

Why Am I Saved?

What Does That Mean?

A Study of Galatians

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A brief review of the introductory background material:

- I. **Paul was very upset with these young congregations (new Christians) in the Roman province of Galatia.**
 - A. Paul's other letters to congregations expressed gratitude or contained a section of praise and encouragement immediately following the greeting of the letter.
 - B. In Galatians, following the greeting, there is no expression of gratitude or word of encouragement.
 - C. The message of the letter began by stating Paul's confusion and concern.
- II. **Why? Why was Paul so concerned?**
 - A. An influential group of Jewish Christians opposed the conversion of people who were not Jews *if* these people had not been first converted to Judaism.
 - B. The book of Acts reveals how this influential group evolved in the church in Jerusalem.
 1. Acts 10:9-34 documents how difficult it was for even the apostle Peter to understand (directly from the Lord and the Spirit) that people who were not Jews could be taught about Christ, baptized, and become Christians.
 - a. The Lord took unusual steps to convince Peter to go see Cornelius.
 - b. Only *after* Cornelius explained why he sent for Peter did Peter finally realize that people who were not Jews could be Christians (verse 34).
 2. Acts 11:1-18 documents the strong reaction in the Jerusalem church against Peter visiting Cornelius and others who were not Jews.
 - a. Those who opposed Peter's visit "quieted down" (NASV) [literally, "became silent"] only when they heard that the Holy Spirit came upon those people who were not Jews.
 - b. But that did not end the matter.
 3. Acts 15 documents the visit of some Jewish Christians from Judea (the Jerusalem area) to the sizable Antioch, Syria, congregation (Christians who were not Jews).

- a. Verses 1-5 state the Jewish Christians told the non-Jewish Christians that unless they were circumcised (a Jewish religious ordinance) and lived by Jewish customs, "you cannot be saved."
 - b. This powerful statement was made to first generation, non-Jewish Christians who had limited or no background in the God of Israel, Jewish history, or the scriptures we call the Old Testament.
 4. Verses 6-21: when Paul and Barnabas were unable to end the confusion created by these visiting Jewish Christians, this question was referred to leadership of the Jerusalem church (the apostles and elders) .
 - a. The church leaders held an open conference and considered all the evidence on this question.
 - b. The decision was to not require people who were not Jews to be circumcised or follow Jewish customs.
 - c. These Christians were requested to abstain from the "pollutions of idols," fornication, eating things strangled, and eating blood.
 5. Verses 22-29: a letter that confirmed this decision was sent to the Antioch church (hand delivered), and the letter was without doubt shared with other congregations that were not Jewish.
- C. However, neither did this bring the disagreement and its issue to an end.
 1. There were Pharisees who had become Christians who insisted (at the conference) that it was *necessary* for Christians who were not Jews to be circumcised and to obey the law of Moses (Acts 15:5).
 2. From the information in Acts 21, evidence indicates that these Christians became the largest, most influential group in the Jerusalem church-- eventually they dominated the views and feelings of the Jerusalem church.
 - a. Years later Paul and Barnabas visited the leadership of the Jerusalem church to report the ways that God was working to save people who were not Jews.
 - b. The leaders were delighted to hear that news (21:18-20).
 - c. But the leaders also feared the reaction of the congregation to Paul and his work (21:20-21).
 - i. "Thousands" of the Christians in that congregation were "zealous for the law" or were committed to the law of Moses.
 - ii. They also heard a false report that Paul was teaching Jews outside of Palestine to no longer practice Jewish customs.
 - d. In the attempt to take the emotion out of the situation and to correct the misinformation about Paul, they requested Paul to assist four Jewish Christians as they took vows in the temple.
 - e. Jews (who were not Christians) from Asia (where Paul did much of his mission work) recognized Paul and accused him of preaching against Judaism, the law, and the temple.
 - f. They almost succeeded in killing Paul.
 3. The hostile emotion and fury generated when people who were not Jews became Christians without being circumcised is evident.
- D. The strategy of Jewish Christians devoted to Judaism and the law who believed that Christians who were not Jews must be circumcised to be saved:

1. When Paul established congregations in a new area by converting people who were not Jews:
 - a. These teachers visited those congregations as soon as Paul left the area.
 - b. They told them that they were not saved because they had not been circumcised.
 - c. They told them in order to be saved that they must be circumcised, learn Jewish law, and keep Jewish customs.
 - d. They created *major* confusion among new Christians who were not Jews and had little or no background in Jewish scripture or Jewish law.
2. This is what occurred in the province of Galatia.
 - a. When Paul left the area, Jewish Christian teachers demanding circumcision and obedience to Jewish law visited these young congregations.
 - b. The result:
 - i. These new Christians abandoned Christ as the complete Savior.
 - ii. They turned to Jewish law and Jewish customs for salvation.
3. Paul was astounded that:
 - a. They left Christ.
 - b. They believed that Paul taught them an incomplete gospel message.
4. Paul's letter addressed this situation.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE LETTER OF GALATIANS

- I. **Paul's introduction to his letter (1:1-5).**
 - A. From: Paul, an apostle appointed by God.
 - B. To: the congregations in the Roman province of Galatia.
 - C. The essential accomplishment and purpose of Jesus Christ is confirmed.
- II. **Paul's amazement and concern (1:6-10).**
 - A. He was amazed that they left the grace of Christ.
 - B. The good news of Christ's grace was the only message that could save them.
- III. **Paul listed the evidences documenting as fact that his message of the good news came from Christ.**
 - A. Before becoming a Christian, he a leading persecutor of Christians (1:11-17).
 - 1. Obviously, no one would teach the persecutor about Christ.
 - 2. His Christian message came directly from Jesus after conversion.
 - B. He did not visit Jerusalem for three years after his conversion (1:18-24); [obviously the Christian leaders in Jerusalem did not teach him after conversion].
 - 1. On that visit, he visited with Peter and James only.
 - a. He was there only 15 days.
 - b. The Christians in Judea did not know him.
 - C. Fourteen years later, he made a second trip to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus (2:1-10).
 - 1. Titus, a Christian who was not a Jew, was not asked to be circumcised.
 - 2. The apostles in Jerusalem acknowledged that Christ sent Paul to teach people who were not Jews.
 - D. Later, when Peter visited with Christians who were not Jews in Antioch, he stopped associating with them (2:11-21).
 - 1. Paul condemned Peter to his face for doing this.
 - 2. Paul showed the inconsistency of Peter's behavior.
 - 3. Justification is produced through faith in Christ, by through following the instructions of the law.
 - 4. Paul, the expert in the law, declared, "I died with Christ; Christ lives in me."
- IV. **Paul examined their thinking and understanding.**
 - A. "Who bewitched you [charmed you out of your senses; mesmerized you] (3:1-14)?"
 - 1. "Every spiritual blessing you received came through the work of the Spirit, not through the message of the law."
 - 2. "God regarded Abraham, the forefather of the Jews, to be a righteous man because of his faith."
 - 3. "The person who is not a Jew but who has faith in Christ *is* Abraham's son" [faith, not circumcision, makes a person who is not a Jew a descendant of Abraham].
 - 4. "The law placed people under a curse; Jesus rescues people from that curse."
 - B. The common, understood realities of a covenant agreement (3:15-22).

