

GALATIANS - A TEACHER'S GUIDE

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
 - b. Why did He record it for our study?
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1. What picture of God would you have if all you had was the book of Galatians? Or only the writings of Paul? What do we know about the churches of Galatia? What other New Testament books were written about the same time? What other book seems to talk about many of the same subjects? What was happening in Galatia that led to the writing of this book? How do you suppose Paul found out about it?

Certain Gallic tribes invaded Asia Minor (what we now call Turkey) around 278 B.C. Gallo-graeci, contracted into Galati—another form of the name Celts—were Gauls in origin who overran Asia Minor after they had pillaged Delphi about 280 B.C. At last, they permanently settled in the central parts of Asia Minor which was thence called Gallo-graecia or Galatia. The Gallic tribes finally settled in the central and northern part of Asia Minor, which later became known as the Roman province of Galatia (the land of the Gauls) because of these early European invaders. Some people think this letter was addressed to the churches in the northern part of that territory, while others think the letter was sent to the southern cities such as Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Paul and his associates were probably the first Christians to evangelize all of those areas. Before the Gauls entered the area, it was inhabited by **Phrygians** who had invaded from the north about one thousand years earlier and conquered a portion of the kingdom of the **Hittites** who had been there before.

Considering all Luke and Paul said about the Galatian churches, it is likely this book was written to a group of churches in northern Galatia just along the southern border of Bithynia. The book was written in A.D. 58 near the end of Paul's third missionary journey from the city of Corinth. The book of Romans was written about the same time and covers some of the same material.

It appears some "Judaizing" Christians were going along after Paul had left these churches, trying to convince these new Christians they must follow all the customs and ceremonies of the Jews, especially circumcision, before they could be considered true Christians. After Paul had worked so hard to make it clear to the new believers that becoming a Jew was not necessary, they were becoming confused. Fortunately for us, someone apparently traveled to Corinth and informed Paul of what was happening. He may even have heard about it as he journeyed from Ephesus to Corinth on his third missionary journey.

Paul certainly felt very strongly about his understanding of the gospel and the freedom it gave him and his Gentile converts. Having been a very strict, and, no doubt, legalistic Pharisee, Paul understood well the hazards of that kind of religion. He had recently come from the Jerusalem conference in A.D. 49 (see Acts 15) where the Gentiles were specifically told they did not need to be Jews or to follow all the Jewish traditions before they could become Christians. To Paul, going back to that old way was equal to rejecting the gospel he had been preaching and which he had worked so hard to promote.

Authorship: While critics would deny that Paul is the author of almost every one of his other letters, virtually everyone agrees that Galatians was written by him.

Early extra-biblical sources attribute Galatians to Paul:

His authorship is also upheld by the unanimous testimony of the ancient Church: compare Irenaeus [*Against Heresies*, 3, 7, 2] (Gal. 3:19); Polycarp [*Epistle to the Philipians*, 3] quotes Gal. 4:26; 6:7; Justin Martyr, or whoever [Tatian] wrote the *Discourse to the Greeks*, alludes to Gal. 4:12; 5:20. (*A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments - Introduction to Galatians* by A. R. Faussett)

Galatians

When men and women get their hands on religion, one of the first things they often do is turn it into an instrument for controlling others, either putting or keeping them “in their place.” The history of such religious manipulation and coercion is long and tedious. It is little wonder that people who have only known religion on such terms experience release or escape from it as freedom. The problem is that the freedom turns out to be short-lived.

Paul of Tarsus was doing his diligent best to add yet another chapter to this dreary history when he was converted by Jesus to something radically and entirely different—a free life in God. Through Jesus, Paul learned that God was not an impersonal force to be used to make people behave in certain prescribed ways, but a personal Savior who set us free to live a free life. God did not coerce us from without, but set us free from within.

It was a glorious experience, and Paul set off telling others, introducing and inviting everyone he met into this free life. In his early travels he founded a series of churches in the Roman province of Galatia. A few years later Paul learned that religious leaders of the old school had come into those churches, called his views and authority into question, and were reintroducing the old ways, herding all these freedom-loving Christians back into the corral of religious rules and regulations.

Paul was, of course, furious. He was furious with the old guard for coming in with their strong-arm religious tactics and intimidating the Christians into giving up their free life in Jesus. But he was also furious with the Christians for caving in to the intimidation.

His letter to the Galatian churches helps them, and us, recover the original freedom. It also gives direction in the nature of God’s gift of freedom—most necessary guidance, for freedom is a delicate and subtle gift, easily perverted and often squandered. (*The Message - Introduction to Galatians*)

2. Do you think the false teachers whom Paul referred to (Galatians 1:7; 3:1; 4:17; 5:7,12) knew Paul personally? Where do you think they came from? (Acts 15:5) What kind of people were they? What do you think was attractive about what they were preaching? Why would anybody want to return to the legalistic and ceremonial requirements of the Jews? What were those false teachers saying about Paul and about what it meant to be a Christian?

It is quite likely that some of those Judaizers were the same people who had stirred up a similar controversy in Paul’s home church in Antioch which led to the Jerusalem council. It is also very likely they attended that meeting to contend for their views. Thus, it is likely that Paul knew them well. They were probably very much like Paul, perhaps even former

Pharisees who, unlike Paul, still believed very strongly that the old Jewish traditions were valuable and necessary if one wanted to be a good Christian! No doubt, they called Paul a “liberal” and a “heretic” for leaving the “old landmarks” they had all believed in at one time.

