

# TTB - Galatians

## History of Galatians Interpretation

- Before we begin, I want to give you some context for how most Christian interpreters approach the book of Galatians.
- Since the second century, Christian commentators and theologians have taught a theological position known as Replacement Theology. Replacement Theology teaches that the Church is the “New Israel” and that the Church has replaced the Jewish people as God’s chosen people.
- This was first expressed by Justin Martyr, a church father in the 2nd century, when he said,
  - “For the true spiritual Israel, and descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham... are we who have been led to God through this crucified Christ.” (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 11)
- Some Christian teachers have adapted this idea to sound more appealing by saying that the Church is the fulfillment of the promises made to Israel. However, that teaching has the same impact as the “new Israel” teaching, which is the replacement of the Jewish people as the chosen people of God.
- Part and parcel with Replacement Theology is the related teaching that when Jesus died on the cross, he made the Law, the Torah, unnecessary, thereby abolishing it or fulfilling it so that we no longer need to follow its edicts. We don’t have time to dig into all of the reasons for this teaching or its implications, but it is important to understand that Jesus did not come to abolish the Torah. As a matter of fact, he says explicitly in Matthew 5:17-18:
  - “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”
- Also, that word “fulfill” means to fill up, not to do away with or complete, and in context it means that he came to give us an even deeper understanding of what the Torah, the Law, means for us.
- What does this mean? Why am I telling you all of this?
- Because most pastors and theologians teach that Galatians shows us how we are not under the authority of the Law, but that we are now under Grace. They set up a false dichotomy between the Torah and Grace, between God’s Law and God’s Kindness, and they make it seem like Paul is teaching something that he actually is not teaching at all.
- I’m going to give you a more complete, more theologically accurate understanding of Galatians than you have likely ever heard. If you have studied this book before then this lesson may also be a bit challenging. I encourage you to give me a chance to help you understand the book in a different way and be sure to collect your questions as we go. I’ll stick around as long as we need to at the end to answer questions.

## Context in Acts

- In order for us to understand Paul’s teaching in Galatians, we need to understand the context of the book, then we need to dig into what he actually says.
- So, let’s start with a short history of Paul up to this point.
  - **[MAP]** In Acts 9, we read about Paul’s radical encounter with the Messiah as he was traveling on the road to Damascus, around the year 33 CE.

- **[TIMELINE]** After this encounter, Paul stayed in Damascus for about three years, before going to Jerusalem to meet privately with Peter. That meeting was apparently just to make sure Peter had the opportunity to confirm Paul's acceptance of Jesus. Paul was a trained rabbi and a student of one of the most respected and learned rabbis of the day, Gamaliel, but he had also been actively persecuting the followers of Jesus, so it makes sense that he would want to clear the air with Peter and calm any fears the chief apostle had about him.
- **[MAP]** After that meeting, Paul went back up north to Syria and eventually ended up back to his hometown of Tarsus of Cilicia.
- After Paul had been in Tarsus for more than a decade, Barnabas asked him to come to Antioch and help him work out what to do with the surprising and unprecedented numbers of Gentiles who were coming to believe in the Messiah.
- Paul and Barnabas worked in Antioch for a few years, but the community there eventually sent the two men to Jerusalem with a collection they had taken for the *Eviyonim*, the poor Jewish believers in Jerusalem. As we will learn from our lesson tonight, Paul also wanted to visit Jerusalem so that he could talk with the leaders of the community and make sure that the teaching he had been teaching to the Gentiles in Antioch was correct.
- After that meeting, Paul and Barnabas went back to Antioch, then the Holy Spirit prophesied that they should be sent out on a journey to the West, to the central part of Anatolia, to tell people there about the Messiah.
- We will learn more about this journey in our study next week, but for now, you should know a few things about the area and the people they visited.
- The majority of their journey took them to an area known as Galatia.
- After traveling through Galatia for more than a year, Paul headed back to Antioch in Syria and reported to the believers there about all the success they had seen in Galatia.
- However, after some months, Paul heard news from the Galatian community that was disturbing to him, so he wrote a letter, an "*epistle*", to the believers of Galatia to address his concerns. This makes the Epistle to the Galatians the oldest writing we have in the New Testament except for the book of Matthew, earlier than all of Paul's other letters. It also means that the letter of Galatians was written BEFORE the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, despite what you might read in many commentaries. Commentators get the timing off because they don't understand the context of the letter and what Paul is addressing.
- So, who were the Galatians?
  - The region of Galatia gets its name from the Gauls, a people originally from modern day France and Central Europe who came down and inhabited the region around 278 BCE, during the reign of Antiochus I.
  - During the time of Paul, the cities of Galatia were inhabited by many different kinds of people. There were natives that had descended from those Gauls and the people they conquered, there were Romans, Greeks, and others who had moved to the area.
  - Among them were Jews. Some of these Jews were descendants of Jews who had been forcibly moved to this area by the Greeks in the previous two centuries, and others were likely traders or others who were looking for opportunities and for a place off the beaten path where they could be safe from interference or oppression.