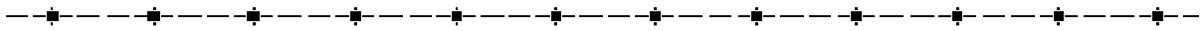
1. The conditions within a covenant agreement cannot be altered; the covenant must be completed as agreed.
 2. God made the covenant agreement [that included the promises] with Abraham hundreds of years *before* the law was given to the Jews.
 - a. That agreement, which could not be changed, was for the Christ to come.
 - b. The blessing God promised came as a result of God's covenant with Abraham; therefore the promise came through Christ, not through the law.
 3. If they left Christ and turned to the law, they left the blessing.
- C. When Christ came, the intended purpose of the law ended.
1. Now people are God's children because they have faith in Christ.
 2. To God, there are no *preferred* people any longer; anyone who believes in Jesus is Abraham's descendant.

V. Paul's insightful understandings.

- A. A young child is not a slave, but he is under a guardian (4:1-7).
1. The law (the Jewish law; the law of Moses) served as a guardian until Christ came.
 2. Christ came to release the Jews from the guardian and to adopt people who were not Jews--both can be true sons of Abraham, children of the promise, and sons of God.
- B. Christians who were not Jews were slaves to idols before conversion to Christ (4:8-10).
1. Paul feared that they were thinking like slaves again.
 2. "I am not your enemy; see me for who I am in my relationship with you--the one who dearly loves you."
 3. Their decision to accept the teaching of Christians who demanded that they obey the law confused and bewildered Paul.
- C. The allegory of Sarah and her son Isaac and Hagar and her son Ishmael (4:21-31):
1. Those two sons represented two covenants, one temporary and one eternal.
 2. Hagar and Ishmael represented God's covenant with the nation of Israel established through the law of Moses [given only to Israel].
 - a. It represented the Jews who clung to the law and rejected Christ.
 - b. The law of Moses was the temporary agreement.
 3. Sarah and Isaac represented the God's covenant with all people established through Christ.
- D. "If you people who are not Jews agree to the Jewish rite of circumcision, you reject Christ's freedom and return to slavery (5:1-26)."
1. "If you use your freedom to love and serve each other, you do not have to worry about obeying the Jewish law--loving each other fulfills that law."
 2. "Refuse to allow your lives to be controlled by the appetites and desires of your physical body."
 3. "Live your life each day in the Spirit bearing its fruit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control).

VI. Closing instructions and encouragement (6:1-18).

- A. Help the Christian who has made a mistake that can destroy him spiritually--rescue him.
- B. Remember the law of the harvest and live with the awareness of that law.
- C. I was so concerned that I wrote this letter instead of dictating it.
 - 1. Those Jewish Christians who demand that you accept Jewish teachings have their own selfish, private agenda.
 - 2. To the Christian, there is one supreme reality: the all important, essential death of Jesus Christ.
 - 3. Closing statement.



OVERVIEW OF GALATIANS: SUMMARY

- I. Paul was astounded that they left the grace of Jesus Christ for Jewish law.
- II. He listed the evidences which verified that his message came from Jesus.
- III. He challenged them to understand:
 - A. Every spiritual blessing they had come through the Spirit.
 - B. God's covenant promises were not received through the law.
 - C. The law's intended purposes were completed when Christ came.
- IV. He challenged them to think.
 - A. The law was only a guardian that served until Christ came.
 - B. Non-Jewish people who trusted Christ were the true children of Abraham.
- V. Accepting the Jewish rite of circumcision made them slaves again.
- VI. Closing instructions:
 - A. Rescue the Christian who made a mistake.
 - B. Live in the awareness of the law of the harvest.
 - C. The supreme spiritual reality is the death of Jesus Christ.

GALATIANS: FOCUS POINT AND INTRODUCTION

Focus point:

Paul said, "The grace of Jesus Christ makes your baptism valid--your sins are forgiven."

Some Jewish Christians said, "Your baptism is not valid because you were not circumcised before you were baptized."

A basic issue: who is speaking for God and Christ? Who should be trusted and believed?

In order for the confusion to be corrected, Paul knew that they must trust and believe him.

The Introduction (Galatians 1:1-5):

Things to note:

1:1--He was an apostle. Men did *not* send him; men did *not* appoint him. He was sent/appointed by Jesus Christ and the God who raised Jesus from the dead.

1:2--Greetings were sent from all who were with Paul to all congregations in Galatia.

1:3--Paul's formal greeting: Grace (a common Roman greeting) and peace (a common Jewish greeting) from God and Jesus.

1:4--Opening emphasis on Jesus' role and importance:

Jesus surrendered himself for our sins.
He did that to deliver us from the present evil world.
It was God's will that Jesus do that.

1:5--Eternal glory should be given to God.

Notes Concerning the Introduction to Galatians

- I. **Christians (those within the church) who attacked Paul and his teachings tried to destroy his credibility as a preacher/teacher/apostle.**
 - A. If they destroyed his credibility, they destroyed his influence and his message.

