



Imad Awde

The
LAW Everlasting
and the *Gospel*

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LAW
and the
Everlasting
Gospel

Revelation 14:12

Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.

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*All verses quoted are from the
King James Version unless otherwise stated.
All emphasis supplied.*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I entered the meeting hall that night expecting the usual result. He would ask the same questions and I would give the standard answers. But this time it was different. Though he asked the usual questions and I gave the standard answers, for some reason, my answer did not make much sense to me.

It was June 2012. I had just finished my message on the law for an outreach program in Tennessee, United States, when a nice gentleman by the name of John raised his hand and requested a private audience with me. After a short talk, he asked for us to arrange a Bible study about the law, and we gladly agreed. Instead of it being a private study, the entire congregation decided to stay and listen.

He began by saying that the Ten Commandments, especially the Sabbath, were no longer applicable for God's people today. One of the verses he used to prove his point was Galatians 3: 24, 25, where it says we are no longer *under the law*. Of course this was not the first time the question had come to me, and hence I gave the usual answer.

I explained the text to mean that we are no longer under the *condemnation* of the law, because we have received Christ. We have been forgiven of our sins and hence no longer condemned. But we still are required to keep the law just like a forgiven criminal is still required to abide by the law.

My explanation did not convince him. It wasn't the first time I had shared this with a Sunday keeper and seen it rejected, but this time it

was different. For some reason, I felt my explanation of the text was not accurate.

As we walked out of the hall that night, I shared my concerns with my traveling companion. My words were as follows:

“I don’t think our explanation of the text is correct! If “*under the law*” means ‘under the condemnation of the law’, how are we to understand Galatians 4:4 where it says, ‘*But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law*’? Are we saying Jesus was born condemned by the law? Furthermore, how are we to understand the text in Galatians 4:21 which says, ‘*Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law*’? Are we saying that the Christians in Galatia desired to be condemned by the law? Something doesn’t add up!”

That evening I realized that my understanding of the text was not accurate, but I also knew that using Paul’s writings to nullify or cancel the law of God was not correct either. I knew what was wrong, but I did not know the correct interpretation. As I walked out of the hall, I was determined to study Paul’s letter to the Galatians to better understand what the apostle meant.

This book contains my revised understanding of Galatians, and how it affects the *position* of the law in my relationship with God. Let me make it clear from the beginning—I do not believe God’s law (Ten Commandments) has been abolished or nullified. Neither do I believe that Christians today are free to break any of these laws. But what I have come to believe, and will expand upon throughout the book, is that God’s people are not to be controlled by the law. For many years I lived under the law, thinking I was living under grace. But a clearer understanding of the letter to the Galatian church has internally set me free in a way that is hard to explain.

It has strengthened my relationship with Christ and proved to me that Christ’s yoke is truly easy. This was not achieved by nullifying the law of God, rather it was achieved by shifting my focus from the law to Christ.

I truly hope and pray this book will be a blessing to you, dear Reader.

CHAPTER 2

THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL

When Jesus returned to heaven after His resurrection, He left His disciples with the Great Commission to “*preach the gospel to every creature*” (Mark 16:15). Unfortunately, over the centuries, there has developed a great misunderstanding regarding the content of the gospel and many have preached “*another gospel*” (Galatians 1:6) that can never save or impart the peace of which Jesus spoke about (John 14:27).

This false gospel wears many faces, but unavoidably, at its heart is a false hope of salvation. Whether this gospel manifests itself in legalistic terms or in liberal terms, if Christ is not at its center, and if it does not change the heart and life of the believer, it is not worth having or teaching.

So what is “*the*” gospel that is to be preached to every creature?

Out of all the texts in the Bible, in my personal opinion, the following text sums up the gospel in seven words:

“And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, **In thee shall all nations be blessed.**” *Galatians 3:8*

Of course what Paul meant by quoting Genesis 12:3 is that in Abraham’s Seed (or in Christ) shall all nations be blessed. This becomes rather obvious as Paul continues his argument especially in verse sixteen of Galatians three. (For further study please refer to the book entitled “*The Seed & The Everlasting Gospel*” where I expound on this understanding.)

The Everlasting Gospel which is to be preached to every nation, kindred, tongue and people (Revelation 14:6; Mark 16:15) is the good news that in Christ, in the promised Seed, all is blessed. Every spiritual blessing is found in one Person, Jesus Christ, the righteous. By receiving Christ, one receives all heaven offers (Romans 8:32, John 1:12).

Jesus was once asked a question by the people who followed Him, “*What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?*” (John 6:28) The same question is asked today by many Christians, ‘What must we do to be saved? What does God want us to do? What does He require from me?’

People give various answers. Some point the questioner to the law; others point him to a particular church; and still others point him to human traditions.

However, in spite of all the false gospels, the answer of Jesus pierces all falsehood. “*This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent*” (John 6:29). To fulfill God’s will in your life is to believe on His Son, in whom we are complete (Colossians 2:10).

If correctly understood, the gospel is a promise of life and salvation to all who accept His Son. (John 6:40) Jesus’ words in the following verse cannot be mistaken: “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life*” (John 6:47). God promised to save man and give him eternal life if he is found in Christ.

Reading such words bring unspeakable joy and peace to the believer. Yet God’s love shines even more when this promise is compared with the way Adam and Eve were created.

When God created Adam, He made him to be one with Himself. The Bible tells us Adam was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26, 27); not only his physical image, but spiritually as well. He was made pure, upright and righteous (Ecclesiastes 7:29). He was clothed and crowned with glory and honor (Psalms 8:5). He was given dominion over everything upon the earth (Genesis 1:28). He was also given a mind with such power and ability as to penetrate creation accurately so as to describe every creature exactly as God would have described it (Genesis 2:18-20).

Think about it! What did Adam have to do to earn life, righteousness, and dominion over the world? Nothing! He was created already a possessor of righteousness and eternal life. He did not do anything to earn them. He was created righteous before any law was spoken to him, and even before he knew or had obeyed any law. By this we can see that Adam was created with a righteousness that is without the law.

This begs the question: on what basis did God give all these blessings to Adam? The answer is found in the following verses:

“For by him [Jesus] were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: he is before all things, and by him all things consist.” *Colossians 1:16, 17*

Notice how it says “*all things were created ... for him*” and “*by him all things consist.*” This emphasizes the fact that Jesus is the One by whom and for whom everything was created; and it also tells us that all creatures consist or find their existence, sustenance, life and blessings in Him.

Notice what else we read about Him:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.” *John 1:1-4*

The Word—Jesus—was with God from the beginning, before creation took place. In this context we are told “*in Him was life and the life was the light of men*”. In other words life, eternal life (1 John 1:1-3), was found in the Word, in Christ, before the fall, from the very beginning.

All created beings receive their life by receiving the One in whom is life. The Scriptures call Him “*the Author of life.*” (Acts 3:15, marginal reading)

In other words, the principle by which creation occurred was that in the Word all created things found life and were blessed. If we simply replace the ‘Word’ with ‘Christ’, we will have the following principle: *In Christ all creation is blessed.*

With this insight, if we compare the gospel by which man is to be saved, and the creation account by which man received life and righteousness, we will find them to be identical:

- The promise under which man was created is: *In Christ all creation is blessed.*
- The promise under which man will be re-created or saved is: *In Christ shall all nations be blessed.* (Adapted from Galatians 3:8. See also Ephesians 4:24.)

With this insight we can better understand why the gospel is called “*the everlasting gospel*” (Revelation 14:6). It is everlasting because it has existed as long as God has existed. Everything God did was under the promise that life and righteousness could be found in His Son.

Hence the New Covenant, which is none other than the gospel we have looked at, is a declaration that nothing will change God’s “*eternal purpose*” for man (Ephesians 3:11). It is a declaration that though man departed from God through sin and lost the blessings he had in Christ, God’s promise for him did not change.

God’s promise is still the same today as it was from the beginning of man’s existence; *he who has Christ, has life.* The same promise freely given to Adam at creation is still extended today, and freely given to sinners who believe.

“And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” *1 John 5:11-13*

CHAPTER 3

THE VALIDITY OF THE LAW

Upon reading and understanding the beauty and simplicity of the gospel, some have concluded that since salvation and eternal life are only based on receiving Christ and believing on Him, then the law, which revealed God's standard, is no longer valid among Christians. Some verses have been quoted to show that as Christians, we are no longer required to keep the law, and hence the law has been done away with.

If you read the introduction to this book, you would have realized that I was challenged by one of these verses, and this led me to a deeper study of the letter to the Galatian church. We will look at that particular verse later in the book, but for now, I want to utilize this chapter to establish from God's Word whether the law has been done away with or not. It is important to understand that this chapter is not exploring our relationship to the law; it is only exploring the validity of the law in Christendom. Our relationship to the law will be explored later.

Lest the purpose of this chapter be misunderstood, let me reecho the words of Paul as found in Ephesians 2:8, 9. Salvation is by grace alone through faith. It is not of work. No obedience to any law could impart perfection or life (Hebrews 7:19, Galatians 3:21). We receive saving grace from God when by faith we accept Jesus as our personal Savior and Lord.

However, if we read the very next verse (Ephesians 2:10), we will discover that this saving grace always results in conformity to the will

of God as expressed in His law. Paul wrote that Christ died so that “*the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit*” (Romans 8:4). If the fruit of our renewed life is out of harmony with the law of God, we cannot claim that its righteousness is fulfilled in us.

Legalism is not obedience to God’s law; rather it is the attempt to obey His law without first receiving the life and righteousness of Christ. It is the attempt to be obedient to the law, because of the law, rather than because Christ imparts a new nature. Upon receiving Christ, one receives “*power*” (John 1:12) to become, and to live like a son of God. If the spirit/life of Christ is within you (Galatians 4:6, 2 Corinthians 4:10, 11), you cannot but manifest the fruits of the spirit (1 John 3:9, 10, Romans 6: 6, 7). If you have an indwelling Righteousness, you cannot but manifest that righteousness.

Paul was very clear in his writing that the law of God, especially the Ten Commandments were not abolished or made void through the cross of Christ. Here are some verses that state this very point:

“Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.”
Romans 3:30, 31

Faith was not given to abolish the law. On the contrary, through faith in Christ we establish the law and fulfill its requirements and righteousness in our lives (Romans 8:4). Notice what else Paul said “*What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet*” (Romans 7:7).

The law is the written standard (although not the means) of righteousness because it points out our sin. Paul saw the law as *holy, just, good, and spiritual* (Romans 7:12, 14). There is no suggestion that he rejected the law because it was nailed to the Cross. As a matter of fact he said “*Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.*” 1 Corinthians 7:19

James, the brother of Jesus, agrees with Paul by teaching that disobedience to any one of the Ten Commandments is equivalent to breaking all of them. He said *“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.”* James 2:10-12.

As you can read, you will see that James considers God’s Law a law of liberty, not a burden. This is exactly what the apostle John wrote, *“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous”* 1 John 5:3. Love for God will result in “good works” (Ephesians 2:10). It will manifest itself in obedience to His will. Jesus said *“If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments.”* John 14:15 (Revised Version) He simply meant that your love for me will naturally lead you to live a life in harmony with My commandments. Later on Jesus pronounced a blessing upon those who do God’s commandments:

“Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.” Revelation 22:14

It is rather obvious that neither Jesus nor His apostles intended to do away with God’s law. The Word of God testifies clearly to this fact. However, based on this truth, some have concluded that since the law is still as valid as it was before the cross, Christians are to relate to it in the same way the Jews related to it before the cross.

Is this so? Our answer to this most interesting question will take us through the rest of this book.

CHAPTER 4

THE FOUR DISPENSATIONS

One thing I learnt through my recent study of the Christian's relationship to the law is the different dispensations under which God dealt with His people. Not until I recognized this difference was I able to correctly understand the place of the law in Christianity.

The word "dispensation" is mentioned four times in the Bible (1 Corinthians 9:17; Ephesians 1:10, 3:2; Colossians 1:25). It comes from the Greek word οἰκονομία (oikonomia) which means:

- 1) The management of a household or of household affairs:
 - a) specifically, the management, oversight, administration, of other's property
 - b) the office of a manager or overseer, stewardship
 - c) administration, dispensation

God in His wisdom used different administrations/dispensations to govern, manage and relate to His people. Our God does not change, but the way He relates to changing humanity varies from one dispensation to another. This does not mean that God saves people in different ways, no! Salvation has always been and will always be by grace through faith. (Ephesians 2:8, Habakkuk 2:4)

However, though the method of salvation has been the same, the content of faith and the outward manifestation has changed from age

to age. With every successive dispensation God's revelation of His purposes progressed or changed depending on the condition of His people.

For example, there was a time when marrying your own blood sister was lawful in God's eyes. Such a conclusion can be supported by asking the following question: "Who did Cain marry when his family were the only human beings on earth?" It is rather obvious that Cain married his own sister. Abraham also married his half-sister. (Genesis 20:12)

When God instituted the Mosaic covenant, He gave specific instructions that a man is not permitted to uncover the nakedness of his sister or half-sister (Leviticus 18:9). So, was Cain's marriage and Abraham's marriage a sin in God's eyes? Absolutely not. Cain and Abraham were living in an earlier dispensation under which such prohibitions did not apply. Understanding the dispensations or administrations, clears up many confusions that can be created by missing this vital point.

Another example is capital punishment for murder. When Cain killed his brother, God did not demand His death; rather He put a curse upon him and sent him away (Genesis 4:10-12). Furthermore, God put a mark on Cain so no man would kill him (Genesis 4:13-16). Yet after the flood, God's reaction towards the murder changed by proclaiming that, "*Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed*" (Genesis 9:6). This could be understood as capital punishment, or a consequence the murderer will eventually face down the track. However, in the Mosaic Covenant or dispensation, the law of God demanded the death of the murderer (Exodus 21:12).

It is rather obvious that God 'managed His household' differently under different dispensations. He met His people where they were and spoke to them or dealt with them in a way they would understand.

The Bible presents us with at least four different dispensations in which God deals or manages His household in different ways:

1. Patriarchal Age: spans from Creation till Sinai
2. Mosaic Age: spans from Sinai till the Cross
3. Christian Age: spans from the Cross till the Second Coming
4. Celestial Age: spans from the Second Coming onward

Not much has been revealed about the first and last age. The Scriptures mainly focus on the Mosaic and the Christian Age. However, enough has been revealed to show the difference between these ages.

For example, during the Patriarchal age there was no tabernacle and no written Scriptures. The firstborn was considered the priest of the family who offered sacrifices on the family altar, built where they resided.