## God-Fearing Gentiles

- This is where we encounter one of the more important contextual concepts of our lesson tonight, the concept of the God-Fearing Gentile.
- In the first century, Gentiles living in the Roman Empire were pagans, polytheists, followers of the Roman and Greek gods, or followers of the various gods of other native lands, who had, for the most part, been absorbed into the Roman pantheon. We covered this in our third Intertestamental Period class, but let's provide a brief overview of the Roman cultic practice.
- Everything in Roman culture revolved around religious belief and practice. There was not, as we have today, a separation between everyday civil affairs and religious practice.
- The Roman pantheon was extensive, with major deities like Jupiter (god of the sky), Venus (god of sex), Neptune (god of the sea, earthquakes, and horses), and Mars (god of war), as well as thousands of other minor deities defined for pretty much everything.
- This expansive pantheon of gods was likely due to how the Romans approached pretty much everything: through assimilation. Instead of separating out religious worship of the nations they took over, Rome practiced something called *interpretatio Romana*—they just absorbed and integrated other people's gods into their core religious practice, expanding their pantheon as needed and equating those new gods with similar gods already in the pantheon.
- Romans worshipped their gods with the common rituals of prayer, sacrifice, and divination. These practices were part of the everyday life of a Roman citizen, and a mistake made in one of the rituals was taken very seriously, even requiring a complete re-do of the practice or festival.
- There was no separation between the civil and religious authorities, either. Roman senators served as priests in the four religious main groups, and the head of the state religion was the emperor, who was the chief priest (*pontifex maximus*). In the first century, the emperor was not generally considered divine during his lifetime, but could be raised to that level after death, complete with a cultic following, sacrifices, hymns, and other honors.
- Due to the deeply embedded nature of the Roman cultic practices in everyday life, there was an intense amount of social pressure exerted on everyone in the empire to adhere to those practices. This was especially true for those who lived in large Roman cities (even those in Israel like Caesarea and the cities of the Decapolis), where these practices thrived.
- Roman religion was highly formalistic and was not prone to fanaticism. They actually considered any religious beliefs that seemed baseless, emotional, or fanatical as “superstition” (*superstitio*).
- The Jewish religion was one of the few non-Roman religions that was tolerated. Many Romans saw Jewish faith as *superstitio*, but they generally respected it because it was an old tradition, and that gave it intrinsic value. As long as the Jews kept to themselves they would be okay.
- However, despite the intense social pressure to conform to the Roman religious rites, there were many Gentiles who were drawn to the beauty of the worship of the one true God of the Jews. These Gentiles became known as “those who fear God,” or God Fearers.
- The God Fearers didn't just believe in the God of Israel, they joined with the Jewish people in their worship of God and pulled away from the Roman cultic practice.
- We met a God-Fearer in our lesson last week, actually. Cornelius, the Roman centurion, is described in Acts 10:2 as “a devout man who feared God with all his household.”

- The God-Fearers were the first Gentiles to come to faith in the Messiah. They were already part of the Jewish community, were active in the local synagogues, and understood the concept of repentance.
- In Paul's journeys through the area of Galatia he encountered many God Fearers in the synagogues, and he includes them in his preaching about the Messiah. In Acts 13:16 Paul starts his message to the members of the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch by saying, "Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen." As he continues his explanation of the life of Jesus he says, in verse 26, "Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God."

## Paul the Apostle

- Okay, with some important context in mind, we can now get into the text of Galatians.
- **[SLIDE]** 1:1 - Paul starts off by defending his authority as an Apostle. This is a common refrain from Paul. The word ἀπόστολος (*apostolos*, "apostle") means messenger or sent one, and in the New Testament it is used as a technical term for a person who was a witness of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. For the normal apostles, this meant they actually saw the Master in person after his resurrection, Paul did not have that opportunity. However, he had a radical, supernatural encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus, and Paul considered that encounter to be equivalent, or at least mostly equivalent, to those of the Apostles.
  - Paul calls himself an apostle, but he knows he does not really deserve the true title, and he understands his position in relation to the leaders of the community of faith, as we will see shortly.
  - In 1 Corinthians 15:9 he says, "For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the congregation of God."