- B. The letters of 1 and 2 Corinthians provide information on methods and approaches used by his Christian enemies who tried to accomplish this.
- C. They made attempts like these:
 - 1. They criticized him for refusing to accept financial support: "If he were a genuine apostle, he would accept the support. He refuses support because he knows that he is not a real apostle" (1 Corinthians 9:1-18).
 - 2. They forces him to defend himself, and then said: "He is an unimpressive person who boasts too much" (1 Corinthians 10:8-18).
 - 3. They attacked him because his apostolic appointment came late: "He does not have the rights of an apostle because he was not a part of Jesus' earthly ministry" (1 Corinthians 9:1-6; 15:8-11; 2 Corinthians 12:11-13).
- D. Paul was vulnerable to such charges because:
 - 1. He did not follow Jesus during Jesus' ministry on earth.
 - 2. He was not born nor reared in Palestine; he went to Jerusalem as a student (Acts 22:3; Galatians 1:14).
 - 3. Prior to conversion, he arrested and abused Christians.
 - 4. His conversion to Christ and divine appointment to apostleship came long after Jesus' death and resurrection.

II. To restore the Galatian Christians' faith in the complete sufficiency of Jesus, it was essential that Paul restore his credibility and prove that Jesus was the perfect fulfillment of God's plan and intent.

THE BODY OF THE LETTER

Section 1: Galatians 1:6-10

Paul emphatically declared that the "good news" of grace in Jesus Christ was the only valid "good news."

- I. **He was "amazed" that they quickly had abandoned the "good news" for a different "good news."**
 - A. The word "amazed" was an expression of indignant astonishment.
- II. **Paul made three points:**
 - A. The supposed "good news" to which they turned was only a distortion of the "good news" he originally shared with them.
 - B. Anyone who declared any form of "good news" that changed or distorted the message he shared with them was to be accursed from God.
 1. Such messengers did not speak for God.
 2. They were in fact God's condemned enemies.
 3. For emphasis, Paul stated his denouncement of these false teachers twice.
 4. The double emphasis stressed the serious error of the distortion.
 - C. Paul's only concern was properly representing God and Christ.
 1. He was not trying to gain their favor or please them.
 2. He was being a faithful, devoted servant to Christ.
- III. **Developing a proper understanding of Paul's contrast between the "good news" he shared and the "different" or "another good news" is essential.**
 - A. For us to reduce Paul's concern (and point) to doctrinal disagreements that separate religious groups trivializes his concern.
 - B. This is the good news that Paul shared with non-Jewish listeners: God's accomplishments in the death and resurrection of Jesus permitted God to grant complete forgiveness, complete salvation to anyone.
 1. Through God's grace in Christ, anyone can become a son or daughter to God.
 2. God's grace, empowered by the death and resurrection of Jesus, could deliver anyone from the condemnation of evil.
 3. To further see Paul's emphasis on the importance and role of the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection, read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 (particularly note what the good news did and was doing for the Corinthians as stated in verses 1 and 2); 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; and Romans 1:16,17.
 - C. A different or another good news (gospel) would declare a means of obtaining God's grace, forgiveness, atonement, justification, redemption, sanctification, and propitiation without Jesus' death, blood, or resurrection.
 1. It would be a new, Christless good news.
 2. That Christless message would do everything Paul's Christ center message did.
 3. This Christless good news would provide every blessing Paul's Christ centered good news provided, but it would do it without Christ.
 4. Paul emphasized that was as unthinkable as it was impossible.

- D. Paul made it clear that the "different" good news the Jewish Christians presented to the Galatian converts was not "another" form of good news, but a distortion of the good news Paul shared with them.
 - 1. It merely added the requirements of ritual circumcision and Jewish customs.
 - 2. It was not a Christless avenue to God's blessings, therefore it was not "another" gospel.
 - 3. It was a distortion that took their trust away from God's act in Jesus' death and relocated that trust in their ritual acts (including circumcision).
- E. They had turned from placing full confidence in God's goodness and actions in the cross to placing their trust in themselves because they had yielded to ritual acts.

THE SOURCE OF THE GOSPEL

Section 2: Galatians 1:11-2:21

Paul verified that the gospel he presented came directly from Jesus Christ.

- **"The gospel I preached to you did not come to me through another human."**
 - I. **"I received it through direct divine communication, not through human communication (1:11-17).**
 - A. "Jesus Christ, not an apostle, was my teacher.
 - B. "This should be obvious:
 - 1. "When I lived in Jerusalem where the apostles were I was devoted to destroying the church.
 - 2. "My devotion to Judaism consumed me; I was not teachable.
 - 3. "No one was a more learned student, a more accomplished student, or a more zealous advocate of Judaism.
 - C. "From the time of my birth, God intended to call me by His grace .
 - 1. "God intended to reveal Jesus to me.
 - 2. "God intended for me to preach the good news about Jesus to non-Jewish people.
 - D. "When God revealed Jesus Christ to me, I did not go to Jerusalem to be trained in the message of the gospel by the apostles.
 - 1. "I went from Damascus to Arabia.
 - 2. "Later I went from Arabia back to Damascus.
 - II. **"Three years after my conversion I made my first trip to Jerusalem (1:18-24).**
 - A. "I went to meet Peter, and I visited with him for fifteen days.
 - B. "Aside from James who was Jesus' brother, I did not meet any other apostles.
 - C. "I am telling you the truth!
 - D. "Afterward I traveled to areas of Syria and Cilicia.
 - E. "But the Christians in Judea did not know me personally--at that time they would not have recognized me if they saw me.
 - 1. "They heard that I had been converted and was preaching for Christ.
 - 2. "They rejoiced in that news.
 - III. **"My second trip to Jerusalem came fourteen years later (2:1-10).**
 - A. "I made the trip with Barnabas (remember that Barnabas was converted in Jerusalem and active in the church there [Acts 4:36,37; 9:27; 11:22-24]) and with Titus (a Christian who was not Jewish).
 - 1. "A revelation directed me to make this trip.
 - 2. "On this visit I submitted the good news that I preached to the church leaders in Jerusalem.
 - a. "I privately disclosed the message that I had been preaching.
 - b. "I wanted them to verify the good news that I presented to people who were not Jewish.
 - B. "This was the result of that visit:
 - 1. "The apostles did not instruct Titus to be circumcised.

2. "The apostles did not endorse the position of the false brethren who tried to bind us to the rituals of the law.
3. "The apostles declared that God had given me the mission of presenting the good news about Jesus to non-Jews just as He had given Peter the mission of presenting the good news about Jesus to the Jews.
4. "James, Peter, and John gave Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship; they affirmed our message to non-Jewish people.
5. "They made only one request of us: remember the poor; and we were doing that.