However, this changed when the second dispensation began. On Mount Sinai God gave instructions to build a tabernacle/sanctuary. He told Moses to record the law in a book, and later Moses wrote the first five books known as the books of Moses (Pentateuch). God replaced the priesthood of the firstborn with the Levitical priesthood, and the family altar with the altar build in the court yard of His sanctuary. With this change, a new religion began. It was still the same God, and the same way of salvation (by grace through faith), but the content of faith and the way it was outwardly manifested changed.

God introduced instructions that did not exist before, such as:

- Ceremonial rituals of cleansing or purification after touching the dead, childbirth, menstruation, running issues and mould in houses.
- Judgments such as the capital punishment for:
 - Adultery (Leviticus 20:10-12)
 - Murder (Exodus 21:12)
 - Bestiality (Both man and animal die) (Leviticus 20:15,16)
 - Striking your parents (Exodus 21:15)
 - Worshiping idols (Exodus 22:20, Leviticus 20:1-5, Deuteronomy 17:2-7)
 - Blasphemy (Leviticus 24:14-16, 23)
 - Breaking the Sabbath (Exodus 31:14, Numbers 15:32-36)
 - Cursing your parents (Exodus 21:17, Leviticus 20:9)
- Laws about incest or marriage between certain close relatives (Leviticus 18:8-18)

- Seven feasts or appointed times of worship (Leviticus 23)
- On three of the seven feasts all Jewish males were to travel to Jerusalem to worship God (Exodus 23:15-17)
- The way a priest and the High priest were to be dressed
- And many other needed instructions.

Upon reading this, some might object saying that Abraham, who lived prior to the Mosaic Dispensation, kept God's laws, commandments and statutes. This, of course, is supported by verses like:

"Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws." *Genesis 26:5*

The above verse is used to support the belief that on Mount Sinai nothing new was introduced. All the laws, commandments and statutes that were given on Mount Sinai existed before and were observed by the faithful.

This conclusion is reached by overlooking the fact that Genesis was compiled or written by Moses during the Mosaic dispensation. It was written for Hebrews, by Hebrews, with a Hebrew's mindset and way of writing, which is somehow similar to the Jewish mindset and way of writing. That is why the text includes most of the Hebrew words that refer to divine laws or commandments.

The point to be understood from this text is that Abraham was obedient to God. He was faithful to God's revelations and requirements whether they came directly from God or handed down from past generations. He obeyed all what was revealed to him.

Abraham could not have obeyed what he did not know. For example, during the Mosaic dispensation, God gave the following statute:

"The nakedness of thy sister, the daughter of thy father, or daughter of thy mother, whether she be born at home, or born abroad, even their nakedness thou shalt not uncover." *Leviticus 18:9*

If all the statutes revealed on Mount Sinai existed at the days of Abraham, and he, as the Bible says, “*kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws*” then the logical conclusion is to believe that Abraham would have obeyed this statute. However, the truth of the matter is that Abraham did not know about this statutes because he married his half-sister, the daughter of his father (Genesis 20:12). Either this statute was not revealed before Mount Sinai, or Abraham did not obey the statutes. I believe that the first option is the correct one.

Another example is ‘circumcision’. As the reader would know, circumcision is a statute found in the Mosaic Covenant which could be traced back to the days of Abraham (Genesis 17:10). Yes, this statute existed prior to Mount Sinai, but the fact of the matter is that it did not exist prior to Abraham’s day. Hence, one could not believe that the statutes, commandments and laws existed all along.

Another statute that could be quoted in here is the one mentioned earlier regarding the Jewish males traveling to Jerusalem to worship God on three of the seven feasts (Exodus 23:15-17). This of course could not have existed before Mount Sinai because the temple at Jerusalem was not in existence.

As a matter of fact, as far as the Bible reveals, all the statutes pertaining to the feasts did not exist prior to the exodus from Egypt. There is no Biblical evidence whatsoever that Abraham, or any one before him, kept any feast of the seven mentioned in Leviticus 23. The feasts were introduced during the Mosaic Dispensation as a teaching tool about the gospel and the Messiah’s work. A Jewish year, which entailed the seven feasts, was a miniature or a sample of the plan of salvation which began on the cross and will culminate with the 1000 years in heaven.

The reason the Bible says that Abraham kept God’s statutes, laws, and commandments is only to emphasize the fact that Abraham was obedient to God in all the details He gave him in that dispensation, as He would expect the Jews later on to also be obedient to all the details He would give them in their dispensation. So it was thus said of Abraham, making him an example for later generations. It was not intended for us to take it very literally. This is the Hebrew style of

writing, and later on, the Jews adopted the same style. For example, talking about “*the last days*” (Micah 4:1) we are told:

“But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it.” *Micah 4:4*

The prophet Zechariah used similar language:

“In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree.” *Zechariah 3:10*

This was the way a Jew could express the greatest tranquility, security, and enjoyment of property; when persons need not keep within their walled towns and cities, and lock themselves up in their houses, but may sit down in their gardens, fields, and vineyards, and enjoy the fruit thereof (1 Kings 4:25). Hence, when expressing the peace, security and happiness of the last day, the prophets, who were Jews, used the Jewish style of writing to which their Jewish readers could relate.

The point is that at Sinai a new religion began: the Jewish religion. This religion or way of worshipping God replaced the patriarchal way. The Levitical priesthood replaced the patriarchal priesthood. The Levitical altar at the sanctuary replaced the family altar at home. Going through the patriarchal priesthood was no longer acceptable with God.

Yet this way of worship was not to last for ever. On Calvary, a new religion began: the Christian religion. The earthly sanctuary was replaced with the heavenly. The Levitical priesthood was replaced with the heavenly Melchisedec ministry of Christ. The Levitical altar was replaced with Calvary. And the sacrificial system was replaced with the Lamb of God.

Many of the instructions introduced on Sinai were no longer to be literally carried out. Such instructions were:

- Ceremonial rituals of cleansing or purification after touching the dead, childbirth, menstruation, running issues, mould in houses and clothing.
- The judgments (stoning the adulterer ... etc).

- The Jewish people traveling to Jerusalem three times a year (John 4:21-24).
- And many other instructions.

On Calvary, the third dispensation began which is to last until the Second Coming. Calvary was the beginning of the Christian religion in the same way as Sinai was the beginning of the Jewish religion. Each of these religions replaced the system preceding it, and each was a greater improvement over the previous system.

In one way, the first three systems (patriarchal, Mosaic and Christian systems) are the same. God's plan of salvation remained the same through all of them, with a deeper revelation of this plan at every stage. However, the outward forms of patriarchalism and Judaism changed respectively at Sinai and Calvary. From each of these changes there developed a new culture and religion.

The mistake some Christians make is allowing the forms of the previous religion to dominate their present religion. The apostle Paul spoke strongly against this mistake in his letter to the Galatians. (This will be examined later in the book.)

Some have gone to the extreme by saying that Christians are not to have anything in common with the Jewish religion. But this is not rightly dividing the word of God. Some forms that Christians practice are carried through from Eden to Eden. Just because these religious forms existed in the first and second dispensations does not mean that Christians are not to practice them. The Sabbath, for example, existed from the very beginning before there was a need for any priest or dispensation. It existed before sin (Genesis 2: 2, 3). To insist that Christians are not to have anything in common with Judaism or patriarchalism is neither logical nor biblical.

However, some Christians have gone to the other extreme by holding onto Jewish religious forms which were given on Mount Sinai and meant to be literally observed only during the second dispensation. Some of these forms are wearing the tassels (Numbers 15:38), growing the beards (Leviticus 19:27), and so on.

Going back to our main point, the Christian dispensation replaced the Mosaic dispensation, which in turn replaced the Patriarchal dis-

dispensation. Nevertheless, the Christian religion is not to last forever. It too, will come to an end. One day, when Jesus comes back and takes us to our new home, there will be no need for a priest. The existence of priesthood is closely related to sin because a priest is needed to deal with sin. However, in heaven there will be no sin, hence no need for a priesthood. That is why we are told Christ will come as a King, not a priest (Revelation 19:16).

Another difference is faith. The Christian religion is a religion of faith. Everything about it is based on faith. By faith we believe God exists, that He created all things by His word, that Christ died and rose again, that our sins are forgiven when we confess...etc. Faith is the center of our Christian religion. It is the hand that grasps the reality we hope for. Yet the Bible tells us *“now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known”* (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Why would we need faith in heaven? To believe in God? To believe Christ rose from the dead or that we will be forgiven and saved? Or that Christ will come back and take us to a better place?

Faith *“is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”* (Hebrews 11:1). Paul also tells us *“For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?”* (Romans 8:24).

Why would we need hope or faith to believe in the reality we will be living in? I do not think we will need faith in the same way as Christians need it today. So that which plays a major role in Christianity, will no longer be needed in the same way it was needed during the Christian dispensation.

It is rather obvious that God dealt differently with His people in different ages. Each dispensation was the best for its time, during which it adequately served its purpose. But when God saw the need for a change, He introduced a new system of worship which began a new culture and religion. As we continue our study throughout this book, it is very important to keep in mind the things we discovered in this chapter. There is a time and a place for everything, and unless we know the time, we will not rightly understand its place.

CHAPTER 5

THE MOSAIC COVENANT

Since the entrance of sin, God has revealed Himself in person twice to humanity. The first was at Sinai, and the second at Calvary. Both are distinct and different from one another. On Sinai, God revealed Himself through laws, while on Calvary, He revealed Himself through a Person, Jesus Christ, His Son. Both manifestations revealed the gospel in the best possible way that suited that time.

A careful study of the laws revealed on Mount Sinai uncovers many beautiful and rich aspects of the gospel. One of the intentions God had when giving these laws was to reveal the gospel and lead His people to a deeper religious experience. However, many today view the law revealed on Sinai and the covenant established with the people at that time, as a bad thing. Some wonder if the law could have ever led to a deeper and richer religious experience!

To candidly answer this inquiry one must not read the Scriptures with today's revelation and understanding. We must view the law the way God's people viewed it at that time, before Calvary. For example, here is how King David saw the law:

"The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD

are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward." *Psalms 19: 7-11*

It is rather obvious that David believed the law to be an avenue that leads to conversion and hence revival. Another example that can be quoted is found in 2 Chronicles 34 where Hilkiyah, the priest, found the book of the law of the LORD. The story goes on to say that the book eventually found its way to King Josiah and when it was read to him he rent his clothes and later he read it to all the people which led to a great revival.

From this story we can see how the reading of the Law resulted in a great revival. Hence it is important to understand that during the Old Covenant the law was not a bad thing, on the contrary, when correctly used it brought a revival. The law was everything to God's people at that time. It taught them morality, hygiene, justice, grace and much more. Yes, in the Old Covenant, grace was revealed through laws. Of course it was not revealed or manifested in the Old Covenant as clearly as it is under the New Covenant (2 Timothy 1: 9,10), but nonetheless God did reveal His grace to the Israelites through laws.

The sinner under the Mosaic Covenant received forgiveness and reconciliation through the ceremonial law (Leviticus 4: 27-31, Job 1:5; 2 Chronicles 30; 17). These rituals that God instituted were meant to teach the people about God's grace and forgiveness. While today, we learn about grace and receive forgiveness and reconciliation through a Person, Jesus Christ, the righteous, the Antitype to whom all these types pointed to.

Of course the rituals in and of themselves could not offer forgiveness or reconciliation. These came by faith in the One whom these sacrifices typified. However these laws were the best way God could reveal Himself, His gospel and His grace to humanity back then.

Today, through faith in the same Person whom these sacrifices typified, we receive forgiveness (1 John 1:9). We no longer need to go to Jerusalem, to offer sacrifices or to seek the Levitical priest for forgiveness, all we need to do is seek Jesus through prayer. We can enter a

saving relationship with God through *faith alone* in Christ (Romans 10:9, Ephesians 2:9, Philippians 3:9, John 6: 29, etc.)

But not so with those who lived under the Mosaic Covenant. The ceremonial laws and rituals were the avenue by which God's people could enter into a saving relationship with Him. Yes, salvation has been and will always be the same—by faith—but the content of faith and the outward manifestation of it changed from age to age.

Under the Mosaic Covenant the law (both Moral and Ceremonial) was necessary to instruct people and lead them into the plan of salvation. Consider the following:

1. The Ten Commandments showed the people their sin and hence their need of a Saviour.
2. Circumcision illustrated heart circumcision.
3. Sacrifices illustrated the death of Christ.
4. The sanctuary and Levitical priesthood illustrated the work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary.
5. The annual feasts illustrated the plan of salvation.

While these ceremonies and laws in and of themselves could not offer salvation or forgiveness, they served as an instrument to help the people experience the gospel and the grace of God. In His wisdom, God, used the law as a schoolmaster or an administrator to instruct the people and lead them into a saving relationship with Himself. In the absence of any other avenue, the law was the way to God; it was the way an Israelite could experience the plan of salvation.

But not so with us who live under the Christian dispensation. This was Paul's point in the letter to the Galatians. The Judaizers insisted that Gentile converts were required to enter the plan of salvation in the same way the Jews entered it under the Mosaic dispensation, namely "*Except ye be circumcised*" and "*keep the law of Moses*" "*ye cannot be saved*" Acts 15:1, 5. Paul however, objected to this line of reasoning and wrote emphatically and clearly against it.

Due to misunderstanding some important elements about the Old Covenant, the Judaizers in Paul's day, and some Christians in our day,

have continued to relate to God in the same way people related to Him under the Old Covenant. The validity of the law has been established in chapter 3, but does this mean that Christians are to relate to it in the same way the Jews related to it before the cross?

To answer this question, we need to first understand some facts about the Old covenant and the law. For instance,

- What were the conditions of the Old Covenant?
- What was the role of the law in the Old Covenant?
- When did the Old Covenant begin and end?

Let us begin by examining the first question:

WHAT WERE THE CONDITIONS OF THE OLD COVENANT?

“Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, **if** ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. ... And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD.”
Exodus 19:4-8

The Old Covenant is found in these verses where we see the agreement between God and Israel. The condition for receiving the blessings was “**if** ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant.” As is obvious from the wording of the text, this Covenant relied on human accomplishment and good works. In order to receive the promised blessings, one had to “obey and keep”. So the terms and conditions of the Old Covenant were ‘obey and live’.

This becomes more obvious as we consider the following verses:

“Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which **if** a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD.” *Leviticus 18:5*

“Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, **that ye may live**, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you.” *Deuteronomy 4:1*

“All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, **that ye may live**, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers.”
Deuteronomy 8:1

(see also *Ezekiel 18:21, 20:11, etc.*)

Obedience to the law and adherence to the Covenant was a pre-request to blessings. A casual read of Deuteronomy 28 shows that obedience preceded blessings and disobedience brought curses. A failure to obey in one aspect of the covenant brought about a curse.

“Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen.” *Deuteronomy 27:26*

God gave them His laws and said ‘do and live’. Yes, God told them ‘if you do them, you will gain life, or you will live by them’. Salvation by works? Yes, it does sound like it! The conditions of the Old Covenant as revealed in Scripture are the essence of salvation or righteousness by works! One cannot read the verses above without coming to such a conclusion.

However, we have already established that salvation is only viable by faith (Ephesians 2:8,9). No one could be saved by works! Paul tells us:

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” *Galatians 2:16*

This seems rather unusual. If works could save no one, why would God make a covenant of works with His people? To justify this discrepancy some have concluded that it was not God who made this

covenant with the people; rather He simply accepted their word and covenant of works. After all, why would God bring them out of bondage (Egypt) to place them under a system of bondage and works which could not save them?

But this could not be, from the mere fact that the scriptures are very clear on this issue. Notice what the Bible says about this covenant:

“And the LORD spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice. And he declared unto you **his covenant**, which **he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments**; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone.” *Deuteronomy 4:12, 13*

Firstly, Moses calls the Old Covenant “*his covenant*” or “*God’s Covenant*”. And then he tells us what this covenant was; he says “*even ten commandments*”. In other words the covenant where God gave you the Ten Commandments and commanded you to perform them is the Old Covenant; it is the Lord’s covenant not man’s covenant. It was a covenant of laws and rules and the Ten Commandments were the center of it. God was the One who made it.

Also notice what Moses said: “*he commanded you to perform*”. God commanded the Israelites to perform the Ten Commandments, not the other way around. God was the One who told them ‘do and live, or perform and live’. That is exactly what we saw earlier in other verses. All that the people did was to agree with what the Lord said (Exodus 19:5-8).

Notice what else we read in the same chapter:

“Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the LORD your God, **which he made with you**, and make you a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, which the LORD thy God hath forbidden thee.” *Deuteronomy 4:23*

Again, we see very clearly that it was the Lord, your God who made the Covenant with the people. It was not the people’s idea, neither were they the ones who initiated it. In His wisdom, God made this covenant with the people for a specific reason. Notice what else we read;

“The LORD our **God made a covenant with us** in Horeb. The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day. The LORD talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire”
Deuteronomy 5:2

Again, it was God who made the covenant with all those who were there when Moses was talking to them (see also Hebrews 8:9). The Bible specifically links this covenant with the Ten Commandments and even defines it as the Ten Commandment in the verse we saw earlier. So Biblically speaking, there is no doubt that it was God who made this covenant. It was He who initiated it and made it with the people. God placed the law before them and said ‘Here it is, if you want life, obey and live.

The revealing question is *why did God initiate such a covenant?* Why did God make a covenant of works that could not save?

If you remember God had just brought His people out of Egypt; out of slavery and bondage. It is important to understand that God’s people at that time had grown up in Egypt; in a place where they were slaves, where a Jewish life was of no value. These people did not know God, neither did they know themselves. They had no conception of the holiness of God or the sinfulness and wickedness of their own hearts.

They were born into slavery, and thought that once they gained their freedom from Egypt, once they are physically or outwardly free, they would be free from all bondage. They saw the solution to their outward problem in God and His servant Moses and hence they followed Him. But they failed to recognize their inward problem.

We see this sentiment coming out in what Korah, the spokesman of the princes of Israel, said when he and the 250 princes came protesting to Moses:

“And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, **seeing all the congregation are holy**, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?” *Numbers 16:3*

They thought their problem was a mere outward one, Egyptian bondage. Once this outward bondage was gone, they believed themselves to be holy and able to stand in the sight of God without a mediator, Moses. But in reality their problem was much deeper and greater than Egyptian bondage. A carnal heart and mind, a selfish heart was the source of their lives. That was their real problem.

Notice what God said in reply to their impulsive promise “*whatever the Lord says we will do*”:

“O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!” *Deuteronomy 5:29*

They showed willingness to serve God outwardly, to keep His commandments, but their hearts were far from Him. They did not understand the true condition of the human heart, which Jeremiah adequately expressed later on by saying: “*the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it*” (Jeremiah 17:9). So how was God going to bring their problem to light? How was He going to show them or convince them that they were in need of a new heart, or of a new life? Their eyes were fixed on their works and achievements, but God’s eyes were on their hearts. They were looking outwardly but God was looking inwardly. More so, God wanted them to change the way they lived. He wanted them to worship Him instead of idols; not to steal or kill; to live a truthful and honest life without sin and misery. He wanted them to live an orderly life in an orderly community. After all, these are His people and His name was to be known through them in all the world.

In order to reveal their inward problem, and to lead them into a better life and community, God initiated a covenant of works and laws. It is as if God said the following: *If you think you are good and holy, if you think you have no problem and you can please me, then here is My law, keep it. If you keep it, you will live.*

So the conditions of the Old Covenant were “obey and live”, and the reasons behind it were to lead them into a deeper self-awareness and thus a better life. Moreover, the law was used as an instrument or medium to accomplish God’s purpose in the people’s lives. This leads us to our second question:

WHAT WAS THE ROLE OF THE LAW IN THE OLD COVENANT?

God had to deal with at least three things:

1. Convict the people of sin and hence the need for a Saviour.
2. Lead and guide the people into a better relationship with Him and their neighbor.
3. Teach His people the gospel and spiritual things that were yet to happen.

Let us examine these three reasons in more detail:

1. Convict the people of sin and hence the need for a Saviour.

The law was a perfect instrument to accomplish this. God was revealing His character in laws, and the people were then able to contrast their own character with God's, which convicted them of sin. Moreover, their inability to keep the law in and of themselves led them to a desperate condition where they realized their need of a Saviour.

This has always been and will always be the role of the law, to condemn and kill the transgressor. Paul tells us the law entered "*that the offence might abound*" (Romans 5:20) and that "*sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful*" (Romans 7:13). The law served as an instrument to identify sin "*for by the law is the knowledge of sin*" (Romans 3:20), and to bring it to life (Romans 7:8).

2. Lead and guide the people into a better relationship with Him and their neighbor.

Earlier we saw how the Israelites had just been delivered from slavery in Egypt where their lives were of no value. You can get a glimpse of how they were treated by reading the stories in Exodus chapter one. The Bible says the Egyptians "*made their lives bitter*" (Exodus 1:14). Furthermore, Pharaoh told the midwives to kill their baby boys and so on.

As a result of such upbringing, women were even more worthless. Men mistreated their wives and hence, God had to deal with all this. After their exodus from Egypt they were under God's guidance and rulership, and He did not want such behavior in His camp. He had to

put a stop to it and to constrain the carnal heart somehow. Hence He instituted a command whereby if a man was to hate his wife, he was not to beat her up or mistreat her, rather he was to divorce her and send her to her parents' home (Deuteronomy 24:3).

Because of the hardness of their hearts, God permitted His people to divorce, but it was not so from the beginning (Matthew 19:8). Though given by God, this law did not perfectly express the heart and will of God. From the beginning of creation, God's will for married people has been to stay together, but God had to meet His people where they were. God had to meet them at their level. They were not in a condition to receive promises like Abraham, their father; they were in need of rules and laws to control them in the same way we use rules and laws to control our children.

God placed them under the ministration of the law (2 Corinthians 3:7) in the sense that they were controlled and governed by laws and rules. The law told them what to do and what not to do. It told them how to treat their children, wives, and parents; it told them how to relate to God and how to worship Him; it told them what they could do and could not do on the Sabbath and so on. God used the law as their "*schoolmaster*" (Galatians 3:24) or guide, to lead them into a better life.

The people at that time, and under that ministration, did what they did because the law said so. Their behavior was controlled or governed by external laws and rules. The way of the law was the closest they could come to knowing God's will and heart. For them to know what God wanted them to do they had to look to the law. If the law said do, then they would do it. It served as a tutor or governor to govern their lives and morals. It not only told them what to do, but it told them how to deal with the person that disobeyed. For example if a person worked on the Sabbath, he was to be stoned, if a man and woman were taken in adultery, both of them were to be stoned (Leviticus 20:10, Deuteronomy 22:22)

Of course these laws did not perfectly manifest the heart of God. Through Jesus God revealed His heart towards the sinner (John 8:7, 11). God desired mercy more than sacrifice (Hosea 6:6). Nevertheless, He had to instate these laws and rules to govern or control the carnality of the people who just came out of slavery and bondage.

Because of the condition of their hearts, the way of the law was the best way God could govern the life and morals of His people and lead them into a better relationship with Him and with their fellow man.

3. Teach His people the gospel and spiritual things that were yet to happen.

God wanted them to learn heavenly realities that were not yet manifest. He wanted to reveal to them more about the mission of the promised Seed. Humanity's only hope is found in the Messiah that was to come, and a large segment of the Old Covenant was designed to illustrate and teach lessons and truths about the Messiah. The law was "*a shadow of good things to come*" (Hebrews 10:1). It pointed to Christ and illustrated much of His work.

So through types and ceremonies, sacrifices and rituals the gospel was preached unto the Jews in the Old Covenant (Hebrews 4:2), though some aspects of it were not revealed until the coming, death and resurrection of Christ (Romans 16:25, 26).

These laws, rituals, ceremonies and sacrifices were a shadow of a greater reality that was met and fulfilled in Christ. Up till the manifestation of the reality all one could do was look to and follow the shadow. But when the reality was clearly revealed and manifested why should any continue looking and following the shadow?

The types and shadows ranged from structures, furniture, persons, colors, events and so on. Some of these types and shadows were:

- The earthly sanctuary pointing to the heavenly sanctuary
- The ark of the covenant pointing to the throne of God
- Earthly high priest pointing to the heavenly high Priest
- The clothes of the earthly high priest pointing to many heavenly realities
- Sin offering and Passover lamb pointing to the death of Christ
- The Passover date (14th) pointing to the time of Christ's death
- The feast of First Fruits pointing to the resurrection of Christ

- The timing of the First Fruits (the third day after the Passover) pointed to the time of Christ's resurrection
- Unleavened bread pointing to freedom or victory over sin
- The Day of Atonement pointing to the exact day when Jesus would enter the Most Holy Place
- The color blue pointing to and representing the Law

The point is, God wanted to teach His people some things that were essential to the gospel. He did that by giving them laws, rituals and ceremonies they were supposed to perform by faith in what was to come. Practicing these laws and rituals provided a way for the Israelites to enter into a relationship with God, and taught them about forgiveness and grace. It helped them understand the gospel.

To the Israelite living under the Old Covenant, these laws—though in and of themselves could not save—were the entry point into salvation in a similar way to what baptism and communion stand for in the New Covenant. These laws pointed forward to Christ in a similar way as baptism and communion point backward to Christ.

However, under the Old Covenant these laws had to be literally observed in order for one to belong to the commonwealth of Israel and be considered a child of God. Faith alone was not sufficient for one to be adopted into the commonwealth of Israel. Circumcision, for example, was a must or a prerequisite to be a part of Israel. Fasting and soul afflicting was necessary on the Day of Atonement. If one did not literally carry these laws out he was to be "*cut off from among his people*" (Leviticus 16:31, 23:29, 30).

The point is, if anyone wanted to be saved under the Old Covenant, he had to literally adhere to and carry out these laws in addition to having faith in the Messiah to come. It was the grace of God through faith that saved people under the Old Covenant, but it had to be accompanied by these outward ceremonies and rituals.

These laws were enforced upon the people up till the cross where type met anti-type. From that time on, these laws have taken spiritual meanings and their literal application became no longer necessary.

In summary, the law was used by God to:

1. Convict the sinner of sin.
2. Teach the Israelites the gospel.
3. Provide an entry point into salvation.
4. Govern the morals and lives of the Israelites.

WHEN DID THE OLD COVENANT BEGIN AND END?

When discussing this point, it is important to differentiate between the Old Covenant as a mindset and its time frame.

The mindset of the Old Covenant is one that relates to God through works. This can be found as far back as the story of Cain and Abel where Cain wanted to offer the fruit of his field, or his own “works” to God. Contrast Cain’s mindset with Abel’s who offered a lamb to God symbolizing his faith in God’s provision. Both mindsets existed since the fall and still exist today.

However, this is not what we are considering here. We are looking at the Old Covenant as one initiated by God for a specific reason. According to the Bible, this covenant had a starting point and a finishing point. It began on Mount Sinai (Jeremiah 31:32, Hebrews 8:9) and terminated at the cross. The Bible says that:

- When the “new covenant” was ratified, the old one ceased. (Hebrews 8:13)
- The New Covenant was ratified when the blood of Jesus was spilled at the cross. (Mathew 26:28, 1 Corinthians 11:25)
- The Law was added till the coming of Christ. (Galatians 3:19, 4:4)

Moreover, the Bible tells us that the Old Covenant “*had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary*” (Hebrews 9:1). This means that the validity of these ordinances and the earthly sanctuary serves as an evidence for the validity of the Old Covenant. And the opposite is true. When these ordinances and the earthly sanctuary lose their significance in God’s eyes, this serves as evidence that the Old Covenant had come to an end.

Furthermore, we are told that the way into the heavenly sanctuary was not yet made manifest while the earthly sanctuary was still in operation (Hebrews 9:8). This becomes important as we seek to identify the time in which the Old Covenant ended in light of the fact that when Christ died on the cross the curtain separating the Holy from the Most Holy Place in the earthly sanctuary was rent from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51) symbolizing the end of its services as far as God was concerned.

This tells us that the Old Covenant ended with the death of Christ on the cross. Hence the role of the law as known in the Old Covenant would have changed starting from Calvary onward. One can no longer continue to relate to God on this side of the cross in the same way people related to Him prior to the cross. Paul tells us that the ministration of the law is “*done away*” (2 Corinthians 3: 7-11).

If the ministration of the law as known in the Old Covenant is done away with, at the cross, one must ask what the role of the law is today and how are we to relate to it?

CHAPTER 6

THE LAW IN THE NEW COVENANT

We have established four roles for the law in the Old Covenant:

1. convicts the sinner of sin
2. teaches the Israelites the gospel
3. provides an entry point into salvation
4. governs the morals and lives of the Israelites

We also saw that the first role is still valid today for the law is still an instrument to convict and condemn the sinner as Paul brings out in his letter to the Romans (Romans 3:20, 7:7). Of course, we are to take into consideration the far-reaching spiritual meaning of the law as Jesus expanded upon it in His sermon on the mount (Matthew 5).