## Paul's Gospel

- In Galatians 1:6-12, Paul talks about how the Galatians had abandoned the good news that they had heard from him. This good news, or "gospel," is something Paul takes very seriously, and something that he considers to be his own gospel, something even somewhat unique to him.
  - Throughout Paul's writings he defends what he calls "my gospel." For example, in Romans 16:25–26, Paul says: "Now to him who is able to strengthen you **according to my gospel** and the preaching of Jesus Christ, **according to the revelation of the mystery** that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and **through the prophetic writings** has been made known **to all nations**, according to the command of the eternal God, **to bring about the obedience of faith—**"
  - Notice the language here: Paul's gospel, the one he calls his own, came from a revelation.
  - Paul confirms this again in Galatians 1:11–12:
    - For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.
  - Paul also calls this gospel a "mystery," one that was lost for generations, but that could be found throughout the writings of the prophets.
  - What is the mystery? Paul explains it in Ephesians 3:1-6:
    - **[READ Ephesians 3:1–6]**
    - Note verse 6: "This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

- The good news of the salvation of the Messiah was revealed not just to the Jewish people, but also to all the nations, and it calls all the nations to obedience that comes through faithfulness.
- **[SLIDE]** That is the essence of Paul's gospel: Gentiles can, as Gentiles, be saved from the wrath of God, the Day of the Lord, that is coming, and gain access to the Kingdom of God. They do not have to become Jews.
- It may not seem like it to you today, but in the first century, this was a radical notion, the idea that the Gentiles were able to be delivered from God's wrath without needing to first become Jews. We talked before about God Fearers and how they were connected to the Jewish community, participating in Jewish life and worship.
- However, in the first century, God Fearers were generally thought to be on the path to conversion. At some point, the idea was that they should become Jewish via the legal and ritual process described in the Bible. Jewish teaching of the day generally understood conversion to be the only way for Gentiles to confirm their place in the coming kingdom of God.
- But that's not what the prophets say. Paul had a revelation about Gentile inclusion in the kingdom of God **as Gentiles**, and he saw confirmation of that in the writings of the prophets, for example:
  - **[SLIDE]** Isaiah 2:1-4; 11:10; 14:1; 49:6, 22-23; 56:6-8
  - Jeremiah 4:2; 16:19-21
  - Zechariah 2:11; 8:22-23; 14:16-19
- What does all this mean? For Paul, the good news, the gospel, was not just that *Jews* could be saved from the wrath to come, but that *Gentiles* could be, as well, and that if their salvation just led to every Gentile converting and becoming Jewish, then these prophecies about the Gentiles coming into the kingdom could not come true.

### Confirmation from the Leadership

- The second half of chapter 1 contains Paul's account of how he ensured that this radical gospel that he has been preaching was actually correct, by getting it confirmed by the leaders in Jerusalem.
  - This is important, because remember, Paul is not even what even he considers to be a "true" apostle. He understands hierarchy and authority, and he knows that if he is not teaching the right gospel then he needs to be corrected by those with the authority above him.
  - In Galatians 1:13, Paul talks about his former life persecuting the church, which he understands might lead some to believe that he is not worthy to preach the gospel at all, much less to preach a gospel of Gentile inclusion.
    - Don't read that verse as meaning "my former way of life when I used to be in Judaism." Paul was still in Judaism, and did not consider himself to have in any way abandoned the Jewish faith or practice. If you're unsure about that, take a look at how he defends himself and his credentials within Judaism in the book of Acts and elsewhere, even in Galatians.
    - He is just talking about his former life persecuting the believers.
- So, to confirm the veracity of his Gospel and to seek official sanction for his mission to the Gentiles, Paul visited Jerusalem and had a secret meeting with the three main leaders in the community of faith, who he calls the "pillars" (2:9).
  - **[TIMELINE]** Just so we are clear on the timeline, Paul says in Galatians 2:1 that this secret meeting occurred 14 years after his experience on the road to Damascus. Barnabas and Titus accompanied

him on the trip, and they brought with them a collection they had taken for the poor Jewish believers in Jerusalem.

- There was another reason for the meeting: The leadership in Jerusalem had sent some representatives to secretly look into what Paul and Barnabas had been teaching in Antioch. In 2:4 Paul calls them “false brothers,” implying that either they were biased against the work among the Gentiles or that he was worried about how they came into the community in Antioch under false pretenses. His meeting with the apostles was intended to assuage their own fears as much as it was to address the question of the validity of his message.
- Paul’s private meeting was with three men: Peter, John, and James the Righteous (the brother of Jesus).
  - He says, in 2:2, “in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain,” meaning in order to confirm that he was not preaching something that was incorrect.
  - There’s a hint in verse 3 about what the conversation covered and what specifically Paul was seeking to confirm about his gospel. He says, “But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.”
  - So, as we discussed before, the issue was circumcision, meaning the legal conversion of the Gentiles.
  - Remember, Paul’s Gospel is that the Gentiles can be part of the body of faith, part of what in Ephesians 2 he calls the “commonwealth of Israel,” without needing to become Jewish.
- In the end, Paul’s message and his mission to the Gentiles was confirmed. He says the apostles “contributed nothing to me,” which is not to say that their input had no value, but just that they agreed with his message of Gentile acceptance.
- To be clear, though, this meeting was held in secret. It was not a public meeting, and the decision of the apostles regarding Paul and his message was **not** publicly announced.
- After the meeting, Paul, Barnabas, and Titus went back to Antioch with lighter hearts and a desire to continue in the work of leading God-fearing Gentiles into the faith.