IV. **"My status as an apostle was confirmed by an incident that involved Peter (2:11-14).**

- A. "When Peter visited Antioch, he made a serious mistake that was nothing short of hypocritical.
 1. "When he arrived, he freely ate and associated with non-Jewish Christians.
 2. "Later, when a group of Jewish Christians from Jerusalem came to Antioch, he stopped associating with the local Christians.
 3. "He did so because he was afraid of the powerful group in the Jerusalem church who insisted that non-Jewish converts be circumcised.
 4. "No only did he stop his association, but he even convinced Barnabas to stop his association with these Christians he helped convert.
- B. "I publicly told Peter, 'You are forcing non-Jewish Christians to comply with a Jewish conviction that you, as a Christian, reject.'

V. **"This is what I told Peter (2:15-21):"**

- A. There is a distinct difference between:
 1. A Jewish Christian practicing circumcision as a Jewish rite to endorse his Jewish heritage and culture, and
 2. Demanding that a non-Jewish sinner be circumcised in order to have salvation.
- B. Jews and non-Jews are all justified before God in the same way--by faith in Christ.
 1. (In this statement Paul stressed this truth: only by trusting the atonement God made through the death of Jesus could anyone receive forgiveness.)
 2. (When a Jew, as an act of heritage and culture, was circumcised, that act did not justify him.)
- C. Faith in Christ (trusting God's accomplishment in Jesus' crucifixion) will justify anyone.
- D. Obeying the instructions and practicing the rituals of Jewish law will justify no one.

VI. **Paul then directed the focus of the argument to himself. In my personal judgment, he was trying to remove the potential for irrational emotion. His point had emotional, explosive potential for both Jewish and non-Jewish Christians.**

- A. "If, after I accept justification in Christ, I sin, does my sin make Christ the minister of sin? Did Christ enable me to sin by justifying me?"
 1. "Absolutely not!"
 2. "I prove that I transgressed when I rebuild what I destroyed."
- B. "As a Jew, committed to the law, I died to law in order that I might become alive to God."

1. Remember: Many Jewish Christians believed that obedience to the law made one alive to God.
 2. To these, the idea that a person under the law was not alive to God was unthinkable.
 3. To many of them, the necessity of dying to the law to become alive to God was a strange concept.
- C. "I died with Christ so the I don't live any more."
1. "Because I accepted justification in Christ, Christ lives in me."
 2. "My physical existence is ruled by faith in God's son, the one who loved me and died for me."
- D. "I will not cancel God's grace by teaching people to trust law instead of trusting Christ."
- E. "If it is possible to become righteous before God by law, then Christ's death was unnecessary and without purpose."

Observation: We previously noted how Paul's enemies in the church attacked his credibility by attacking his credentials as an apostle. This final argument likely reflects the core information Paul stressed in his confrontation with Peter. It provides us with an insight into the manner that some Jewish Christians attacked Paul's message.

1. Many of these former idol worshippers who had been baptized into Christ likely "looked and acted" spiritually crude when compared to the moral and ethical sophistication of the typical Jewish Christian.
2. In their spiritual infancy, likely some of their actions and deeds "offended" Jewish Christians.
3. Jewish Christian argument: "Surely people who had been forgiven and saved would not conduct themselves like that! If faith in Jesus is responsible for them living and acting like that, Jesus must be teaching them how to sin instead of delivering them from sin!"
4. Paul's declaration: Because they are spiritually unlearned and unsophisticated does not mean that Jesus teaches them to be sinful. Forcing them to adopt Jewish rituals to improve external appearances to Jewish Christians is not the answer. Jewish law and ritual cannot and will not make them righteous. Only by trusting Christ (the source of atonement and sanctification) can they be righteous.

Important realization: Being righteous does not depend on how we are perceived or evaluated by human eyes. Being righteous depends on how we appear in the eyes of God. Faith in Christ changes us in God's eyes.



A FOCUS ON JEWISH CIRCUMCISION

Background Material to be Studied at the End of Galatians 2

A central issue in the controversy between the Jewish Christians and Paul was the rite of Jewish circumcision (Galatians 5:1-6; 6:12-15). The Jewish Christians from Jerusalem falsely taught that non-Jewish Christians must accept Jewish circumcision, Jewish law, and Jewish practices in order to be saved. Why? Why did Jews (those who were not Christians and many who were Christians) place such emphasis on circumcision?

- I. **Genesis 17:9-14--The original covenant (agreement) God made with Abraham. (Remember that all Israelites, all Jews, were and are the direct descendants from Abraham.)**
 - A. The covenant that God established with Abraham was to be observed "throughout their generations" (by all his descendants in any age) [verse 9].
 - B. Every male would be circumcised [verse 10].
 - C. Circumcision was the continuing symbol of the covenant (agreement with its promises) that God established with Abraham that would include all his descendants [verse 11].
 - D. Every male should be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth "throughout your generations" [verse 12].
 - E. Those males to be circumcised included sons, those who were born as servants to the family, and those who were purchased to be servants for the family [verses 12,13].
 - F. This was an "everlasting covenant" [verse 13].
 - G. Any Israelite male who was not circumcised was not to be regarded as an Israelite [verse 14].
- II. **Genesis 17:22-27--Abraham obeyed immediately by having all his male servants, Ishmael, and himself circumcised.**
- III. **Exodus 12:44, 48, 49--A part of the Passover instructions to Israel.**
 - A. Passover was the most important religious observance in Israel.
 1. It commemorated their deliverance from slavery in Egypt by the acts of God.
 2. It renewed their memory of how they became a free people.
 - B. A slave owned by an Israelite could not eat the Passover meal until he was circumcised [verses 44,48].
 - C. No uncircumcised man born of Israelite parents could eat the Passover [verse 49].
- IV. **Leviticus 12:3--The male child was to be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth.**
- V. **Joshua 5:2-7--Israelite males were circumcised before the military campaigns began against the inhabitants of Canaan.**
 - A. Preparations were made to circumcise "the sons of Israel" [verses 2,3].
 - B. All the males who left Egypt (forty years earlier) were circumcised [verse 4].

1. All the males of adult age (men of war) died in the wilderness before the nation invaded Canaan.
 2. This was their punishment for refusing to listen to God the first time He gave them opportunity to enter Canaan [Numbers 13,14].
- C. All the males born during the time Israel was in the wilderness were not circumcised [verse 5].
1. These males were circumcised before invading Canaan.
 2. The oldest were as old as 40 years old (if their mothers were pregnant when they left Egypt).