The second role of the law as an instrument to teach, is also valid in the New Testament but not in the same way nor to the same extent. Christians can learn many wonderful lessons from the law, statutes and judgments that will enhance one's spiritual walk. Particularly, a study of the sanctuary and its services would uncover many wonderful and deep insights into the plan of salvation. However, to us who live on this side of the cross, we have the story of Jesus as recorded in the four Gospels, and the other books of the New Testament that gives us a much deeper and better insight into the plan of salvation than what the law gave to the Israelites before Christ's time.

So yes, the law can still serve as an avenue to learn about the gospel, but only in a limited way. What we have in Christ and through Christ supersedes anything one can learn from the law.

On the other hand, the third and fourth role of the law as an entry point into salvation and a governor or ruler over the people ceased at the cross. This was Paul's main point in his letter to the Galatians. The Judaizers in Paul's day insisted that Christians must enter the plan of salvation in the same way the Israelites did before the cross. They did that by teaching that except a man be circumcised and keep the law of Moses he cannot be saved (Acts 15:1, 5). They also persuaded the Galatian Christians to desire to be under the government or ministration of the law (Galatians 4:21) and hence dragging them back under the Old Covenant.

Of course, Paul strongly objected to this teaching. He clearly stated that the law could never give life (Galatians 3:21) and that all those who seek to earn salvation by works are under a curse (Galatians 3:10). Paul's argument in the letter to the Galatians not only deals with the Judaizers of his day, but it also undoes the legalistic approach Christians could have to the gospel today.

From this point onward, we will examine the letter to the Galatians focusing on chapters three and four in which Paul presents his strongest argument against such false teachings.

INTRODUCTION TO GALATIANS

To better appreciate and understand the content of this letter, let us answer the following questions

1. Why was this letter written?
2. What was the problem in Galatia?
3. What were the false teachers teaching?
4. What was Paul trying to correct?

If we correctly answer these questions, we will better understand the letter. So here are the answers:

1. WHY WAS THIS LETTER WRITTEN?

Because the church was departing from the gospel which Paul preached (Galatians 1:6).

2. WHAT WAS THE PROBLEM IN GALATIA?

False teachers had crept in and as a result, the people's focus had shifted from faith in Christ to the works of the law. The believers at that church began to seek salvation through their own efforts and works rather than through faith in Christ. They desired to be "under the law" (Galatians 4:21). The Old Covenant mentality and requirements were being enforced by its advocates, the Judaizers.

Unlike the council that is recorded in Acts 15, in this letter Paul's concern was not focused on circumcision or any specific features of the ceremonial law, rather his focus and concern were aimed at the false teaching that required believers to add the observance of the law to faith in Christ in order for them to be saved.

It is important to understand that the problem at Galatia was a different kind than the one at Corinth. At Corinth, the believers were falling into sin and practicing things unheard of even among the Gentiles (1 Corinthians 5:1), hence their problem was sin. However, this was not the problem at Galatia. On the contrary, the Galatian believers were heading into legalism. They were not desiring to break the law in any shape or form, rather were seeking salvation by trying to keep all the law. They were not desiring to be sinners; they desired holiness and righteousness, but sought after it in the wrong direction, i.e. through the law, not through faith. Paul's main point in this letter could not be dealing with sin or with the condemnation of the law upon sinners because this was not their problem. The issue in this letter is one of salvation by faith verses salvation by works.

3. WHAT WERE THE FALSE TEACHERS TEACHING?

They were teaching that you must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses to be saved (Galatians 5: 2,3). Salvation cannot come by faith alone; you must add your works to it.

4. WHAT WAS PAUL TRYING TO CORRECT?

Paul was trying to correct the legalism that was taking place in the church. Please remember that it was legalism that was creeping into the church, not paganism. Paul's attempt was to redirect the people's focus from the works of the law to Christ. He was not trying to convince them that they are not to sin! These people desired to go back to the works of the law or to salvation by works, and Paul's letter was intended to correct this particular problem.

I cannot overemphasize this point. If you misunderstand it, you will misunderstand the letter. Our understanding of the purpose of this letter and the condition of the Galatians gives us a better understanding of its content. For example, when Paul tells them "*Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law*" (Galatians 4:21), our understanding of their problem helps us understand what Paul meant. Did these people desire to sin, and to be under the condemnation of the law? Or did they desire to earn salvation by works and to be governed by the law? What was the problem in the church?

Our main focus will be on chapters three and four, but in order not to miss the context, I will summarize the main points of chapters one and two prior to getting into our topic.

GALATIANS 1 & 2

1. Paul declares himself an apostle of Christ and confirms to them that he knows what he is talking about because the gospel he believes in and shared with them is not of man but of God. For he received it from Jesus Christ Himself. He did not receive it from any man, including the apostles.
2. Then he sets the scene of the church's condition in Galatia by stating that these people are departing from grace and accepting another gospel. Which is not another, but is simply a perversion of the true gospel of Jesus Christ.
3. Then in chapter 2 he tells them how that after fourteen years he went up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders in charge of

the church there, and preached to them the same gospel he had preached to the Gentiles. Moreover, he says that Titus, who was a Greek, was not compelled to be circumcised. In other words, the apostles and leaders of the church in Jerusalem accepted Paul's gospel and understood that circumcision is no longer required of a Gentile convert. The evidence to what he was saying is the fact that Titus was not circumcised. This proves his point that all the apostles approve of the gospel he is preaching to the Gentiles and agreed with him on the fact that salvation and righteousness are by faith and not by works.

4. But he also includes the fact that some false preachers came in and tried to take away their liberty which they had in Christ in order to bring them into bondage. It is important here to ask ourselves the question: Liberty from what and bondage to what? Later on in the letter he clarifies what he means by bondage:

- a. Bondage to the law as our tutor and governor:

“Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:” *Galatians 4:3*

- b. Bondage to the Old Covenant which is a covenant of works:

“Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.” *Galatians 4:24, 25*

- c. Bondage to the legalistic mindset that we must be circumcised to be saved:

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.” *Galatian 5:1, 2*

It is obvious that these false teachers were trying to bring them under the ministration of condemnation (2 Corinthians 3:7-9). It is very clear that Paul was referring to the liberty from the ministration of the law, or from that government which demanded “do and live.”

5. Then he gives the example of how Peter was persuaded by the conduct and legalistic mindset of some Jews that he withdrew himself from eating with the gentiles. Peter’s example affected the action of other Jews (2:13) even Barnabas himself who we are told was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: (Act 11:24). Legalism is a very contagious disease.
6. After stating what Peter did, Paul emphasizes the fact that this system of the law could not save or bring righteousness. He expressed this in statements such as “a man is not justified by the works of the law” (2:16) and “by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” And “if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.” (2:21)

GALATIANS 3

With this background, Paul begins to compare two systems in chapter 3. One system is based on the work of the law, while the other on faith. Here is what he says (I will first state the verses and then write my own understanding of them):

“O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain. He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same

are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto." *Galatians 3:1-15*

- How did you receive the spirit? Was it by the works of the law or by faith? What does Paul mean by "*receive the spirit*"? He was asking them, how did you receive this new life—the life of Christ—by the works of the law or by faith? Remember what he said two verses earlier in Galatians 2:20, "*not I but Christ liveth in me.*"
- If you began living this new life by faith, do you think you will perfect it or finish it by the flesh? Or by the works of the law?
- He that brought this life to you and performed miracles among you—did he do it by the works of the law or by faith? What was their source of power, works or faith?
- He concludes in verse 6 that of course it is by faith just like Abraham received this righteousness by simply believing God's promises, hence by faith and not by works.
- Furthermore, all those who have this faith are the children of Abraham, implying that the inheritance is not of works, but of faith.

- Be sure then, be confident and believe that all those who will have this faith and will live by faith, will be the children of Abraham. Why did Paul bring Abraham into it? The reason is that it was the Jews, the professed children of Abraham, who were confusing the gospel. It was the legalists that were bringing in a new gospel as Paul mentioned in chapter 1. Hence, Paul's argument or point to his readers is that if they truly desire to be the children of Abraham, they are to follow the example of Abraham. Seek righteousness in the same way Abraham sought it, and that is by faith not by works.
- Not only that, but Paul further emphasizes his point by showing that the true gospel, the only gospel was preached to their father Abraham, "*In thee shall all nations be blessed*". The gospel was a promise God made to Abraham. It is important to understand that the gospel is a promise of life. It is not an agreement where two parties come together to make a covenant with each other. No, it is a promise from God to man.
- After making his point, Paul resumes his comparison of the law and faith by saying that all those who are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. However, all those who are of the works of the law are under a curse.
- Just from these two verses, we can tell what was happening in the Galatian church and what Paul understood these Christians to be thinking. Paul understood that the Galatians were looking at or considering two roads to righteousness, one by faith and the other by works of the law. In light of that, he tells them very clearly that one will lead them to be blessed and the other to be cursed.
- Then he goes as far as saying that no one will be justified by keeping the law. We are justified by faith, and the law is not of faith. In other words, you are not going to be justified by that which is not of faith, namely the law. The system of living under the law is not based on the principle of faith; hence, it cannot justify you.

- In fact, that system brought you under a curse because it says, “*cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them,*” and all have sinned.
- But don’t worry, Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, He has taken the curse upon Himself that the blessing, the righteousness, the promise of eternal life, and inheritance promised to Abraham will come upon everyone—Jews and Gentiles alike—through faith.

All this is the backdrop to Paul’s main point in the letter which is as follows:

“Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.”
Galatians 3:16-20

Paul just finished telling his readers about the gospel, the covenant, and the promise that God made to Abraham, namely “*In thee shall all nations be blessed*”. He explains this by stating that the promise was not only to Abraham, but also to his Seed, Jesus, meaning that the gospel preached to Abraham is, “*In Christ shall all nations be blessed*”.

Please keep in mind that Paul was correcting a false teaching that was prevalent in the church. Not only that, but he also knew that the false teachers would be present when the letter was read, hence his attempt to rebut their argument. Though we do not know their argument, we can get a glimpse into it from Paul’s response or reply to the deception. From reading the letter to the Galatians, I believe the false teachers would have been saying things like this:

‘Yes, yes, we know what Paul preached, and we know the promise God gave to Abraham, but the law was given after the promise was made. Mount Sinai is the last covenant God made with us, the Jews, and hence His later covenant overrules the earlier promise. God’s way of salvation was manifested on Mount Sinai, and it is through the law. Hence, you must keep the law and be circumcised to be saved.’

With this in mind, Paul’s following words come to life. Notice what he says in verses 17 and 18:

“And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.” *Galatians 3:17, 18*

Paul plainly tells them that the covenant which was made on Mount Sinai, 430 years after the promise was given to Abraham, cannot cancel or change the promise. Because if the inheritance promised to Abraham is obtained by the law, then it is no more of promise. And if this is so, then how come God gave it to Abraham by promise? God made a promise to Abraham and His promise to him was not based on any law. Keep in mind that Abraham lived and died before the law was given on Mount Sinai. Abraham’s inheritance was given to him by promise before the Old Covenant came in place. Hence the fact that Abraham was given or promised the inheritance before the law was added disproves their argument that the inheritance is by the law because it was given to Abraham independent of the law, since it was before Mount Sinai.

Again this emphasizes the fact that the inheritance along with the gospel, righteousness, and eternal life is a promise made by God. When you make a promise, you are the one who will fulfill it, not someone else. The fulfillment of your promise is dependent on your truthfulness, honesty, and ability to fulfill it. In the same way, God’s promise of life to Abraham and the human race is dependent on God’s honesty and ability to fulfill it, not on my ability to earn it. This is the essence of a promise.

After destroying the falsehood preached, Paul anticipates a logical question. He states it then answers it. You see, if what Paul just said is

correct—that the inheritance is not based on the law and that the law and the covenant given and established on Mount Sinai could not and did not change the promise—, then the logical question that follows is:

Wherefore then serveth the law?

Or in other words, if what you are saying is correct, then please tell us, Paul, why was the law given? What was its purpose? Why was it needed? Here is the answer:

“Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.”
Galatians 3:19, 20

Let us take this verse one segment at a time:

“added because of transgressions”

Paul tells them that the law was “*added*” or “*entered*” (Romans 5:20) because of sin, or as we saw earlier “*that sin might become exceedingly sinful*”. Because sin was widespread amongst the people at the time of their Exodus, God placed the law in that position; He made it so clear and wrote it on stone to show them the sinfulness of their own lives and their need of a Savior.

Keep in mind, the reason Paul is writing this letter is because of the legalistic mindset that was creeping in among the church. The law, and the law alone is what these legalists were pointing to. They were directing the church to seek the promised inheritance and righteousness through the law or through the works of the law. Paul was attempting to undo or expose their argument by attacking it at its roots. He says:

‘Hang on a second. You have missed the whole point of why the law was given. The law was not given to give us righteousness or life, neither was it given to impart this promise of eternal inheritance to us. Not at all! It was simply given because of transgression, and to point out sin in a very clear and condemning way.’

But notice what else he says:

“It was added ... till the seed should come to whom the promise was made ...”

Who is this Seed **to** whom the promise was made?

Contextually Paul just said that the promises were not only made to Abraham, but *“to Abraham and his **seed** were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.”* Galatians 3:16

The Seed is Christ.

Whose Seed was He? Again, according to the same verse we just read, Christ is the Seed of Abraham meaning the Son of Abraham.

“till the seed should come”

Which coming was Paul referring to, the first or the second coming of Christ? The natural reading of the text compels us to believe that Paul was referring to the first coming of Christ (see on verse 24).

Moreover, Paul is continuing his point from verse 16 where he said that the promises were made to Abraham and to his Seed. Hence the phrase *“till the seed should come”* is referring to the time when Christ will come as the promised Seed or Son of Abraham, that is, in human flesh.

All Israel was looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, the promised Seed, which was fulfilled in the birth of Christ when He was born or *“made of a woman”* (Galatians 4:4).

“to whom the promise was made”

What was the promise made to Abraham and his Seed?

“And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” Genesis 12:3

“... in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.” Genesis 22:18

Paul was not focusing on the earthly inheritance that was promised to Abraham, i.e. Canaan, but on the spiritual inheritance. His focus was on the blessing of salvation and eternal life, hence his mention of it in:

- Galatians 3:8 *“the scripture, foreseeing that God would **justify** the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed.”*
- And in Galatians 3:14 *That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive **the promise of the Spirit** through faith.*

Paul’s main point in this letter is how we are justified and accepted with God—by faith or by works? He was not interested in any earthly inheritance.