## The Dispute in Antioch

- Apparently not long after Paul arrived back in Antioch, Peter decided to make a visit there, too. He was probably coming to see exactly what was going on himself and to better understand how the mission to the Gentiles was proceeding.
- Initially, Peter was happy to be in community with the Gentiles, but after some amount of time some other men came from Jerusalem and Peter had a change of heart.
- When many pastors teach about this disagreement, they say something like, “Initially Peter was happy to eat ham and cheese sandwiches and cheeseburgers with the Gentiles, because he knew that the old kosher laws had been done away with after his vision of the sheet in Acts 10.”
  - There is so much wrong with this idea that it’s hard to know where to start, but a few points:
  - 1) Peter’s vision of the sheet in Acts 10 does **not** mean that the kosher laws were done away with, and Peter himself did not interpret the dream that way. That’s like saying that Joseph’s vision of the 7 scrawny cows eating the seven fat cows means that we need to feed cows an all-steak diet. Peter interprets the dream like this: “God has shown me that I should not call **any person** common or unclean.... Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” (Acts 10:28, 34-35)

- 2) So, Peter would not have been eating ham and cheese sandwiches. He was not going to break the commandments of the Torah just because there were Gentiles around.
- 3) Remember that these Gentiles were God Fearers. God-fearing Gentiles were part of the synagogue, they were participating in Jewish life. These meals would have taken place within the context of the communal life of the synagogue, and there's no reason to think that the Gentiles were eating non-kosher food. It actually appears that the Jews and Gentiles were all eating together, without making a distinction or a separation of some kind.
- When "certain men from James" came to Antioch, things changed. Peter and Barnabas and many other Jews started separating during the communal meals. These men from Jerusalem, other Jewish believers, apparently had not been made aware of the details about Paul's gospel of inclusion, or more likely they just disagreed with it. They believed that it was necessary for Gentiles to convert if they wanted to be part of the community of faith, and that otherwise they should be kept separate. To keep the peace, and possibly out of fear about what might happen, Peter and the other Jewish believers in Antioch decided to separate during the communal meals.
- But Paul opposed Peter's decision publicly. He said, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"
  - We are not told how Peter reacted to this public condemnation, but the ongoing conflict between those who followed the gospel of Gentile inclusion and those who did not was not going to end anytime soon.
  - At the Jerusalem Council a few years later, though, Peter defended the gospel of Gentile inclusion, so maybe Paul's argument had a beneficial effect on him.
- It was some time after this conflict that Paul and Barnabas were sent off on their first journey to the West, eventually ending up in Galatia, making many disciples among the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles in those cities. You'll learn more about that next week.

## Works of the Law

- We now move past the narrative part of the book of Galatians and into Paul's defense of his Gospel.
- We also come to the first time Paul uses a phrase that you have likely all heard, but that we absolutely need to define: **[SLIDE]** ἔργα νόμου, *erga nomu*, "works of the law."
- This is also where we are introduced to two different scholarly views of how to understand and interpret the teachings of Paul. The Historical Perspective on Paul was taught by people like Martin Luther and Thomas Aquinas and is also taught by modern teachers like John Piper. Meanwhile, the "New Perspective on Paul" was initially explained by Christian scholar E.P. Sanders in 1977 in his book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, and is taught by many other modern day scholars (Palestinian here is used in the original Roman sense, not in its modern usage.)
- The New Perspective on Paul teaches that "works of the law" in Paul's writings refers to the observance of specific commandments from the Torah that define a person as Jewish. These specific boundary markers are described in the Torah as "signs" (the Hebrew word for a sign is תִּיָּא, 'ot), as we see in Exodus 31:17 when God says regarding the Sabbath, "It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed."
- The New Perspective on Paul, therefore, limits Paul's phrase "works of the law" as referring only to the Torah-ordained practices that define Jewish status: circumcision (meaning the act of conversion by which

someone becomes Jewish), keeping the Sabbath, the finer details of the kosher food laws, and wearing *tzitzit* (tassels) and *tefillin* (a.k.a., phylacteries).