VI. **For us to note the force of circumcision, consider Leviticus 19:23-25.**

- A. When they arrived in the land of Canaan, they would plant fruit trees.
1. For the first three years, the fruit of those trees was to be regarded "uncircumcised" and not to be eaten.
 2. On the fourth year the fruit was to be considered "holy" and offered to God.
 3. On the fifth year they could eat the fruit.
- B. To signify that the fruit was not to be used at all in the first three years, they were to look upon it as "uncircumcised" or strictly forbidden and excluded.

VII. **There is an aspect of circumcision stressed by God that often failed to register in the understanding of the people.**

- A. While the physical act of circumcision was necessary to obey God, the fact that the physical act occurred meant nothing unless it reflected the condition of their hearts.
1. A male could be circumcised on the eighth day, and still not be in relationship with God.
 2. The whole nation could practice circumcision, and still not be in relationship with God.
 3. The physical fact of circumcision meant nothing if the person did not have "a circumcised heart."
- B. Leviticus discussed in detail the consequences and punishments that would occur if Israel turned away from God, were disobedient, and practiced evil.
1. However, if such occurred, it did not have to be an irreversible condition.
 2. Leviticus 26:40-42 stated that God would remember the covenant that he made with their forefathers and would "remember the land" (bring back the blessings) if these things occurred:
 - a. If they confessed their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers,
 - b. If they humbled their uncircumcised heart,
 - c. If they make "amends for their iniquity."
 3. Note circumcised bodies and uncircumcised hearts meant that God would turn from them and react to them with hostility.
 4. Deuteronomy 10:12-16--What did God require of Israel?
 - a. Fear (reverence, respect) Him.
 - b. Walk in His ways.
 - c. Love Him.
 - d. Serve Him.
 - e. Do the above with all their hearts and souls.
 - f. Keep the Lord's commandments and statutes.

- g. Circumcise their hearts and refuse to be stubborn.
- C. To see the stress and emphasis on the importance of the circumcision of the heart as well as the body, read Jeremiah 4:3,4 and 9:25,26. Paul made this point to the Jews in the first century in Romans 2:24-29.

Section 3: Galatians 3:1-22

- I. **You have been foolish enough to allow these people to "cast a spell" on you.**
- A. When I taught you, you responded as if you actually could see Jesus' public execution by crucifixion.
1. Please reflect on your decision to follow these Jewish teachers by answering my questions.
 - a. Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the commands of the Law or by having faith in what you heard about Jesus?
 - b. If your spiritual life came into existence with the activity of the Holy Spirit, are you foolish enough to believe that the road to spiritual maturity is found in your physical acts?
 - c. Becoming Christians resulted in suffering for you--did you suffer for no reason?
 2. The Divine One gives you the Holy Spirit and causes miracles to occur among you.
 - a. Does that happen through human obedience to the Law or through faith in Christ?
 - b. Does it happen because of your human acts or because of what you heard?
 3. Even Abraham, the forefather of these Jews who deceive you, was regarded to be righteous by God because he BELIEVED (Genesis 15:6).
 - a. It is certain that the true descendants of Abraham are those who, like Abraham, trust God.
 - b. Scripture itself predicted the God would justify people who were not Jews.
 - i. That would occur through the good news about Jesus Christ.
 - ii. That is what scripture meant when it said, "ALL NATIONS will be blessed in Abraham" (Genesis 12:3).
 - c. Those who respond to God through faith in Christ are blessed with the believing Abraham.
- B. Everyone who surrenders to the Law's acts of obedience places himself under a curse.
1. The Law itself declared that the person was cursed who did not perfectly obey everything the Law commanded (Deuteronomy 27:26).
 2. It is impossible for the Law to make a person "right before God" (because no one can perfectly obey all the Law's commands).
 3. Even from Abraham's day, this has been true: those who are "right before God" live by faith [please note that they, like Abraham, *live* by faith, not merely declare that they believe].
 - a. A person can obey the instructions of the Law without any faith.
 - b. To obey the law, all that is required is to physically function, to practice the instructions.
- C. Christ redeemed [freed us from slavery] us from the Law's curse.
1. Christ did that by becoming [by law] a curse on our behalf.

- a. The Law said, "A curse is on everyone who is hung on wood" [publicly displayed in or after death by having his/her body hung for the public to view] (Deuteronomy 21:23).
- b. Christ was willing through crucifixion to become a curse for our benefit.
 - i. Because he did that, all people can benefit from the promise made to Abraham.
 - ii. Because he did that, people who are not Jews can benefit from Christ as certainly as can Jews.
- c. That is the reason that we can receive the Holy Spirit who was promised us if we had faith in Christ.

II. **Brothers in Christ, I challenge you to understand my point by considering a covenant agreement between two people.**

- A. When two people make a covenant agreement, everyone knows that the following things are true:
 - 1. The agreement must be ratified.
 - 2. Once ratified, it cannot be changed or canceled.
 - 3. The conditions are firm (like our signed contracts).
- B. Please pay careful attention to the order of events.
 - 1. God made His covenant with Abraham.
 - a. God gave His promise to Abraham to his SEED [singular] (Genesis 12:1-2;13:15;17:7).
 - b. Please take note: the word translated "descendants" in some translations is literally translated "seed."
 - c. The covenant promise was made to Abraham and his SEED.
 - d. SEED referred to one person, not many persons.
 - e. SEED specifically pointed to Christ.
 - 2. Paul said, "This is my point."
 - a. The Law was given to Israel 430 years *after* God gave the covenant promise to Abraham.
 - b. That Law did not invalidate God's covenant promise that was made 430 years earlier.
 - c. That Law did not nullify God's promise made through His covenant with Abraham.
 - d. That promise was an inheritance to be received.
 - i. An inheritance is based on a promise, not law.
 - ii. The inheritance existed because of a *promise* made to Abraham.
 - 3. Does the mean that the Law had no purpose to serve?
 - a. The Law was needed because of Israel's failure to follow God's purposes and will.
 - b. Israel, the nation, was not like Abraham--Abraham trusted God and did as God instructed him to do.
 - c. The Law had its origin in God, and both angels and Moses were mediators.