So the term *“till the seed should come to whom the promise was made”* can only refer to the first coming of Jesus when He became the Seed of Abraham and the Author of eternal salvation to both Jews and Gentiles (Luke 2:11, Hebrews 5:8, 9). It is referring to the time when He brought this justification by faith to the heathens as well as to the Jews (Romans 1:16, 17).

However, it is worth mentioning here that regardless of how one understands the promise (whether inheriting the earth or inheriting eternal life), the end result should not change. Paul was directing the minds of his readers to the coming of the Seed and not to the fulfilment of the promise. Notice his words again:

*“It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come **to whom** the promise was made”*

Paul did not say the law was added ‘till the fulfilment of the promise’. No. The time he was referring to was the **coming** of the Seed TO WHOM the promise was made. His words *“to whom the promise was made”* were used to link the Seed, he is talking about in verse 19, with the Seed he mentioned in verse 16. It is an excellent way of writing that leaves no room for misunderstanding to whom Paul was referring. This way the reader does not misunderstand the identity of the Seed being spoken about.

In other words, Paul was saying ‘the law was added because of transgressions till the seed, promised to Abraham, should come.’

Please don't miss the point of this verse. Paul is telling us very clearly that the law was added, or was put in such a place as a governor and tutor, “*till the seed should come*”. In other words, the law was made the governor or tutor until “*the appointed time of the father*” or until “*the fullness of time was come*” as he says in chapter 4. The people were put under the ministration of the law until the coming of Christ. That is exactly what he says in chapter 4, verse 4.

“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,” *Galatians 4:4*

The coming of Jesus, His death and resurrection, were the turning point when God's people changed from being under the ministration of the law to being under the ministration of the Spirit. Paul tells us in Hebrews 8:6 that “*now*” on this side of the cross “*hath he [Jesus] obtained a more excellent ministry*” which is more glorious than the first one. That is exactly what we read in 2 Corinthians 3 where Paul presents us with two ministries and says that the second, the ministry of the spirit, is more glorious than the first.

After Paul makes this point in Galatians, he says the following apparently obscure verse:

“Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.”
Galatians 3:20

Contextually speaking, Paul was contrasting the two ways of obtaining the inheritance, righteousness, and life. One way was by the promise God gave to Abraham while the other was by the covenant God made with man on Mount Sinai. Commenting on the covenant made on Mount Sinai he says that “*it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.*”

Paul's point is that the covenant made on Mount Sinai needed Moses to be the mediator, and the fact that there was a mediator proves that more than one party was involved in the covenant. The presence of more

than one party proves that this was not the fulfillment of the promise made by God because the promise only takes one party to fulfill.

Think about it this way: If I was buying a house from you; both of us will need to do something. We both need to agree on a price, I will have to do my part: give you the money, while you have to do your part: give me the house. Usually we both use a lawyer to mediate between us.

On the other hand, if I promised to give you \$1,000 dollars, you do not need to do anything other than receive the money. The fulfillment of the promise lies in my hands. It depends on my honesty and financial ability.

In the same way, Paul was using the presence of a mediator—Moses—to prove the presence of more than one party: the people and God. This proves that what happened on Mount Sinai was not the fulfillment of the promise. This being the case, the covenant that took place on Mount Sinai is not the fulfillment of the promise, neither can it replace or do away with it because God cannot lie.

Again, Paul anticipates a question so he asks it and then gives the answer:

“Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.” *Galatians 3:21, 22*

After proving that the law was not the fulfillment of the promise, nor could it do away with it, Paul makes sure his readers do not misunderstand him to be saying that the law was bad. He clearly states that the law is not against the promises of God, but neither was it given to fulfill the promise of God or to give life and righteousness. Not at all! The Scriptures have already concluded that all are under sin and hence no one was able to keep the law perfectly for all have sinned. This assures us that the promise is given us by the *faith of Christ* and not by works. Only those who believe on Jesus will receive this promise of life and righteousness.

One thing God cannot give is a law by which man can inherit eternal life. Paul says: “*if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.*” Life could not come through laws. The evidence Paul gives is the fact that everyone is “*under sin.*”

It is important to understand that verse 22 sets the stage for the argument he is about to make. Misunderstanding this verse will result in misunderstanding the verses to come. Here is the verse again:

“But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.”
Galatians 3:22

The key point to unlock the verse is the word “*believe*”. Keep in mind that in this letter Paul was dealing with the Judaizers who were teaching that simply believing in Jesus is not sufficient. One must circumcise and keep the law of Moses to be saved. Now this was true under the Old Covenant! Prior to Christ, one had to keep the Law of Moses in order to enter this saving relationship with God. Not that doing these things earned them salvation; not at all. It was simply the avenue God instituted to teach the people and help them experience or enter the plan of salvation. One could not manifest faith in God without doing these things.

However, Paul’s whole point in his letter to the Galatians is that after the Cross the believer no longer needed to enter the plan of salvation in the same way the Jews did before the cross. He argued that we are no longer under the old system where we must do these things, the promise is now given to them that *believe*. This of course became only available at the time when circumcision and various other laws that separated the Jews from the Gentiles were taken away. During this time there was no difference between a Jew and a Greek (Galatians 3:28) and hence the only prerequisite to receiving the promise is *belief*.

Understanding the background and Paul’s intention by the word “*believe*,” allows us to better understand the phrase “*by faith of Jesus Christ.*” By this, Paul was referring to one of two options:

1. The faith that Christians should have in Jesus whom they have met and heard about—the One who lived, died, and rose again.
2. By the faith of Jesus, as in the faith which Jesus authored and manifested while on earth. This same faith is given to the believer as a gift.

Either case, the point of time is still the same. Both of these interpretations refer to the faith after the cross. So the phrase “by faith of Jesus Christ” refers to the time after the cross, the time of Jesus’ incarnation, death and resurrection.

Understanding this phrase becomes crucial as we move into verse 23:

“But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.” *Galatians 3:23*

“But before faith came”

What faith? The “*faith of Jesus Christ*” which he spoke about in verse 22 and which fits in the new dispensation after the cross.

Literally interpreted Paul is saying ‘before the faith of Jesus came’. The faith of Jesus became available after He lived as a human being and perfected this faith. The scriptures call Him “*the author and finisher of our faith*” Hebrews 12:2.

Think about it; in Hebrews 11, Paul tells us about all those heroes of faith which by faith attained a good report. In other words, faith was in existence all along; all those who were saved before the cross were saved by faith. But in this passage Paul said “*Before faith came.*” What does he mean? Did not faith always exist?

Yes, faith always existed; but the key to understanding this is the term “*faith of Jesus Christ.*” Before this faith of Jesus came, or this system of approaching God by this faith came, “*we were kept under the law.*”

Paul in this text is comparing the following two systems:

1. The system of law—where the law was the tutor and governor of the people as we saw earlier. The people approached God

and related to Him by laws and rules. It is the system during which the law played all the roles we saw in chapter 5.

2. The system of faith—where Jesus is the One who controls us and the One through whom we approach and relate to God; where He lives in us and His faith is manifested through us.

Yes, faith existed before the incarnation, but it was through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus that the doctrine of justification by faith without works became more fully revealed. Not only that, but it was through His incarnation—during which He was tempted, tried and made perfect through suffering (Hebrews 1:10)—that Jesus authored this perfect and complete faith. This faith is given to all those who believe on Him, hence He “*became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him*” (Hebrews 5:8, 9).

So when Paul said, “*before faith came*” he meant ‘before the cross’ or ‘before the time of Jesus’

“*we were kept under the law*”

Remember that Paul in this letter is addressing the problem of legalism which he faced many times, and had mentioned earlier in chapter 2:4 where he said these false brethren came in to spy out our liberty, that they might bring us into bondage. These false brethren wanted to bring Paul back under the Old Covenant where the people were in bondage to the law, and the law was their tutor and governor (Galatians 4:21-26, 5:1, 2).

What does “*kept under the law*” mean?

The Greek word translated “kept” means “to guard, protect by a military guard, either to prevent hostile invasion, or **to keep the inhabitants of a besieged city from flight.**”

And the word translated “*under*” means “*by.*”

“*Kept under the law*” means “guarded, protected or controlled by the law”.

Paul is saying that before this system of faith came, we—that is God’s people—were controlled by the law. We were under a system

where the law was our protector and guard. It told us what we ought to do and what we were not to do. It controlled our morals and lives.

This is none other than the Old Covenant that began when the law “*was added*” (verse 19) 430 years after the promise (verse 17). However, this covenant was not supposed to last forever, neither was the law supposed to be our tutor and governor forever. This system was put in place for a limited time and was supposed to last “*till the seed should come*” (verse 19).

It is important to understand that before the cross, being under the law was the right way to go. It was not bad, neither was it considered a system of bondage. It was all what they had. However, after the cross, or after the new system was introduced, Christians could no longer relate to the law in the same way the Jews related to it before the cross.

Seeking that same relationship with the law places the believer in bondage to laws and rules. In light of the new system, the old system became a system of bondage. The liberty offered in the New Covenant highlighted and brought to light the bondage of the Old Covenant.

Just like in the Celestial dispensation, faith—the center of Christianity—will not be required in the same way it is required during the Christian dispensation. In like manner, the law, which is the center of the Old Covenant, is no longer required in the same way as it was back then.

“shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed”

By the word “*faith*”, Paul was referring to “*the faith of Jesus*” or “*the ministration of the spirit*”, meaning the system of faith. This system of faith was not fully revealed until the coming of Jesus.

Therefore, before this system of faith was available, we were kept under the government of the law awaiting the “*fullness of time*” to come or awaiting “*the appointed time of the father*” during which this new ministration of the spirit will begin.

After the cross, God’s people shifted from being under the law to being under grace (Romans 6:14, 15) or under this system of faith. I find it very interesting how in Galatians while talking about this sys-

tem of faith Paul says “*shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.*” In other words, before Jesus came and authored this faith, giving it to us, this system of faith was not revealed. Notice what he says while talking about grace:

“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, **But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ**, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:” *2 Timothy 1:9, 10*

In other words, the purpose and grace of God was not made manifest until the appearing of Jesus. So according to the text in Galatians and the one in 2 Timothy, this faith and grace was not manifest until the appearing of Jesus. This is none other than the ministration of the spirit that Jesus has obtained on this side of the cross.

Let us continue with Paul’s argument in Galatians:

“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” *Galatians 3:24*

Therefore the law was (past tense) our schoolmaster (which means leader, tutor or governor) until the coming of Christ, the promised seed. The words “*to bring us*” are added. The verse should read as such:

(YLT) “so that the law became our child-conductor—to Christ, that by faith we may be declared righteous,” (*Young Literal Translation*)

The word translated “unto” in KJV or “to” in YLT comes from the Greek word number **G1519** which—according to Strong’s Concordance—means:

A primary preposition; *to* or *into* (indicating the point reached or entered), of place, time, or (figuratively) purpose (result, etc.); also in adverbial phrases.: - [abundant-] ly, against,

The point of time reached

Here is how other translations put it:

(ERV) “I mean the law was the guardian in charge of us until Christ came. After he came, we could be made right with God through faith.” (*Easy to read Version*)

(ESV) “So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.” (*English Standard Version*)

(GW) “Before Christ came, Moses’ laws served as our guardian. Christ came so that we could receive God’s approval by faith.” (*God’s Word*)

(ISV) “And so the law was our guardian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith.” (*International Standard Version*)

(MKJV) “So that the Law has become a trainer of us until Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” (*Modern King James Version*)

That is exactly what Paul said earlier in verse 19 “*it was added ... till the seed should come*”. And it is exactly what he goes on to say in chapter 4. I believe that the context demands us to translate it as the above translations put it, “until Christ.”

Another very important point that should not be missed is found in the Greek word that is translated as a “*schoolmaster*”. Sometimes due to the language and culture, the true meaning of the verse is missed. Here is what the word used by Paul means:

A tutor, i.e. a guardian and guide of boys. Among the Greeks and the Romans the name was applied to trustworthy slaves who were charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys belonging to the better class. The boys were not allowed so much as to step out of the house without them before arriving at the age of manhood.

It is hard for us to fully comprehend the meaning because this is no longer a practiced custom in our day and age, but that was common at

the days of Paul. Paul is likening the law to a trustworthy slave, or to a good, holy, and a just instrument or method used by God to supervise or control the lives and morals of His people while they were children. His people were to be under the control of this supervisor (the law) until the time appointed of the father or until the fullness of time, or until the coming of the Seed.

Very interesting. The word “*schoolmaster*” entails a very similar meaning to the word “*kept*” which was used in the previous verse. In verse 23 Paul used a word that means,

“to guard, protect by a military guard, either to prevent hostile invasion, or **to keep the inhabitants of a besieged city from flight.**”

If we introduce the meaning of this word into the text, it will say “the law was used as a military guard or protector to control the people”.

While in verse 24 he used the word *schoolmaster*, the meaning of which if introduced into the text can read: the law was used as our guardian or guide which supervised or controlled our lives and morals.

Paul’s use of these specific words is not accidental. He wanted his readers to understand the role the law played before the cross. It was vital for his argument that the Galatians understand this role because he was about to tell them that it came to an end.

Why did God place the law in such a position?

“that we might be justified by faith”

One of the reasons God placed the law in such a position was to lead His people to the realization that justification could only be attained by faith. No one could be justified by works. Only when faced with the law of God did the Israelites realize their own sinfulness and inability of saving themselves. Because of the law, they sought after justification by faith.

So the law was our tutor and governor until the coming of Christ; and from that point onward this system of faith came. Notice what Paul says:

Galatians 3:25: "But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster."

But now, since this new ministration or system of faith has come, we are no longer under the control of the schoolmaster.

Notice the parallel Paul just made:

"before faith came we were ... under the law"

"after that faith is come we are no longer under a school master"

So under the law = under a school master
(which means tutor or guardian).

Hence under the law means under tutors and guardians.

The law is no longer our tutor and governor controlling our lives and morals and instructing us on what to do and not to do; the law is no longer the instrument which God is using to keep us in line and to reveal His will to us. It is no longer the entry point unto salvation. Why?

Galatians 3:26: "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

Galatians 3:27: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

Because all of you are the children of God "*by faith in Christ Jesus*" and all of you who have accepted Jesus, have put Him on, or have Him dwelling in you. This might not be very clear here, but Paul picks on this point in chapter 4:1-7 where he says that we are no longer servants but sons because God has sent the spirit of His Son into our hearts crying Abba Father. And by having Christ dwelling within, we ought to know the heart of God and His perfect will, then we will no longer need a law to control our will and lives like children do. Now we become like mature adults who know the heart of their God and are controlled by His Spirit which when followed will not only fulfill, but also supersede the requirements of the law.

Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

And now, under this system of faith, under this new ministration, there is no difference between a Jew and a Greek, for all of us are one in Christ. In other words, under this new system of faith, under this new covenant and new ministration of the spirit, the wall of partition, that was separating the Jews and Gentiles, no longer exists. Now the gentiles do not need to be circumcised outwardly in order to be one with the Jews. No! This system of types and shadows has been done away with and now we are all one in Christ Jesus.

This verse confirms our understanding of these two systems which are divided by the cross. During the first system—which is referred to as: “*under the law*”, “*before faith came*”, “*under the schoolmaster*”, “*the ministration of condemnation*” or under the Old Covenant which existed before the cross—there was a big difference between a Jew and a Greek. For a Greek to become part of the commonwealth of Israel, he had to be circumcised and so on. But under the new system—which is referred to as “*after that faith is come*”, “*no longer under a schoolmaster*”, “*the ministration of the spirit*”—there is neither Jew nor Greek.

Galatians 3:29: “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

And if you are Christ’s, whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or not, according to the flesh, you are Abraham’s seed and heirs, according to the promise that was given to him. In other words, in Christ you receive this promise of eternal life that was given to Abraham—not by works, but by faith in Christ.

GALATIANS 4

In chapter 3 Paul established the following points:

1. The Old Covenant and the law given on Mount Sinai are not the promise by which we are to receive life and righteousness;

2. The law was to govern the lives of the people from Mount Sinai till the Coming of Christ.
3. After the system of faith has come, we are no longer under the law or under the school master.
4. Under the new system of faith there is neither Jew nor Greek, but all are heirs in Christ Jesus.

After making the above points, Paul continues his argument by using two analogies to further expand and clarify his point more:

1. The heir
2. Two sons

The first analogy:

“Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.” *Galatians 4:1-7*

Notice, Paul is talking about “*the heir*” in this example. According to the last verse of chapter 3, he is talking about the heir according to the promise. Now this heir, Paul says, “*though he be lord of all*”, or though he is the owner of the estate, he is not any better than a servant so long he is a child.

Why is that? Paul gives us the answer in verse 2. It is because he is “*under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.*” Keep in mind that Paul is using an analogy to teach something. His analogy is that as long as the heir is under the control of the tutors and governors, he is not any different than a servant. But notice what he adds “*until the time appointed of the father.*”

The heir was not to be a child controlled by the tutors and governors forever. No, he was to be like that until the time appointed of the father. Not until the heir learns something, or until he achieves something, or until he decides. No, it is until a certain time set by his father. It is a determined duration, or an allotted time.

Before we go any further, ask yourself the following question: according to the context and the flow of the letter, what is Paul referring to by saying “*tutors and governors*”?

You cannot escape the clarity and continuity of his argument. Just a few verses earlier he was equating the law with a schoolmaster which we saw means ‘a tutor or a guardian’. He was explaining how we are no longer under this schoolmaster, or we are no longer under this guardian or tutor which is the law. Now in the analogy he is using to further clarify his point. He says that the heir is like a servant as long as he is under tutors and governors.

There is no doubt that Paul was referring to the schoolmaster and hence to the law by saying “*tutors and governors*”. This is the only way one can understand this text if he is to divide the scriptures rightly.

“Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:” *Galatians 4:3*

After stating his analogy, he expounds on it and applies it to the Jews by saying “*we*”. Keep in mind, Paul was not writing his letter to you and me today, he was writing it to the Galatians who were being deceived by the Judaizers. The Judaizers were bringing the Galatians under the covenant of works, under the law. Therefore, Paul was trying to show them that this Old Covenant, the covenant of the law would only lead them to bondage.

Hence his analogy is that “*Even so*” (or ‘in like manner’, or ‘in the same way’), “*we*” (the Jews) “*when we were children*” (that is before the cross) “*were in bondage under the elements of the world*”. Let us take this phrase in two sections:

1. “... *were in bondage*”—the Jews under the Old Covenant were in bondage to laws and rules. The Old Covenant, as he says in his second analogy, only leads to bondage. Under the Old Covenant the

Jews were in slavery to the law. They were to obey and live. And this, of course, led them to even greater bondage because all have sinned.

2. "... *under the elements of the world*"—this cannot refer to anything else but the law, the entire system revealed on Mount Sinai, including the Ten Commandments. If we are to take the letter in its context, that is the only conclusion one can arrive to. "*Elements of the world*" hark back to the "*tutors and governors*" in verse 2 which harks back to the "*schoolmaster*" which harks back to "*the law*" that was given 430 years after the promise to Abraham. This is the essence of Paul's argument and analogy. That is why after stating that as long as the heir is a child, he is like a servant because he is under tutors and governors. He said "*even so*" (or in the same way), we (Jews) when we were children, we were in bondage to the tutors and governors (or to the law).

The problem people have is with the terminology used "*elements of the world*". Some would think that Paul cannot refer to that which is holy, just, and good as "*elements of the world*".

Here is what the Greek word (stoicheion) translated as "*elements*" mean:

Thayer Definition:

1. any first thing, from which the others belonging to some series or composite whole take their rise, an element, first principal
 1. a) the letters of the alphabet as the elements of speech, not however the written characters, but the spoken sounds
 1. b) the elements from which all things have come, the material causes of the universe
 1. c) the heavenly bodies, either as parts of the heavens or (as others think) because in them the elements of man, life and destiny were supposed to reside
 1. d) the elements, rudiments, primary and fundamental principles of any art, science, or discipline

As you can see, it can have various applications but one thing is common in all these applications. It consistently implies the meaning of "elementary, or basic, origin, or the first thing from which others rise" and this meaning can be applied to:

1. literal things referring to the basic elements from which the world was made (2 Peter 3:10, 12)
2. spiritual beings (Colossian 2:10)
3. rudiments of knowledge (Galatians 4:3, 9; Colossians 2:8, 20)

It is rather obvious that Paul's use of this word in Galatians is referring to something related to or linked with the law. Paul's use of this terminology while referring to the law is befitting his argument. His whole argument is to tell them that the law is not the way to salvation neither will it earn you eternal life. The only way to attain salvation and acceptance with God is through faith in Christ Jesus.

In this context and with this background Paul refers to the law as "*elements of the world*" meaning that the system of the law was the basic revelation of God's plan of salvation. It is the elementary way that God used to teach children the plan of salvation and to control them. It is not the end, neither is it the complete picture. It was full of shadows and types that pointed to a greater reality that was fulfilled, completed, and perfectly manifested through Christ. From Paul's perspective and in light of the cross and the new system of faith, the law was "*weak and beggarly*" (Galatians 4:9) as pertaining to salvation. It could not save, neither could it give life; hence to Paul—though it was holy, just, and good as pertaining to salvation and the inheritance of the promise—, it appeared childish. It could not accomplish, neither was it intended to accomplish God's will (Hebrews 9:9, 10:1, 7:19, Romans 8:3).

So Paul's argument so far is as follows:

'As long as the heir is a child, he is not any different than a servant because he is under the control of rulers and governors until the appointed time of the father. In the same way, when we (the Jews) were children (that is before the cross), we were controlled by laws which were the elementary instructions given by God to teach us about the plan of salvation and control our carnal nature'.

However, in the analogy given, Paul said the heir was to be under the tutors *until the time appointed of the father*. And that is exactly what he goes on to explain:

"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law," *Galatians 4:4*

“*When the fullness of the time was come*”—when the time that was appointed by the Heavenly Father was come (verse 2). (I believe this was prophesied in the 70 week prophecy of Daniel 9.)

“*God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law*”

Notice how Paul says that Christ was “*made of a woman*”. In other words, Christ—the Word of God—took upon Himself human flesh and became the Seed of Abraham. This harks back to the point of time he highlighted in Galatians 3:19 where he says “*till the Seed should come*”.

Notice the reoccurring time frame:

it [the law] was added ... till the seed should come Galatians 3:19

the law was our guardian until Christ came (Galatians 3:24 ESV)

is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father (Galatians 4:2)

under the elements of the world ... When the fullness of time was come [time appointed], God sent forth his son [coming of the seed] (Galatians 4:3, 4)

Paul’s point cannot and should not be missed. God’s people were placed under the jurisdiction or control of the law until the coming of Christ. Since then, we are not under the law; the law is no long our tutor and governor, rather we are under grace or under the system of faith.

Notice how Paul says that Christ was “*made under the law*”. Christ was born under the control or jurisdiction of the law; He was born under the Old Covenant. Jesus was the only Person who could live under that system and fulfill all the requirements of the law. He did no sin and knew no sin.

Galatians 4:5 “To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

So why was Jesus born under the law? “... *to redeem them that were under the law*”. Here Paul is carrying on with his argument against the Judaizers who were bringing the Galatians back under the law. He pointed that one of the reasons why Jesus became a human under the law was to buy out from slavery and bondage those who were under

“*tutors and governors*”, those who were stuck under the system of the law. Therefore, by going back under the law, by trying to earn your salvation by works, you are denying the work of Christ.

“... *that we might receive the adoption of sons*”—this is an interesting statement made by Paul. In here, he is talking about the Jews again by saying “we”; the Gentiles were never under the law. Only when the faith that was to be revealed came, only when the Jews accept Jesus as their Saviour would they receive the adoption of sons. This begs the question: What were they before?

If the Jews were to receive the adoption of sons after Jesus was made of a woman and redeemed them from being under the law, then what were they before? Weren't they sons?

As a nation, they were the child of God and were referred to as a “son” (Hosea 11:1). However, according to the context and the analogy Paul is using, the Jews were heirs, they were children, but they did not live as mature sons of God. The time appointed, during which they were to receive this adoption, was the coming of the Seed.

Galatians 4:6 “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”

Before I share my understating of this text, I want to remind you what was happening. The Galatians, Jews and Gentiles alike, accepted the gospel preached by Paul. They were set free from the bondage of the law (Jews) and the bondage of idolatry (Gentiles) in Christ Jesus. In Him, they received the adoption of sons; in Christ, they become the sons of God. However, something was happening. The Judaizers were bringing in a false gospel. You must be circumcised to be saved; you must keep the Law of Moses to be saved. They were bringing the church back into bondage to the law.

For a Jew, if you are not circumcised you are not considered Abraham's seed or an heir of God because, of course, God gave the circumcision as a sign to Abraham and all those who desired to belong to the people of God had to be circumcised. So in other words, the thinking that was creeping into the church was that unless you were circumcised, you were not the son of Abraham and hence not a son of God.

Paul is correcting the error; he is rebutting the Judaizers' argument. Keep in mind that Paul was a Hebrew, a Jew, a Pharisee and he knew how they thought and what they taught.

So he is telling the Galatians, "One of the reasons why Jesus came is to free us from the bondage and slavery under the law. Now being made free, we receive the adoption of sons." Concluding these thoughts, he anticipates the Judaizers' objection to be: "No, you will only receive the adoption of sons when you are circumcised." Knowing this, he records verse 6 saying,

"And because ye are sons" or because you have already received the adoptions of sons and are already made the sons of God, *"God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."* In other words, Paul was calling their remembrance to the fact that they already received the Spirit of God as evidence that their adoption as sons was not dependent on circumcision; hence, what the Judaizers were teaching was not correct.

I must emphasize Paul's words where he says *"God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts."* We looked at this in an earlier chapter, but it is important to understand that this divine-human spirit/life was not available before the cross (John 7:39). Yes, the divine spirit of Christ was in the prophets of old, and yes, the divine spirit was with David, but this spirit or life Paul is talking about in here is the life that Christ laid down in humanity. It is the divine-human life that was tempted and tried, that gained the victory and died, and that rose again. That same righteous, redeemed, victorious and perfect life of Christ that was lived and perfected during the incarnation is given to all those who believe on the Son. It is rather obvious that before Christ lived as a human, His divine-human life—which was perfected through the incarnation—was not available.

The best way I can harmonize how the spirit of Christ was with the prophets of old and yet still believe that this life was not given before Christ was glorified (John 7:39) is by saying that the life of Christ given after the cross is the same spirit that was given before but with many plusses. This same divine life, given before the cross lived through humanity, gained the victory over temptation, and was perfected through suffering (Hebrews 2:10, 5:9). This same life, Paul

says, God has given to you because you are already His sons. You do not need to be circumcised or to keep the Law of Moses in order to be adopted into the family of God. No. Through faith in Christ, you have already received this spirit that entitles you to call God “*Abba, Father*”.

Galatians 4:7 “Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

Paul concludes his analogy by telling the Galatians that they are no more servants, or under tutors and governors, or under the elements of the world, or under the Old Covenant. No. They are sons, full sons of God, already adopted in the heavenly family. And because they are sons, they are already heirs of God—not through the law, neither through the Old Covenant, but through Christ.

By saying “*thou art no more a servant, but a son*”, Paul was harking back to the analogy he gave in verse 1 and 2. A servant is the one who is under the law; a son is the one who is not under the law. Please keep in mind that the argument is not whether a Christian is to keep the law or not. This is not the point, neither has it anything to do with the problem at Galatia. The issue and the argument is about the ministration of the law versus the ministration of the spirit. It is being under the law versus under grace.

Therefore, Paul’s first analogy teaches that being under the law, or looking to the law for salvation, or being under the Old Covenant and controlled by the law, is a form of slavery. It is not the relationship that God wants to have with us today. And it also teaches us that the coming of Jesus was the appointed time of the Father when the heir was no longer to be under tutors and governors (the law), but was to receive the spirit of His Son, or the victorious life of Christ, and was to be governed by this Spirit. It is simply a continuation of the main point of his letter.

After showing the difference between a child and a mature son, and then applying it to the Galatians (by telling them that they are not servants, but sons already adopted in the family of God), he goes on to say:

“Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that ye have

known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain." *Galatians 4:8-11*

What was Paul talking about in here? Let us take it one verse at a time:

Galatians 4:8 "Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods."

It is rather obvious that Paul was talking to the gentile Galatians who were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and without God in this world (Ephesians 2:12). Different people interpret this text in different ways, but if we keep Paul's theme of the letter in mind and go with the flow of thought, we can only reach one understanding.

Again, the problem in Galatia was not that the people were going into idolatry or living in sin; no, it was that they were going into legalism and trying to earn their salvation by works. After Paul does his best in chapter 3 to undo the falsehood that has been preached and lead his readers to the truth about righteousness by faith, he launches into the analogy we saw above about the heir to strengthen his point and give his readers a clearer understanding. It is only logical to believe that after accomplishing this, he will turn the attention of his readers back to their own problem.

