titus in Crete partway through the journey to Roman imprisonment (Titus was one of his escorts) in order to pastor the churches there and appoint elders.	Titus 1:5
Paul sent Titus a letter while in Greece - on the west side of the Peloponnesus Peninsula - modern day Greece - in Nicopolis. Delivered by either Tychicus, or a disciple named Artemas. He instructed Titus, that once the letter-deliverer arrived then he should try to visit him in Nicopolis.	Titus 3:12
Paul wanted Titus to do his “best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see[ing] that they lack[ed] nothing.”	Titus 3:13
At the end of Paul’s life, he tells Timothy that Titus has gone to Dalmatia - an area across from Italy on the Adriatic Sea (modern Croatia, Bosnia, and Montenegro).	2 Tim. 4:10

Who was Timothy?	
In Galatians: Timothy’s circumcision (Acts 16:3) could explain 5:11	
From Derbe/ Lystra.	Acts 16:1.
Mom was a believing Jew, Dad was a Greek.	Acts 16:1
He had a good reputation among other believers in his region.	Acts 16:2
His mother (Eunice) and grandmother (Lois) taught him the Scriptures from the time of Timothy’s youth.	2 Tim 1:5; 3:15
Suffered from “frequent ailments” so Paul prescribed him to drink a little wine for his stomach instead of just water.	1 Tim 5:23
Knew well of Paul’s treatment in Galatia the first time he had come through - whether as an eyewitness or because of eyewitness testimony. He would’ve been 2-5 years younger the first time Paul came through with Barnabas.	2 Tim. 3:11

Joined Paul and Silas near the beginning of his 2nd Missionary journey.	Acts 16:1-5
Got circumcised (as an adult) because of the Jews in Galatia who all knew his Dad was Greek (they knew his anatomy). I think Paul was making a strategy move here - earlier he had chosen not to circumcise Titus.	Acts 16:3; Gal. 2:3-5
Was left in Berea with Silas (Acts 17:14) to disciple new Bereans and got special instructions to visit, disciple, and get a report from Thessalonian believers for Paul while Paul went on to Athens. They finally caught up with Paul in Corinth.	Acts 17:14; 18:5; 1 Thes. 3:1-2
At some point was sent back to Corinth to “remind [them] of [Paul’s] ways in Christ.”	1 Cor. 4:17
Timothy (seemingly) hand delivered the letter of 1 Corinthians to the Corinthian church - after he was sent back the first time but before the 2nd Missionary Journey.	1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10
During the 3rd Missionary Journey, he was sent ahead to Macedonia (with Erastus) while Paul was in Ephesus.	Acts 19:22
Noted Co-Author of 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, and 1&2 Thessalonians (5 of Paul’s 13 letters).	Phil. 2:22;
Served with Paul as “a son with a father” and Paul calls him “my true child in the faith.”	1 Tim. 1:2
Paul writes his last-known letter to Timothy and asks him to come to him before he is condemned to die by Nero. He asks him to bring John Mark, a cloak that he had left with Carpas in Troas, his books, and especially his writing parchments, and to try to come before winter.	2 Tim. 4:11, 13; 4:21

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All scripture quotations are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.