- However, according to the Historical perspective on Paul, the phrase “works of the law” means **all** of the commandments in the Torah, both the commandments that define Jewish identity and the ones that don’t specifically have that goal.
- [John Piper](#), who again teaches the Historical Perspective, provides a clear distinction between the two perspectives. He says, “Some folks... take this to mean a very limited set of works like circumcision, dietary laws, sabbath keeping—not the whole law, not the moral law, but just the ceremonial law that divided Jews and Gentiles because of their styles of life, and thus the works of the law are a problem because they separate Jew and Gentile. I don’t think that’s even close to right... I think ‘works of the law’ in Paul always refers to the works that you do in obedience to the law in general without any limitations.”
- Many pastors and teachers today have not been introduced to the New Perspective on Paul, or if they have heard about it they still continue to teach the historical perspective. Personally, I find the New Perspective much more compelling, but others don’t. I don’t know why, but I suspect it’s generally because, 1) the historical perspective is easier to preach (meaning that it’s much easier to give a 20-minute, 3-point sermon about justification when you don’t have to explain the nuances of Paul’s message in Galatians and Romans), and 2) the implications that come with understanding Paul in his original context are pretty far-reaching, and can make it uncomfortable for us as modern Protestant Christians who have thrown off the Torah and all of its potential to have a direct impact on our daily actions and obligations.
- However, in Through the Bible, we are not going to shy away from hard teaching!
- In Greek, the phrase Paul uses is ἔργα νόμου, *erga nomu*, “works of law.”
  - On an interesting historical note, until very recently there was no other Second Temple literature that used this same phrase “works of the law,” so most scholars thought that Paul just essentially made it up. However, among the Dead Sea Scrolls were found numerous fragments of a text now known as “4QMMT.” These fragments, which come from six different manuscripts, are copies of a text originally written as far back as 150 BCE. It is a letter written by a leader in the Essene Qumran community encouraging people to follow his teachings. [SLIDE] In the conclusion of the text, the author uses the phrase מעשי התורה (*ma’ase ha-Torah*), which means “works of the law.” As scholar Jörg Frey says, “4QMMT viii 12 (C27) with its mention of מעשי התורה provides the only exact Hebrew parallel to the syntagma ἔργα νόμου in Ancient Hebrew Literature.” (in *Interpreting and Living God’s Law at Qumran*, ed. by Reinhard G. Kratz, p. 210)
- When Paul uses the term “works of the law” in his writing, both here in Galatians and elsewhere, he is not talking about all of the commandments of the Torah. We know that because of the context. It is not hard to reconstruct what is going on in the congregations in Galatia where Paul had taught and had led many Jews and Gentiles to the truth about the Messiah.
- Remember the context of Paul’s trip to Jerusalem to meet with the pillars. He points out that Peter, James, and John did not require Titus, a Gentile believer, to become circumcised. The issue for Paul is the teaching that in order be justified, or legally exonerated before God, the Gentile believer has to become Jewish. “Works of the Law”, then, is Paul’s shorthand for “the practices that set someone apart as Jewish.”
- Look at how he explains this in Galatians 2:15-16, with some of my own interpretative text added in:
  - “We ourselves [meaning Paul and other Jewish believers] are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet [even] we know that a person is not [legally exonerated before God] by [the commandments of the Torah that define us as Jewish] but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we [Jews] also have believed



in Christ Jesus, in order to be [legally exonerated] by faith in Christ and not by [our Jewish status], because by [Jewish status] no one will be [legally exonerated].”

- As you read the rest of Galatians, I encourage you to put this context back into your understanding of the text.
- Paul is frustrated that after he left the congregations in Galatia some other believers, who we might call the Influencers, visited them and started teaching the Gentiles that they had to become Jewish if they wanted to truly see the kingdom of God. In Paul’s mind that was completely wrong. If Gentiles are excluded from the kingdom, then what’s the deal with the prophets always talking about Gentiles being part of the kingdom?
- Galatians 2:18 — For if I rebuild what I tore down [the exclusivity of Jewish segregation from Gentiles], I prove myself to be a transgressor.
- Galatians 2:19 — For through the law, [that is through relying on my Jewish status,] I died to the law, [that is, I realized that my Jewish status is not sufficient for justification,] so that I might live to God.
- Galatians 2:21 — I do not nullify the [kindness] of God, for if righteousness were through [being Jewish], then Christ died for no purpose.