"... when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods." He is referring the Gentiles to their condition before they accepted the Messiah. He tells them that before they accepted God, they willingly did service, or were willingly in bondage to idols.

Galatians 4:9 "But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?"

But now, after that you have accepted God in your lives and became Christians,

“how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?”

Question: Were these people turning back into idolatry? Was this the problem in Galatia? Were these people, who were trying to do all they could (circumcision and keeping the law of Moses), desiring (choosing, preferring, wishing, hoping, wanting) to worship idols again?

Remember, their problem did not come from their own minds; they were being deceived by Judaizers who were known to be a legalistic sect, a group of people who were sticklers to the Law of Moses that speaks strongly against idol worship. Do you think that these sticklers to the law, these people who were advocating and stressing and teaching the keeping of the law as a way of salvation, would teach the gentiles to worship idols?

Even common sense forbids us to believe such things! Of course idol worship was not the problem in Galatia. The Galatian Christians did not desire to worship idols, neither did they desire to be under the condemnation of the law. The problem in that church was: acceptance with God by faith or by works.

With this in mind, the question we have to answer is: what did Paul mean by *“how turn ye **again**”* and *“whereunto ye desire **again**”*. The word *“again”* is what led me in the past and still leads many people to believe that these Galatians must have been going back to idol worship because that is what they were doing in the past; they must be going back to it because Paul said that they were doing it again.

However, after studying the letter contextually, I discovered that interpreting the text this way does not harmonize with the content of the letter and does not flow with its context, neither does it correctly reflect the problem Paul was dealing with. Upon a reexamination of the letter, I have come to understand that Paul’s use of the word *“again”* is very befitting of the context, but my past understanding or application of the word was to the wrong thing.

Here are the two ways to understand the term *again*:

1. They were turning again to what they did before, namely idolatry.

2. They were turning again to the condition they were in before accepting Christ namely, slavery and bondage.

In my understanding, the second application harmonizes perfectly with the rest of the letter and especially with the flow of thought that Paul was sharing with his readers. The context of the letter and especially of this chapter turns the attention of the reader to the topic of slavery and bondage more than to idolatry. That is Paul's point and argument from the beginning of the chapter. That was his main point in the analogy he just finished.

Notice the focus on the topic of slavery and bondage in chapter 4:

In verse 1 he says “*Servants*”.

In verse 2 he says “*under tutors and governors*”.

In verse 3 he says “*in bondage under the elements of the world*”.

In verse 4 he says “*under the law*”.

In verse 5 he says “*under the law*”.

In verse 7 he says “*no more a servant*”.

In verse 8 he says “*ye did service*” or *were servants*”.

It is rather obvious that Paul's focus is on slavery and bondage, not on idolatry. Therefore, here is his argument as I see it in verses 7—9. He tells them:

“You are not servants in bondage to the law; you are already sons possessing the spirit/life of God's own Son. I do not understand, how could it be that before you accepted God you were servants or in bondage to things that are no gods, to idols and foolish things. But now, after that you have been set free from your bondage to idols by receiving the life of Jesus, how come you are going back again to bondage? You are doing the same mistake by turning “to the weak and beggarly elements” (the law) to which you again desire to place yourself in bondage.”

The word “*again*” is referring to the condition of bondage and slavery which in the past was to idols, but now is to the law. In either case, they are servants and not free sons.

“the weak and beggarly elements”

The objection might be raised that Paul cannot refer to the law as weak and beggarly elements. However, he did. The law “*was weak through the flesh*” (Romans 8:3) in that it could not save anyone, and it was beggarly or poor in that it could not give life (Galatians 3:21). While talking about the law, especially the one relating to the Levitical priesthood, Paul said that it was weak, unprofitable, and could make nothing perfect (Hebrews 7:18, 19). The law is good if used lawfully (1 Timothy 1:8), but when it comes to the unlawful use of the law as means of salvation and acceptance with God, the law is definitely weak, beggarly, and unprofitable.

Moreover, the context of the letter forces us to understand the term “*weak and beggarly elements*” to be referring to the law. The term “*weak and beggarly*” in verse 9 harks back to “*elements of the world*” in verse 3, which harks back to “*tutors and governors*” in verse 2, which harks back to “*schoolmaster*” in chapter 3:25, which harks back to “*the law*” in 3:24, which harks back to the law given 430 years after the promise in chapter 3:17.

It is rather obvious that these people were desiring to be in bondage to the law, or desiring to seek salvation by their works and adherence to the law. These Christian gentiles who had been freed from bondage to idols were committing the same mistake by seeking another form of bondage. When they were idolaters, they were in bondage to a system that taught them salvation by works. All idol worshippers seek salvation by works. They must please their gods by offering sacrifices or placing their idols in their homes and so on. Yes, it was idolatry, but it was a system that sought salvation by works. And now after they had been set free by the gospel, after they had accepted salvation by faith in Christ Jesus and not by works, they were about to accept a system which taught salvation by works. Yes, it was a Biblical system and a covenant with God, but it was a system that could not save anyone. In light of the New Covenant and the new system of faith, the old system became a system of bondage and slavery to the law.

By accepting this system, and seeking salvation in that way, they were starting to keep the Law of Moses, which Paul would have taught them not to observe (Acts 15:5, 19; 21:23-25). Hence his words:

“Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.” *Galatians 4:10, 11*

“... *days*” is referring to the “holy convocations” that were set in Leviticus 23 such as the 1st and 7th day of the feast of unleavened bread and the 1st and 8th day of the feast of tabernacles and so on.

“... *months*” is referring to the new moons.

“... *times*” or “a measure of time” is referring to the set feasts which illustrated the complete plan of salvation in one Jewish year.

“... *years*”—this refers to the sabbatical year and the Jubilee year.

It is rather obvious that these Christian Galatians had been deceived by the Judaizers whose mission in life had been to compel the gentile converts to be circumcised (Galatians 6: 12, 13) and keep the Law of Moses of which these “*days, and months, and times, and years*” were a part. They believed that the Gentile converts ought to enter the plan of salvation in the same way they did, by observing all the statutes, laws and commandments of which the appointed times mentioned above were a part.

A note must be said in here in regards to the Sabbath, the 7th day of the week. Paul’s argument and comparison in this letter was between the systems established on Mount Sinai versus the Everlasting Gospel or the promise given to Abraham. The Sabbath day, though stated in the Ten Commandments and playing an important part in the Old Covenant as a sign between the Israelites and God, was established before sin existed. Paul’s argument cannot be used to nullify Sabbath observance because the Sabbath existed before the law was added on Mount Sinai. The Sabbath was set apart and made holy before the Old Covenant existed. Keeping the Sabbath does not and cannot enslave its observer unless of course it is observed as a means of salvation. Insisting that keeping the Sabbath is a form of bondage suggests that God Himself entered into this bondage when He rested on the Sabbath day and blessed it as we are told in Genesis 2:2, 3.

I don’t see Paul’s argument including the Sabbath because he was addressing something they had accepted and began to practice after

his departure not while he was with them. That is why he was pointing to their keeping of “*days, and months, and times, and years*” as a negative thing. Why? Because this was one of the manifestations of the false theology they had recently accepted, hence, it was not a practice they had while Paul was with them.

Think about it, if the Galatians were keeping these “*days, and months, and times, and years*” while Paul was with them, then why would he point to them now as a form of slavery and bondage if he himself told them to keep them. This cannot be. The Galatians learnt the real gospel from Paul, but now they are learning something false from the Judaizers. Pauls’ highlighting and pointing out their keeping of these days as a form of bondage and slavery is an undisputable evidence that these days were not a part of the gospel he taught them.

What about keeping the feasts today? Is it alright to keep the feasts if we do not depend on them for salvation?

This is the position of some Christians today. From my personal experience with feast keepers, I have come to understand that usually feast-keeping is reached by three methods of thinking,

1. There are those who believe the feasts are still a requirement of God that must be obeyed. This reasoning is reached by first believing that all the statutes are still as valid and binding today as they were under the Mosaic Dispensation. And since the feasts are a part of the statutes, it logically follows that we must keep them. Neglecting to do so is considered a sin. This belief is due to misunderstanding the subject in chapter 4 “The Four dispensations”, and in chapter 5 “The Mosaic Covenant”.

As I mentioned earlier, the feasts were introduced at the time of the Exodus unlike the Sabbath, which was introduced at creation. The feasts did not exist prior to the Exodus. Their purpose was to teach the Israelites about the Messiah who was to come. Once the Messiah came and fulfilled them, there is no longer a need to observe the shadows that only served as a teaching tool about the Messiah’s work. Believing that feast-keeping is a requirement, places the believer in a very dangerous position where one shifts his focus from Christ to the law of do’s and don’ts.

2. The other reason used for keeping the feasts is that there is a blessing in them. This belief teaches that we do not keep the feasts as a means of salvation. We simply keep them because there is a blessing in doing so, and we need all the blessings we can get. Why not spend more time with God?

Again, this belief is reached by a misunderstanding of the information in chapter 2, "*The everlasting Gospel*". As I mentioned earlier, we are complete in Christ, all the blessings we can receive are found in Him. Keeping the feasts in order to receive a blessing suggests that the believer is not complete in Christ.

Moreover, as far as the Bible reveals, God did not put a special blessing upon the feast days *as He did upon the Sabbath* (Genesis 2:3). Therefore, to claim that there is a special blessing in keeping the feasts on a specific day is neither Biblical nor logical. The blessing comes from the fellowship and time spent with God, which could be done on any other season other than on the "feasts".

3. The third belief is that we keep the feasts for an educational reason. The writer by no means claims to know what is in the believers' hearts, so no judgment will be passed upon this reason. However, the writer is left wondering why keep them every year if it is *only* for an educational reason? Why not learn the lessons from one or two cycles and then move on?

As far as I can gather from Paul's argument in Galatians 4, he regarded keeping the feasts as an evidence of their departure from the gospel. Are feast-keepers in our day following in the Galatian's footsteps? Would Paul say the same thing to the feast-keeper today, as he said to those at his day?

I believe Christians have no reason to be involved with feast-keeping, tassel-wearing, and beard-growing. At best, they are to be held in the same light as circumcision. As a requirement it has been done away with. It bears no spiritual meaning whatsoever. However, no one can condemn a person who circumcises his newborn son for some reason other than a spiritual one.

Having said this, there is a difference between circumcision and feast-keeping. Feast-keeping requires determining the exact day the feasts begin; on the new moon, or on the harvest and so on. This position must be accompanied with the belief that it is a requirement, and it must be kept on a specific day because the blessing is on that specific day and not another. If we miss the right day, we miss the blessing. If that is not the case, then why try to determine the exact time? And if there is no need to determine the exact time, then what is the difference between this specific gathering and another one on any other random time?

Camp meetings, during which the believer can gather with other believers and enjoy the fellowship, can be held at any random time throughout the year. If the blessing is truly found only in the gathering, fellowship and time spent with God, then the feasts issue becomes totally irrelevant.

As far as I can conclude, it is groundless to keep the feasts without first internally believing that it is a requirement or that there is a blessing on those specific days, both of which are wrong positions. Holding to any of these two beliefs places the believer in the same position as the Galatians after they departed from the gospel. It places the believer under the schoolmaster, or under the law.

That is why I do not keep the feasts for I believe that feast-keeping can be a dangerous sign of a deep misunderstanding of the gospel. I advise all feast-keeping readers to re-examine their position and ask themselves the question, 'why do I keep the feasts?' If your answer is 'because it is a requirement, or because there is a blessing in it', then you have committed the same mistake as the Galatians, and "*Christ shall profit you nothing*" (Galatians 5:2).

Paul took the Galatian's feast-keeping as evidence of their departure from the gospel and considered their conduct as a serious threat to his work. His words to them were,

"I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain." *Galatians 4:11*

The Galatian's behavior and reaction to the Judaizers worried Paul and made him afraid of them. Their influence could spread and affect the other churches around them. The gospel, which Paul had dedicated his life to preaching, was being threatened by the conduct of the Galatians. Paul understood that there was no room for legalism in the real gospel. If these Galatians were not corrected and set straight, their influence would spread, and Paul's labor among them would have been in vain because he labored to set them free from the bondage and slavery of idolatry. Now he finds them going again into another form of bondage; bondage to the law.

So it is with feast-keeping Christians today. Every person who keeps the feasts is saying to others that feast-keeping is a necessity. The fact is that people learn from our example and it really does not make much sense to say, "I keep the feasts, but I don't really believe it is necessary." Paul says that we Christians, are a letter "*known and read of all men*" (2 Corinthians 3:2). Most people who see our actions will rightly conclude that we believe the practice to be a necessary part of the Christian experience. Hence, just as in the days of Paul, this conduct is threatening the real gospel today.

After making these points, Paul changes his tone in verse 12-20 and begins to appeal to them, reminding them of their kindness to him when he was with them and how they accepted him as an angel of God. Then he tells them that the Judaizers' interest in them is not of good motives, "They want to isolate you from me and from the gospel I have preached to you in order that you might follow them." He tells them how he is striving again and is willing to go through heart pain to win them back to the gospel so Christ could be formed in them again.

"My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you," *Galatians 4:19*

Legalism or seeking salvation through the law is a very serious threat to one's salvation. When Paul brought the gospel to Galatia, those who accepted it were adopted into the family of God. They received the life of Christ and had Christ formed in them (Galatians 4:6, 7). But now, because of legalism that was brought in by the Judaizers, these Galatian Christians had lost Christ and accepted another gos-

pel. Christ was replaced with the law. Instead of looking to Christ for salvation, they looked to the law for salvation. Instead of desiring to be under Christ they desired to be under the law. And hence, the law given by God became the obstacle between them and God.

Paul recognized this danger and hence his marvelous attempt in this letter is to set the gospel straight in their minds, and to lead them back to Christ. To him it was as if he had to start all over again to win them back to Christ. Thus his words “*I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you*”. Legalism is a hideous deception that leads to destruction.

After this, Paul picks up on the thought he mentioned in verse 9 where he said “*how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, wherunto ye desire again to be in bondage?*”

By saying:

Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? *Galatians 4:21*

“... *desire to be under the law*”—our definition of the term “*under the law*” is put to the test in this verse. If it means “under the condemnation of the law”, then we are saying that these Christians desired to be condemned by the law of God; in other words, they desired to die. This was one of the verses that made me reconsider my understanding of the term “*under the law*”. I once believed that “*under the law*” meant “under the condemnation of the law”. However, with that definition I had to understand this text to mean that the Galatian Christians desired to be condemned by the law. This of course, did not make sense to me, neither did it sound logical. No one desires to be condemned by any law, let alone the law of his God. This predicament led me to restudy the letter and reach my current understanding. Of course, the problem at the Galatian church was not idol worship or condemnation by the law; it was acceptance by God through the works of the law versus faith.