- d. *It was to be in force until the SEED could come and make God's promise a reality.*
- 4. The meaning of verse 20 is unclear to us: the point was that the promise is superior to the Law.
- 5. Does the Law oppose God's promise? Impossible!
 - a. It did not oppose the promise, but it had a specific limitation.
 - b. The Law could not give a person [spiritual] life.
 - c. If the Law could make a person "right before God," then human righteousness would be based on Law instead of faith in Christ.
- 6. Scripture confirms that all people are the prisoners of sin.
 - a. Only through Christ can people be released from that prison.
 - b. The promise given to Abraham said, "All families [nations] would be blessed through Abraham" (Genesis 12:3).
 - c. Faith in Christ makes that promise reality.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Section 4: Galatians 3:23-4:31

- I. **Before faith in Christ became a reality, the Law kept people in custody [the concept is that of protective custody].**
 - A. The Law served a temporary [but essential] purpose prior to the coming of Christ.
 1. The purpose of the Law was to be our *paidagogus* to lead us to Christ.
 - a. In English, there is not suitable word to translate *paidagogus*.
[Information concerning the *paidagogus* is taken from *The Living Word Commentary*, The Letter of Paul to The Galatians, Robert L. Johnson (R.B. Sweet Co., Inc.: Austin, Texas), Volume 10, pp. 97, 98.]
 - b. The *paidagogus* was often a slave who had oversight of a boy from the age of six to sixteen.
 - c. He was the escort and the disciplinarian who watched over him and took him to and from school.
 - d. He constantly accompanied the boy to guard him against evil and immoral influences.
 - e. The *paidagogus* was commonly strict, severe, and a proverb for a sour disposition.
 - f. One can see without difficulty how that the Law served all these roles.
 2. The Law's specific purpose was to watch over us as it led us to Christ.
 - a. The Law could not justify us.
 - b. But it could lead us to the Christ who could justify us.
 3. Now that the Christ has come, we can have faith in the Christ; we are no longer under the oversight and control of the *paidagogus*.
 - B. Faith in Christ Jesus [not Law] makes us God's sons.
 1. When we are baptized into Christ, God clothed us in Christ.
 2. When people are baptized into Christ, God removes all distinctions.
 - a. Paul listed the three basic distinctions of that day.
 - b. The distinction between Jew and non-Jew is removed in Christ.
 - c. The distinction between a slave and a person who is free is removed in Christ.
 - d. The distinction between male and female is removed in Christ.
 - C. If you belong to Christ, you are Abraham's descendant.
 1. You are an heir of the promise that God made to Abraham.
 2. The promise is rightfully yours because you belong to Christ.
- II. **A child and a slave have a lot in common.**
 - A. While the child certainly will reach maturity and inherit everything, as a child, he lives as though he were a slave.
 1. For example, a child is under the oversight and control of a guardian or a steward throughout his childhood.

2. In that same way, though it was God's plan for us to receive the inheritance, we were under the basic teachings and principles of the Law.
 3. When the time was right, God sent His Son by allowing him physically to be born of a woman and allowing him to be born under the Law.
 4. He came to accomplish these two things:
 - a. To redeem those who were in slavery under the Law.
 - b. To extend divine adoption to all.
 5. As those who believe in Christ, you received the adoption.
 - a. If that were not true you would not have Christ's Spirit in your heart.
 - b. Nor would you feel that God is your Father.
 6. You are God's son, God's heir, and not a slave.
- B. If you are determined to place yourselves under the Law, consider an allegory from the Law itself.
1. Abraham had two sons, one (Ishmael) whose mother was a slave and one (Isaac) whose mother was free.
 - a. The son born of a slave was conceived as a result of human design and intent.
 - b. The son born of a free woman was conceived as a result of God's promise.
 2. The slave mother and the free mother represent two covenants (the covenant given at Mount Sinai and the covenant given through Christ).
 3. Consider the slave mother (Hagar) the covenant given at Mount Sinai.
 - a. The covenant from Mount Sinai produced children who were slaves as did Hagar.
 - b. Hagar represents Sinai and present Jerusalem.
 - c. All who are under the control of the Law given at Mount Sinai and are loyal to Jerusalem are born of a slave and remain in slavery to the Law.
 4. Consider the free mother (Sarah) and the covenant given through Christ.
 - a. Sarah represents the heavenly Jerusalem where God Himself lives, where there is true freedom.
 - b. Just as Isaac was born through God's promise, you also are born through God's promise.
 - c. Just as Ishmael tormented Isaac, these Jewish Christians torment you.
 - d. Please remember: the slave and her son were driven away so that the slave's child would not be an heir with the child of promise.
 5. Though you are not Jews by fleshly birth, you are God's sons of promise through the covenant given through Christ.
 - a. You are not slaves; you are sons.
 - b. Those who are God's sons through faith in Christ are the true children of promise, the true heirs of Abraham.
- C. Trust the change of your status before God (Galatians 4:8-20).
1. There was a time when you were slaves to gods that do not exist.
 - a. But you discovered the living God, and He came to know you.

- b. Why do you want to return to slavery by placing yourselves under the regulations of the Law?
 - c. I am afraid that I accomplished nothing in teaching you.
2. Please be like me because I was like you.
- a. You have not offended me.
 - b. When I first came to teach you about Christ I was quite sick.
 - c. My sickness could have repulsed you, but it did not.
 - i. You received me as if I were God's angel and treated me as if I were Christ.
 - ii. Have you forgotten how blessed you felt?
 - iii. Have you forgotten that you would have given me your own eyes?
3. Am I now your enemy because I tell you the truth?
- a. These Jewish teachers are not trying to include you; they are trying to make you dependent on them.
 - b. I want to include you, not exclude you or make you dependent on me.
 - c. It would be wonderful if you remembered this when I am there and when I am away.
4. I feel like that I am in the process of giving birth to you again.
- a. The process will not be over until you learn to trust and depend on Christ in your lives.
 - b. I wish that I could be with you in person so that I could change my tone.
 - c. But you truly confuse me!