### Chapter 3

- In chapter 3, Paul continues his objections to the teachings of the Influencers.
- In verse 2 he points out that the Gentiles in Galatia received the Holy Spirit when they were still Gentile, not as a result of becoming Jewish. This was the same thing that surprised the Jewish believers about Cornelius and his family in Acts 10 and 11, and what led them to believe that God would even give justification to Gentiles. Acts 10:45 says, “And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.”
- Paul then connects this issue of faith to the story of Abraham, a constant refrain in his teachings. He reminds the Galatians that the blessing given to Abraham is that in him “all the nations” would be blessed. If the blessing can be given to all nations, then that means Gentiles do not have to become Jews to gain the blessing.
- He expands on this more in verses 15-22. In verse 18 he says that the promise to Abraham that the Gentiles would be blessed by his seed (i.e. be justified by the Messiah) could not be annulled by the giving of the Torah later. In other words, the covenants of God build on one another; the later covenants don’t annul or abolish the precedents of the earlier covenants.
- Paul then asks a logical question: If the promise of justification comes through Abraham, then what’s the purpose of the Torah? He says here (and also expands on this more in Romans 5) that the Torah was given to define transgressions, to define what sin is and what righteousness is. This comes back to something we have talked about before:
  - **[PPT]** The word Torah in Hebrew means “to teach,” and it comes from the root word יָרָה, *yara*, which means “to throw/to cast.”
  - Why do we call it “the Law”? The Alexandrian Jews who translated the Septuagint used the Greek word *nomos*, meaning “standard, norm, or doctrine”, and later meaning “law”. They used it in the context of a custom, guidance, or system.
  - **[PPT]** Meanwhile, the word for “sin” in Hebrew is חַטָּאת, *chatat*, which literally means “to miss the target.”

- So, we could say that the Torah is what we throw ourselves towards, the target we shoot for, and that missing the target is how we define sin.
- In the last part of chapter 3, Paul continues to describe how the Torah works and what it was always intended to do.
- He uses a familiar writing style here that you will see many more times, especially in Romans, where he quotes his opponents, then debunks them. He says, “If the Torah defines sin, doesn’t that mean it’s full of sin, so it must be contrary to the promises of God?” It’s really a silly argument, since the same God who gave the promises to Abraham also gave the Torah, and both are good gifts.
- In verse 22, many Bible translations use the word “imprisoned,” which is really not a good translation of the Greek word used there. The word really should be “enclosed,” so as to say that “the Torah enclosed everything under the definition of sin so that the promise of exoneration could come through the seed of Abraham, Jesus the Messiah.”
- Paul then uses a metaphor that would have been well recognized by the Hellenized members of the Galatian community, that of a pedagogue.
  - **[SLIDE]** The word παιδαγωγός, *paidagōgos*, in Greek is best translated as a “child conductor” or “guardian.”
  - You might hear someone translate it as “tutor” or “teacher” sometimes, but that’s not the historical role of a pedagogue.
  - The pedagogue was not the tutor himself, he was responsible for guarding the child, getting the child from his home **to** his tutor, leading and protecting him on his journey.
- Paul says, “Before the Messiah came, we Jews were protected by the Torah, kept inside for the coming faith that would be revealed. So, then, the Torah was our guardian until the Messiah came, in order that we could be exonerated by our faith in him. Now that we have come to believe in the Messiah, we don’t need to be guided on the path to him. Even you Gentiles have found him, so you don’t need to convert in order to have faith.”
- Then he goes on to say that we are all saved from the wrath to come in the same way, regardless of whether we are Jewish or Gentile, slave or free, male or female.
  - This verse does not mean that there is no distinction between these categories **at all**. I think we can all agree that there are still differences between men and women. Paul is just saying that *when it comes to justification*, to being exonerated as a result of our faith in Jesus, there is no difference between us. You could say that all of us put on our justification one leg at a time.

## Chapter 4

- In the last verse in chapter 3, Paul connects what he is saying again to Abraham and how we who have believed in the Messiah are able to inherit the promise of redemption that Abraham was given.
- He then takes that metaphor on a journey through time.
  - Notice the continued use of “we” Jews and “you” Gentiles in this section. Paul is trying to show that the Jews and the Gentiles both need faith in the Messiah for justification, because, again, there are Gentiles in the Galatian community who are being told that they need to become Jewish to inherit the promise of justification.
- Paul says that a child cannot inherit the promise. Instead, he has to be protected by the guardian until the proper time. It’s almost as if the child is a slave—not to the pedagogue, the guardian, but to their own

desires and the whims of childhood fancy. The guardian's job is to protect the child, but that does not mean it's an easy job.