However, if the definition of the term “*under the law*” means “under law as a way of salvation” or “under the Old Covenant” then this verse will make perfect sense and will harmonize with the rest of the chapter. Paul was picking up the thought he left in verse 9 where he was

amazed how these Christians desired to be in bondage to a system of law, and now he is challenging their thinking and understanding of the Scripture by appealing to what the law says. He tells them “look, you who desire to be controlled by the law and earn your salvation by the works of the law, haven’t you read what the law says?”

“For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman.” *Galatians 4:22*

Paul’s words in here lead to a better understanding of his use of the term “*law*”. By “*law*” he did not simply mean the moral or ceremonial law, no, he meant all the five books of Moses which the Jews call the Pentateuch. That is why when he appealed to what “*the law*” stated, he did not quote from the actual law, but from the stories found in Genesis. His appeal or challenge to them makes up the second analogy in this chapter which begins with this verse.

“For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.” *Galatians 4:22-23*

God promised Abraham a seed. It was a promise, not an agreement, and it was God’s part to fulfill His promise; it was His responsibility. However, due to lack of faith, Abraham and Sarah decided to take the matter in their own hands and bring about a son through their own devising and efforts. He was a son after the flesh. In other words, he was a son born by man’s effort not by God’s promise. The Lord promised it, but because He had taken too long, Abraham and Sarah decided that what the Lord has promised, WE WILL DO. This is the kind of attitude or thinking they had.

Paul uses this story and highlights the fact that Agar, the mother of Ishmael, was a slave, a servant, or in bondage, and the son that was born of her was born after the flesh or after man’s devising. Sarah on the other hand, was a free woman, she was not in bondage to anyone, and the son born of her was born by promise not by man’s effort. It was God’s doing not man’s doing.

“Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.” *Galatians 4:24*

He says that the story found or recorded in “*the law*” is an allegory or a symbol of the two covenants. One of them was established on Mount Sinai and is typified by Agar. It is a covenant that bears children to bondage. The term translated as “*gendereth*” entails the meaning of being born or converted. In other words, the Old Covenant established on Mount Sinai inevitably leads, gives birth to, or converts to slaves and puts them in bondage to the law.

“For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.” *Galatians 4:25*

He again says that this Agar, the servant, is the parallel or symbol to the covenant made on Mount Sinai.

“... *answereth to Jerusalem*” the marginal reading is a clearer translation. It says “*is in the same rank with*”. In other words, Paul was saying that Agar the servant, the one who was controlled by her master, is a symbol of the Old Covenant which places men in bondage and makes them servants to the law by which they are controlled. Not only that, but Agar is also in the same position or rank as Jerusalem “*now is*” (at his day), in bondage to the Romans and controlled by their rules and laws.

Of course, his application to Jerusalem’s bondage is not only the physical bondage of the Romans. Jerusalem, or Israel as a nation, was still in spiritual bondage because they rejected the only way to salvation, Jesus Christ. They were still choosing to live under the Old Covenant and earn their salvation by works. Hence, Jerusalem and her children (all the Jewish people) were still in bondage. In all these three types, (Agar, the Old Covenant, and Jerusalem), freedom does not exist and bondage is manifested.

“But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.” *Galatians 4:26*

The other side of his analogy is the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem that will descend from heaven. His use of the heavenly Jerusalem proves to us what he meant by using the earthly Jerusalem. It is obvious that the heavenly city is not our literal mother. He is rather using the heavenly Jerusalem in comparison with the earthly Jerusalem. The earthly one represents Agar and the nation of Israel, the Jews, while the heavenly city represents Sarah and the Christian church, or those who accepted Jesus (compare Revelation 21:2; 21:9,10 where the city is called the bride of Christ and 2 Corinthians 11:2 where we, the church is called the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:23-33; Revelation 19:7).

It is rather obvious that Paul was making a clear distinction between Judaism or Israel as a nation and Christianity or the church. The first one was in bondage while the other is free. If you are born of a servant, you are a servant, but if you are born of a free woman, you are free. This is his analogy.

“For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.” *Galatians 4:27*

Paul in here is quoting from Isaiah 54. I believe he is linking it with the analogy he is giving. Sarah was barren while Hagar was not. Sarah was the one who could not bear children and hence was desolate or lonely. Paul’s use of this verse carries the message that Sarah should rejoice because she has many more children than Hagar. In other words, because in the New Covenant the gospel was given to the Gentiles, who are much more than the Jews in number, Sarah, who illustrates the New Covenant should rejoice.

“Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.”
Galatians 4:28

Paul tells us that we, the Christians, are like Isaac the children of promise and hence not of works. If you remember in the beginning of his analogy we saw how he was comparing the bondswoman with the free, and hence the works of the flesh or man’s devising versus the promise of God or God’s devising. Therefore, since Isaac is the son of Sarah—who represents the New Covenant—, Paul was saying that we

are the children of the New Covenant or under the New Covenant, not under the Old Covenant and the law.

“But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.” *Galatians 4:29*

Just like Ishmael persecuted and teased Isaac, so the children of the Old Covenant, the Judaizers (who want to bring you under the law and want you to seek salvation by the works of the law) are persecuting us the Christians who are born after the spirit and have received the spirit of the Son.

“Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.” *Galatians 4:30*

Paul concludes his analogy by saying “*Cast out the bondwoman and her son*”. Again, the bondwoman was a symbol of the Old Covenant. Therefore, Paul’s advice to the Galatians was to cast out the Old Covenant mentality, that sought salvation by works. He was telling them to stop trying to earn their salvation by works. Not only that, but he says to cast her out with her son. I see Paul in here telling the Galatians to reject the Judaizers, the sons of the Old Covenant, and not to listen to them anymore because neither them, nor any other person will inherit eternal life by obedience to the law. Salvation is a promise from God to man just like Isaac was a promise from God to Abraham. If we are to seek salvation by works, we will make the same mistake Abraham did when he and Sarah sought to fulfill God’s promise by their own efforts.

“So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.” *Galatians 4:31*

The conclusion of the analogy is that we are not the children of the Old Covenant, neither are we the children of bondage, but rather the children of the New Covenant. The last verse in this analogy carries the same meaning as the last verse in the first analogy where he says “*Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*” *Galatians 4:7*

“we are not children of the bondwoman” ↔ “thou art no more a servant”
“but of the free” ↔ “but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

Paul gave both analogies to teach the same lesson. We are not under the Old Covenant, nor are we under the law or in bondage to the law. We are the children of God, not servants. Moreover, because we are sons and daughters of God, we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. We have already received the spirit of His Son into our hearts. Both analogies contrast the Old Covenant versus the New Covenant.

Also notice Paul’s question in verse 21 and his answer in the verses that followed: *“tell me ye that desire to be under the law do ye not hear what the law says”*. The example he gives or the argument he presents shows that he did not mean “under the condemnation of the law” by saying *“under the law”*.

If that was what he meant then his question would have been like this: ‘tell me ye that desire to be condemned by the law (or that desire to sin), do you not know what the law says?’ This question demands an answer that deals with sin since it is the main point of the question. He would have showed them what the law says about sin or something of that sort. Nevertheless, we obviously see that sin was not the issue he dealt with when he gave the answer.

The fact that the answer to his question was dealing with the difference between the Old and New Covenant—between bondage to the law versus freedom in Christ—, tells us that his question had to do with the same topic. This to me confirms my understanding that “under the law” means “under the Old Covenant, or under the system of the law, or under the law as a way of salvation.”

In Galatians 3 & 4 Paul gives one of his best arguments or Bible study to show that we are no longer under the dominion or jurisdiction of the law—that the law is no longer to control our lives; that we are not servants but sons. He makes it very clear that the coming of Jesus, His death, and resurrection marked the timing when the ministration changed from the law to the Spirit. It also shows that salvation is by faith in Christ Jesus, not by works and that whosoever seeks salvation by works is going back under the Old Covenant and is departing from

faith. Salvation is a promise given by God to us; it is not an agreement, it is a promise. Just like Isaac and Ishmael: one is by promise, the other is by works.

Which one are you living under?

GALATIANS 5

After giving his best shot in chapter 3 and then illustrating it to his readers twice in chapter 4, Paul goes back to the argument of the Judaizers and to the reason that brought about this letter. Due to time and space I will not go through the rest of the letter, but will comment on the first 4 verses of chapter 5:

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”

Galatians 5:1

He says, because of all the evidence I have given you, hold to and enjoy this liberty from the bondage of the law that Christ has provided for us, and do not get stuck again with the yoke of bondage or under the law. Do not go back to bondage.

Some have interpreted “*yoke of bondage*” to mean ‘bondage to sin’. But this cannot and does not fit the context of the letter or even the immediate context. Notice what his next verse is:

“Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.” *Galatians 5:2*

Listen, I, Paul, the one who taught you the gospel and showed you the way to Christ, am telling you that if you seek salvation by works, if you believe such theology as ‘I must be circumcised to be saved’, then Christ is of no use to you. Why? Because you become under the old covenant, under the law, and just like Ishmael and Agar you will be cast out. Again, we can see very clearly how Paul links the yoke of bondage to the theology that I must be circumcised to be saved.

“For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.” *Galatians 5:3*

I am telling you again, if you seek salvation by works, or if you adopt the theory that you must be circumcised to be saved, then you are under the law and you must fulfill or do the whole law in order to earn eternal life. This is the same point he made in chapter 3:10.

“Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.” *Galatians 5:4*

And if that is the case, then Christ is not of any help to you because you are seeking to receive the promise by works instead of by faith. Whosoever seeks justification by the law, or seeks to be under the law, is fallen from grace. It cannot get any more serious than this. It is rather obvious from the above verses that the yoke of bondage Paul was talking about is not the bondage of sin, rather it is the bondage of the law or being under the law.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” *Ephesians 2:8, 9*

Salvation is by faith alone. This has been Paul’s focus and theme throughout all his letters, especially his letter to the Galatian church. He wrote, preached, travelled and agonized to bring this truth of the gospel to light.

His greatest opposers were the Judaizers of his day who insisted that Gentile converts were to enter the plan of salvation in the same way the Jews were taught to enter it. “*Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.*” *Acts 15:1*

Paul’s way of undoing their influence was to show that the Old Covenant ended at the cross, and hence the role of the law has changed. It is no longer to be the “*schoolmaster*” of the people as it was before the cross. God’s people are no longer to be “*kept under the law*” they are to be “*kept by the power of God through faith ...*” *1 Peter 1:5*

According to the Scriptures, “*the power of God*” is Christ and His gospel (Romans 1:16, 1 Corinthians 1:24). In other words, Peter wrote that we are ‘*kept*’ (protected, guarded and controlled) by Christ through faith’. This harmonizes perfectly with what Paul said in Galatians 3:27. The reason we are no longer under a schoolmaster is because we “*have put on Christ*”.

Christ and Christ alone is to be our Ruler. He is to be the motive and source of our actions and service. In the days of Paul, the law, which God gave to bless the people, became the obstacle between them and God. Israel did not attain to the law of righteousness because they sought it not by faith, but by the works of the law. (Romans 9: 30-32).

This has been and still is a problem plaguing God's people. Though no one today says we must be circumcised to be saved, the same mindset that led the Judaizers back then to this conclusion is leading many Christians today to similar conclusions. Laws and rules are still taking the place of Christ in many a heart.

Today, this mindset is being manifested in various ways. Some still insist, we are to enter the plan of salvation in the same way Israel did before the cross. Those things which were but a shadow of the reality fulfilled in Christ, are brought to light as a requirement of salvation. Feast-keeping, tassel and beard-wearing is an example of those shadows which have been brought by some as a *requirement of salvation*.

Another way the Old Covenant mindset is being manifested is in the way Christians relate to laws and rules. For many, the rules and laws have hindered their growth in Christ. I can testify to that from a personal experience.

When I first became a Christian, I was so excited to read the Bible. I wanted to learn more; I wanted to know more about God and have a closer relationship with Him. I enjoyed reading the Bible and praying. At that time I had a job where I would leave home at 6 am. So I would happily and excitedly wake up at 4:30 or 5 am to have enough time to read my Bible and pray. I looked forward to it with all my heart.

As the days went by and my Christian circle of friends widened, I mingled with many who would give good counsel. They would encourage me to have my quiet time every morning, which was an excellent advice. But here is where the problem began. Quiet time became a law for me; it became 'a must' that I had to do every morning.

'Quiet time, prayer time, Sabbath-keeping ... We can do this, but shouldn't do that on the Sabbath' and so on. All these things were

good and true, but I heard these things so much that my focus shifted from Christ to the law of do's and don'ts. Before long, quiet time and Sabbath keeping became a burden.

Why was that? Why was it not a burden at first, but after I was taught the right thing, it became a burden? At first, it was a delight, but later it became a burden!

Was it wrong to have quiet time, prayer time and to keep the Sabbath? Absolutely not. Then why the change, where does the problem lie? It lies in the ministration of the law. My problem was that I came under the law, under the dominion and jurisdiction of the law. I did what I did because *the law said so*, not because it was a part of my renewed nature. My mindset brought me under the Schoolmaster.

Though most Christians today might not have the same issues the Galatians had, such as circumcision and keeping the Law of Moses, the principle set forth in Paul's letter still stands today. Christians ought not to relate to God through laws and rules. Laws must not motivate our service to God.

By laws—I am not only referring to the commandments and statutes, I am referring to any work, rule or law we deem necessary for salvation other than faith in Christ, that is anything we put between us and Christ.

Salvation is by grace through Faith. Christianity is not a works-based religion, it is a *Life*-based religion. It is based on the Life of Christ. The only requirement we must meet, the only thing one ought to deem essential for salvation is obtaining the Life of the Author of life. It is believing on the One whom the Father has sent (John 6:29).

Paul's reason and defense for teaching that we are not under a Schoolmaster, and no longer slaves, but sons, full grown sons of God, is the fact that we "*have put on Christ*" (Galatians 3:27). Moreover, because we have put on Christ, we ought to let Christ live His life in us, which will fulfill the righteousness of God. For we are made the righteousness of God *in Christ* (2 Corinthians 5:21). This divine life will fulfill the righteousness of God without the law, yet witnessed by the law and the prophets (Romans 3: 20-22).

The revealing question that needs to be asked by every Christian is, 'Why do I do what I do?' Is it because the law says so, or because it is a part of my renewed nature? The answer to this question will reveal to you under which ministration you are living. It will reveal whether you relate to God through laws and rules, or through Christ.

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