INSTRUCTIONS

Section 5: Galatians 5 and 6

- I. **Christ gave us freedom with the specific intention of our being free.**
 - A. Plant your feet firmly in that freedom; allow nothing to move you from that freedom.
 1. Consider the things that we, today, as the church, stress that Christians should "stand firm" in.
 - a. The list would include the Word, the truth, sound doctrine, the authority of Christ, etc.
 - b. Certainly, we should "stand firm" in all these things.
 - c. But how often do you hear "freedom" placed on that list?
 2. Paul clearly stressed that these Christians should stand firm in the freedom that Christ gave them.
 - B. To stand firm in Christ's freedom they must not "*again*" submit (RSV, JB), be subject to (NASV), be entangled in (KJV), be burdened by (NIV), be tied to (NEB) a yoke of slavery.
 1. The Greek word translated "submit" or "be subject to" means "to be held in" or "to be ensnared."
 2. Spiritually, laws formed a yoke that held or ensnared, and that yoke destroyed freedom.
 - a. A yoke was not placed on oxen to free the oxen, but to control the oxen.
 - b. The yoke harnessed the oxen's strength for the purpose of moving a burden.
 - c. The yoke existed to use the oxen, not to free the oxen.
 - d. The well being of the oxen was not the primary consideration.
 3. The word "*again*" provides an interesting insight into the inadequacy of the control of law.
 - a. It seems to draw a parallel between the control of law under Judaism and the control of law under idolatry.
 - b. For the non-Jewish Christians to escape idolatry and submit the Judaism was to escape slavery to enter slavery.
 - c. The ordinances of both existed to control the person who submitted.
 - d. The result of both was to burden the person, not to free the person.
 4. When your past religious life was formed and regulated by laws (ordinances), it is extremely difficult to stand in freedom.
 - a. Freedom feels unnatural; because of past religious conditioning, it can even feel unspiritual.
 - b. It feels "natural" and "spiritual" to submit to external controls and burdens; submitting to laws "just feels right."
 - c. So you can easily escape an undesirable form of control to submit to a seemingly more desirable form of control.

- d. But, spiritually, the control of law (ordinances) equals slavery-- regardless of the source or the nature of the system of laws.

II. **In verses 5:2-12, Paul placed his entire, collective influence and personal position as their original teacher behind this injunction: "If you allow yourselves to be circumcised to comply with Jewish ordinances, you will receive zero benefits or blessings from God."**

- A. Please remember that Paul was not speaking about circumcision as a matter of health or hygiene (as it is often used today), but circumcision as a religious rite, a spiritual ordinance to be imposed on non-Jews.
 - 1. "If you allow yourselves to be circumcised:
 - a. "You are obligated to practice every ordinance of Jewish law.
 - b. "The moment your flesh is cut away in the act of circumcision, you actually sever the bond the binds you to Christ; you cut yourself away from Christ."
 - c. "The moment that you seek to be just before God by an act of law is the moment that you fall out of God's grace."
 - 2. "It is the spirit and grace that gave us the hope of righteousness through faith in Christ."
 - a. In Christ being a Jew or non-Jew means nothing.
 - b. Therefore in Christ the ordinance of circumcision means nothing.
 - c. In Christ only this is of true substance and enduring meaning: faith in what God achieved in Christ; faith that is busy and at work using the same love that gave us Christ.
 - 3. "What happened to you?"
 - a. "Who hindered you from obeying the truth?"
 - i. Please carefully note that the deed of obeying a law by submitting to circumcision was *not* obeying the truth.
 - ii. Standing in the freedom that Christ gave them was obeying the truth.
 - iii. Placing their trust, their confidence in what God achieved through Christ's death on the cross was obeying the truth.
 - iv. Serving through love was obeying the truth.
 - b. "Christ did not persuade you to accept circumcision."
 - i. Here, leaven or yeast is used as a negative symbol; at times it was also used as a positive symbol (Matthew 13:33).
 - ii. Just a few submitting to circumcision could become a powerful influence that encouraged the whole church to view circumcision as necessary for salvation.
 - c. "I believe that you will reject this new view that you have been taught."
 - i. "Whoever disturbed you about circumcision will endure his own sentence."
 - ii. "Do you not realize that if I taught what he taught that the Jews would not be persecuting me?"

- iii. "If I preached that circumcision was necessary for non-Jews to become Christians, these people could accept the cross which is a symbol of shame."
- iv. "Instead of trying to circumcise you, I wish these people would 'cut themselves off.'"

III. **"It is very important for you to understand the true nature of the freedom you have received in Christ" (5:13-15).**

- A. "You were not given freedom in Christ to create the opportunity for you to indulge your sensual desires."
 - 1. The true nature of freedom is not the opportunity to indulge oneself.
 - 2. The true nature of freedom is the opportunity to serve.
 - 3. To gain the force of what Paul said, contrast this new right to serve God with the denied right to *serve* God demonstrated in the functions of the high priest, the priests, and those who had the "right" to perform services for God or the gods.
- B. "If you are really concerned about fulfilling the heart and intent of law, practice the foundation principle of the Jewish law: serve your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18).
 - 1. Concerns about the law generated conflict.
 - 2. Chewing on each other would lead to the destruction of each other.

IV. **Paul addressed the unending struggle that exists in every age for every Christian: the intensely personal struggle between sensual desires and spiritual focus (5:16-26).**

- A. How could a person who escaped the slavery of idolatry live his daily life with a spiritual focus that did not yield to sensual appetites?
 - 1. "Because you are free in Christ, let the Spirit (not your sensual desires) direct the way that you live your daily life."
 - 2. Function daily in the guidance of the Spirit.
 - 3. Do not function in the guidance of sensual desires.
- B. Essential realizations:
 - 1. Many of these Christians could not read.
 - 2. Books, printing, nor the New Testament existed.
 - 3. The letters that would eventually form the New Testament were in the process of being written and collected.
 - 4. Christians then received the Holy Spirit in the form and to the degree that enabled them to receive daily guidance from the Spirit.
 - 5. The Spirit did not overpower them or control them through force; they chose to allow the Spirit to guide them.
 - 6. They were to choose the guidance of the Spirit and reject the guidance of their sensual desires.
- C. They could have the guidance of the Spirit only if they stood in the freedom that Christ gave them.
 - 1. The Spirit would not lead them to the law.
 - 2. The Spirit would not place them under the control of the law.
 - 3. The Spirit would not destroy the freedom that Christ gave them.
- D. Sensual desires and the Spirit were (are) enemies of each other.