- The Jewish people were pulled astray all the time by what Paul refers to in verse 3 as the “elementary principles of the world.” This is what Moses prophesied would happen in Deuteronomy 28:64, “And the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known.”
- Then, in verse 4, the redemption comes, the teacher comes—faith comes.
  - In the fullness of time, God sent his son, born a human being, born under the law [born a Jew], to redeem those under the law [the Jewish people], so that we [the Jews] might receive the adoption as sons.
  - Note the language here. Again, he's talking about the Jewish people.
- He continues in verse 6, turning to the Gentiles, and saying, “And because you [Gentiles] are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into [all] our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you [Gentiles] are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”
- With his focus still on the Gentiles, he tells them a similar story about their own beginnings under those “elementary principles of the world” and their own path to redemption through the Messiah.
- “Formerly, when you [Gentiles] did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods [i.e. you served idols, too]. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world [i.e. idolatry and its related practices], whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.”
  - The “days and months and seasons and years” Paul refers to here cannot be related to the observances of the Torah's holidays or the Sabbath. That would not make sense for Paul, who personally observed these Biblically mandated holy days and even made an effort to visit Jerusalem as often as possible for the Biblical festivals.
  - The issue here is Gentiles who are not only saying that they need to become Jewish in order to be justified, but, as we will see later, once they make that transition they start going back to their old idolatrous ways. They are going back to the Roman cultic practices, buckling under the social pressure of their friends, family, and neighbors.
  - Because they thought the power of salvation was in the physical act of conversion, they figured it didn't matter what they did any more, so taking a trip to the local pagan temple wasn't a problem.
- Paul continues expressing his concerns for the Gentiles in Galatia, and calls out the Influencers, who he says (in v. 17) are trying to shut out the Gentiles and make people in the community think that they, the influencers, are important.
- Starting in Galatians 4:21, Paul uses another metaphor to try to help the Gentiles in Galatia understand that justification does not require Jewish status. Building on the conversation about Abraham, Paul brings up the story of Ishmael and Isaac.
- In this metaphor, Paul is contrasting two types of Gentiles by connecting them to the two sons of Abraham:
  - 1) Ishmael, who Abraham conceived because of his own fleshly desire to fulfill the promise God gave him, is connected to the Gentiles who convert and try to gain the promise of justification by the flesh—literally by circumcision.

- 2) Isaac, the true son of the promise, who was born as a result of Abraham's faith, is connected with anyone who has faith in God for justification and does not depend on own their Jewish or Gentile status. As Paul says in verse 31, "So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman."

## Chapter 5

- Paul starts off his next section by telling the Gentiles not to allow themselves to submit **again** to a yoke of slavery. What does he mean? Is he talking about the Gentiles being enslaved under the Law?
- No! Go back to Galatians 4:9. The Galatians used to be enslaved to their own evil inclinations, to the "worthless elementary principles of the world."
- The Gentiles were never under the Torah before, so how could they submit "again" to the Torah?
- The slavery Paul is talking about here is the idea that you can convert to attain a status that's already yours. That's a pagan idea, not a Biblical idea.
- In verse 2, he warns the Gentiles who are wanting to convert that if they do so they will lose their focus on the redemption of the Messiah.
- Then he says in verse 3, "I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law." **Notice this!** Paul confirms that anyone who converts and becomes Jewish then **becomes obligated to follow the commandments in the Torah that apply to Jews**. If this is true for Gentiles who convert, it is even more true that Jews by birth are **also** obligated to all the commandments.
  - In my opinion, this is one of the most important statements Paul makes. Paul is not, in any of his letters or teachings, saying that the Torah is no longer in force or that Jews are no longer obligated to keep the Torah. On the contrary, he says the complete opposite!
- He then again affirms that the whole issue of justification, being exonerated legally before God, has nothing to do with Jewish status. He even goes so far as to say that someone who converts with the intention of gaining Jewish status so that they can be justified has lost what they were actually seeking, that they have fallen outside the kindness, the grace, of God.
- Then he expresses his frustration once again against the influencers, those people who keep telling the Gentiles that justification comes through Jewish status. Apparently, some of these people were former Gentiles themselves, and maybe they were trying to justify their own conversions by telling their friends that the only way forward was to convert.
- Paul's frustration really comes through in verse 12, when he says, "I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!" That's a bit of sarcasm (he really would not want them to do that), but it's clear that he's frustrated.
- In the rest of chapter 5, Paul turns to the practical. If the Gentiles are not supposed to convert and become Jewish, then what do they do? Where do they start?
  - Being Gentile comes with more freedom than the Jews have. That's undeniable. Jews are obligated to more commandments than Gentiles, and some of those covenantal obligations place a daily burden on Jews.
  - But that freedom a Gentile has is a double-edged sword. It is easy for us to think that we don't have anything at all that we need to do, anything that we are obligated to, but that's completely wrong.
  - Remember, Paul is writing letter to the Galatians this **before** the ruling of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, so there is no official standard yet about legal (halachic) obligations on Gentile disciples.

He needs to give these Gentiles in Galatia some instructions on how to live their lives and help them divert their attention away from trying to gain salvation through conversion.