1. The struggle between the Spirit and sensual desires prevented converted idolaters from doing what they wanted to do.
2. If they wanted to follow their sensual desires, the Spirit struggled against those wishes.
3. If they wanted to follow the Spirit, their sensual desires struggled against those wishes.
4. The deeds of sensual desires were obvious:
 - a. They were sexual deeds expressed through:
 - i. Sexual immorality.
 - ii. Impurity.
 - iii. Sensuality.
 - b. They were deeds that honored other gods or spirits:
 - i. Idolatry .
 - ii. Sorcery.
 - c. They were deeds arising from ungodly emotions:
 - i. Enmity.
 - ii. Strife.
 - iii. Jealousy.
 - iv. Angry outbursts.
 - v. Envy.
 - d. They were deeds that created division:
 - i. Disputes.
 - ii. Dissensions.
 - iii. Factions (heresies).
 - e. They were deeds of indulgence:
 - i. Drunkenness.
 - ii. Carousing.
 - f. They included any deeds similar to any of these things (obviously, Paul was not making an exhaustive, all inclusive list).
 - g. "I warned you before and I warn you now: practicing these things will destroy your spiritual inheritance."
 - i. They oppose and defeat the Spirit.
 - ii. They destroy the freedom that Christ gave Christians.
5. The fruit (singular) of the Spirit is just as evident.
 - a. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
 - b. The law does not oppose any of these.
6. All a Christian man or woman needs to do to determine if he or she is controlled and guided by sensual desire or by the Spirit is to examine his or her own life.
 - a. Is your daily life characterized by the deeds produced by sensual desires?
 - b. Is your daily life characterized by the fruit of the Spirit?
7. Those who give possession of their lives to Jesus Christ crucify (deliberately execute) sensual hungers and desires that oppose the Spirit.
 - a. Crucifixion is a slow death.

- b. It is also a painful death.
- c. This is self-inflicted crucifixion.
- 8. If the Spirit gave us spiritual life, then let us follow the Spirit.
- 9. Let's forsake bragging, challenging, and envying--the things that create conflict with each other.

V. **Instructions (chapter 6).**

- A. Remember the situation that motivated Paul to write this letter and consider Paul's instructions in that context.
 - 1. The things Paul revealed through the teaching of this letter likely created the groups among the congregations in Galatia.
 - a. A group who clearly understood that Christians depend on Christ 100% and on the law 0%.
 - b. A group who understood some things Paul taught but were confused by some of Paul's statements.
 - c. A group who felt that Paul had personally attacked them and considered it their responsibility to oppose Paul and his teachings.
 - 2. It would be naive to conclude that Paul addressed this complex problem with one short letter and created perfect understanding among all the Christians in all the Galatian congregations.
- B. Instruction # 1: treatment of the Christian who failed (6:1-5).
 - 1. The situation: if you catch a person in a trespass (NAS); if a person is caught in wrongdoing (TEV); if a person is overtaken by a trespass (RSV); if a person impulsively does something wrong (NEB); if a person misbehaves (JB); if a person is trapped in a sin (NIV).
 - a. This person spiritually has failed.
 - b. Christians have discovered the failure.
 - c. Perhaps the person has not come to the awareness of failure.
 - d. The context does not seem to indicate that Paul was talking about a situation of remorse and repentance, but a situation where a Christian is trapped in his own failure.
 - 2. Note that his instruction does not stress discipline but restoration.
 - 3. The attempt of a caring, concerned Christian to restore the Christian who failed must:
 - a. Come from spiritual mindedness ("You who are spiritual...).
 - b. Come from a spirit of gentleness.
 - c. Not come from a spirit of superiority or self-righteousness.
 - d. Begin with the Christian (who wishes to restore) conducting a self-evaluation to protect himself or herself from temptation.
 - 4. If the Christian who attempts to restore does not have a Christ-like attitude that is gentle, he also has spiritually failed.
 - 5. "To you who are so impressed by the law, give priority to Christ's law: bear each others burdens (love each other as Jesus loved you--John 13:34,35).
 - a. Do not regard burden bearing as something beneath you.
 - b. To think that you are something that you are nothing is mere self-deception.
 - c. The arrogance of self-righteousness is not spiritual mindedness.

6. Consider how easy it would be for those who understood Paul to be frustrated and impatient with those who did not understand him.
 - a. The Christian who did understand needed to remember that he had held the same wrong convictions.
 - b. Earlier he was also in the state of ignorance and confusion.
 - c. Do not act superior as though you never had the problem.
 7. The scope of helpfulness that Paul emphasized was broad.
 - a. Restore those who fail.
 - b. Assist those who are burdened--help them with their burdens.
 8. Live and direct your life on the basis of self-evaluation rather than on the basis of evaluating others.
 - a. Do not find your sense of accomplishment on the basis of "I surely straightened them out and brought them under control."
 - b. Base your sense of spiritual achievement and self-respect on the foundation of how you are dealing with your own life and inadequacies.
 - c. Just as a Christian is responsible to help those who struggle, a Christian also must accept responsibility for himself.
- C. Instruction # 2: a set of directives (6:6-10):
1. Financially support those who teach you.
 2. Do not create the deceptive confidence that you can hide anything from God (you cannot knowingly choose to practice evil and gain God's blessings).
 3. In your life, you will harvest what you plant.
 - a. If everything you plant is focused on your physical existence, you will harvest a dead, decaying body.
 - b. If everything you plant is focused on Christ, you will harvest eternal life.
 4. Do not get discouraged while you doing good; if you don't get tired and quit, your harvest from the good will come.
 5. Do good at every opportunity for everyone.
 6. Be especially diligent in doing good in God's family.
- D. Conclusion (6:11-18):
1. You can see by the size of the writing that I wrote this letter myself.
 2. Realize that the Christians who are urging you to be circumcised do so to escape persecution for believing in Christ's cross.
 - a. This could be Jewish Christians.
 - b. This could be non-Jewish proselytes.
 3. Those who are urging you to be circumcised do not keep the law.
 - a. They want to receive credit for your decision to be circumcised.
 - b. They want to brag about the influence they have over you.
 - c. The only boasting that I will do is boasting about what God accomplished in the crucifixion of Jesus.
 - d. Through that act the world and I were crucified to each other.
 4. Circumcision is nothing; being a new creature in Christ is everything.

- a. May peace and mercy be upon those who follow this rule and on God's Israel (all those who receive the promise by having Abraham's faith.)
5. Let no one cause me any more trouble--my body has on it the physical marks of belonging to Jesus.
6. Christ's grace be with your spirit.