- So, what does he do? He teaches them the Torah!
- Paul first warns Gentile believers first not to give into their fleshly desires but to live by the Spirit. He's not setting up a distinction between the Spirit and the Torah, he's distinguishing between the Spirit and the flesh.
- In verse 18, he adds, "And you are led by the Spirit, even if you are not Jewish," meaning that even Gentiles have obligations to keep since the Spirit of God is leading us.
- Then he details the differences between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit, reminding the Galatians that people who give into the flesh will not inherit the Kingdom of God, which is to say, they will not withstand the coming day of the Lord and the final judgement. That's what the Gentiles who are trying to convert really want, so Paul is showing them the way to achieve it.

## Chapter 6

- The first part of chapter 6 contains some general instructions.
- **[READ Verse 1]** What is a transgression? If Paul thought the Torah was of no value or not obligatory, then how could he tell the Galatians to deal with transgressions?
- **[READ Verse 2]** What is the "law of Christ"? Look at the context: How we should deal with our neighbors. When Jesus was asked about following the commandments in the Torah, he said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37–40) **That** is the "law of Christ": Bear one another's burdens, love your neighbors. A better translation of this would be the "standard of Christ," because remember the word *nomos* in Greek means "standard".
- Verses 3-5 talk about how we have to be careful not to deceive ourselves into thinking that we are more important or better than we really are. Paul says we need to test the work that we do, because eventually, when we stand in the court of judgement at the end of days, we will have to bear our own load.
- **[READ Verse 6]** When someone teaches us the Word of God, it's important to share the benefits we gain from that teaching back with the teacher.
  - I would personally love to hear all the wonderful things the God has done in your life as a result of the Through the Bible class. Share with me!
- Verses 7-10 take a principle of Jesus, the principle that "we reap what we sow," and applies that to the struggle between our flesh and the Spirit. Sow into the Spirit, so that you can reap the rewards in the Kingdom and the World to Come.
- Paul finishes his letter with a personal appeal to the Galatians, written with his own hand. Apparently, he had large handwriting, either as a result of a physical ailment, or maybe just in comparison to the handwriting of his scribe.
  - He does a similar "writing the final words myself" thing at the end of Colossians and at the end of 1 Corinthians.
- In his final words, he calls out those among the Influencers who themselves converted, became Jewish. He says that they only did it so that they could avoid the persecution that comes from being a Gentile who follows the Jewish Messiah.

- Remember, the Roman social system did not allow for non-Jews to avoid their social and religious responsibilities to the Roman religious cult just because they happened to go to synagogue. It was hard for non-Jews to serve the God of Israel. These Influencers converted so that they could avoid difficult conversations with, or persecution from, their pagan neighbors.
- But then Paul says something even more scandalous. These same men who had become Jewish and were trying to convince others to do the same were not even following the Torah themselves!
  - This is what he was talking about a little bit in chapter 4, and he dealt with a similar problem in Romans 2:17–25 **[READ Romans 2:17–25]**
  - Being Jewish is of no value if you don't follow the Torah.
  - But these Influencers are not following the Torah, they just want Gentiles to become Jewish so they can boast about having the right theology.
- Paul then says that the only thing that matters is that we, whether we are Jewish or Gentile, become a new creation through the Messiah's grace. That's it.
- In Verse 16, Paul says, "And as for all who walk by this rule [the rule that we should focus on being a new creation], peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God."
  - This phrase "the Israel of God" is hotly debated among scholars. Some says that he is equating the Church with Israel, that he is saying that the church is the "new Israel." As we talked about at the beginning of this lecture, that is an unbiblical teaching known as Replacement Theology.
  - Paul has been spending this entire letter talking about the distinction between the Jewish people and the Gentiles, affirming the value of being Jewish while also clearly stating that that Jewish status has nothing to do with justification.
  - Why would he then, in the last few words of his letter, say something that undermines the importance of the Jewish people as the chosen people of God?
  - Michael J. Vlach does a great job of debunking this idea in his book, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?*, which I highly recommend everyone read.
  - He says that "the Israel of God" in this verse is a reference to Jewish believers, the Messianic Jews, as we might call them, who Paul is contrasting with the Influencers, those who are trying to get Gentiles to become Jewish for the purposes of justification. Paul affirms the Jewish believers while rejecting the Influencers.
  - I think that distinction makes much more sense, especially in light of the rest of scripture.
- I love how Paul ends his letter. "From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus." This looks like a sly reference to the many times we read about in Acts 13 and 14 when Paul and Barnabas were driven out of Galatian cities, beaten, and even stoned. In other words, he's saying, "I already suffered enough when I was with you guys, so get your act straight and stop causing me trouble."