The fact that Paul had to spend about the first third of Galatians establishing his own right to preach and teach the gospel suggests these Judaizers knew him and were claiming that since he was not one of the disciples, his “gospel” was not as valid as that of the immediate associates of Jesus. No doubt, they claimed they were bringing the true gospel from men like James (Jesus’ brother) and Peter. Paul must have believed it was necessary to establish he was on a par with those other “apostles” and his authority was no less than theirs!

3. How could Paul be so confident about his version of the gospel that he could say the following?

We have said it before, and now I say it again: if anyone preaches to you a gospel that is different from the one you accepted, may he be condemned to hell! (Galatians 1:9, *GNB*)

Is it possible for us today to be that confident about our understanding of the gospel? What did Paul mean when he said “gospel”? What do you mean when you say gospel? Did Paul lose his temper in this passage? Is it ever justified for Christians to use such language?

No one in the Bible said more about freedom than Paul. But, in Paul’s mind, some things are not negotiable. He had personal experience with the results of a legalistic religion, and he was never going to go back to it. He knew that even the most rigid practice of the Jewish codes would never bring the peace of mind and the wonderful relationship with God one finds when one discovers the truth. He also knew an “angel” from heaven had been the one who started the whole sin problem! He remembered how hard he had worked to be able to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. He had spent his whole lifetime studying Scripture, and he now had a very thorough comprehension of the God presented there. Many peripheral matters could be left to the discretion of the individual believer, (See Romans 14) but the core truth of the gospel is non-negotiable! Notice the ways this passage is translated in the different versions.

Galatians 1:8: The Greek is literally *anathema esto*--Let him be ‘anathema.’”

“...ἀνάθεμα ἔστω” (Greek)

“...Let him be outcast.” (*NEB*)

“...Let God’s curse fall upon him.” (*The Living Bible*)

“...May he be a damned soul.” (*Phillips*)

“...May he be condemned to hell!” (*GNB*)

“...Let him be accursed.” (*KJV; NASB; Montgomery; Kleist and Lilly*)

“...may he be accursed!” (*Twentieth Century*)

“...let that one be accursed!” (*NAB; NRSV*)

“...Let him be cursed.” (*The Message*)

“...Let him be eternally condemned!” (*NIV; Clear Word*)

“...He is to be condemned.” (*Jerusalem*)

“...God’s curse be on him!” (*Moffatt*)

“...let him be anathema.” (*ASV; Concordant Literal*)

“...let him be banished from your midst.” (*Greber*)

“...a curse upon him!” (*Goodspeed; Williams*)

“...a curse be on him!” (*Beck*)

“...cursed be he!” (*The Original New Testament*)

“...let God’s curse be on him.” (*Translator’s*) [Endnote: “Paul is not pronouncing any official excommunication. He is indicating that the man in question will be separated from God.”]

“...I pronounce a curse upon him.” (*Stevens*)

“I pray that God will punish anyone who...” (*CEV*)

“...Anathema, devoted to destruction, doomed to eternal punishment.” (*Amplified*)

4. Could you stand in the pulpit and preach a sermon and at the end say, “If anyone disagrees with what I have just preached, may he be condemned to hell”? (Galatians 1:8,9) What would you do if your pastor did this? In Romans 14:5-10, Paul seemed to be so gracious in allowing differences of opinion. Why would he not extend the same courtesy to the people who come with a different gospel?

Galatians 1:8,9 seems to be in direct contradiction to Romans 14:5. Paul wrote these two passages within a few weeks of each other. Paul always wanted to seem as gracious as possible. That is why he said, “Let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind.” But there were some things Paul believed were not negotiable; the truth about God was number one on that list. Paul had done his best to explain the gospel to the people at Galatia. He had come to know his God well enough that there was no question in Paul’s mind about His character. So, when other preachers appeared in Galatia confusing and deceiving the people, Paul became very upset. Paul understood very well what the result of accepting their “gospel” would be. He had grown up as a Pharisee. Through personal experience he knew the legalistic, harsh, arbitrary, exacting picture of God that was their gospel. Paul had done everything he could to prevent the Galatians from suffering under that regime. He wanted it to be very clear where he stood on this matter.

Furthermore, was it not an “angel” from heaven that had spread the lies and misinformation about God? Paul knew very well what the result would be of following this angel from hell. Parents should do everything they can to keep guns out of the hands of their children. This is not regarded as harsh. Paul was trying to protect his Christian children from a fate worse than guns. Thus, Paul could sound very gracious in Romans 14:5, but there was no room for a false gospel. The God of freedom, love, and graciousness cannot be served by arbitrary, harsh, legalistic methods. God supported Paul in being absolutely unbending about freedom!

Revelation 13 makes it very clear that someday the Devil and his angels will appear pretending to be Christ. When that happens, we must be able to distinguish very clearly between the true and the counterfeit. The Devil knows God very well. He will counterfeit the second coming as closely as God will allow him. The only safety will be in knowing God well enough that we will be able to say, “This is not the God of Scripture or the God I know!” No doubt, it will be very difficult to make such a statement when the whole world believes it is the Christ, but true followers of Christ will not be deceived. (See Revelation 13 and 2

Corinthians 11:13-15)

5. If an angel appeared and said he had come from heaven to bring us the “good news,” should we hesitate at all in accepting what he had to say? (Galatians 1:8,9) How could he possibly be wrong? (2 Corinthians 11:13-15) What criteria would you set up to determine what is the real gospel or good news? Where did Paul learn his version of the good news?

When evaluating any new truth, we must follow certain guidelines:

1. Any new idea must always be consistent with the canon or rule that has already been given: the Holy Scriptures. Every true revelation about God will always be consistent with the previous revelation that has been given.
 2. Several modern churches have “prophets” that have spoken in modern times. These prophets, and any new prophets or evangelists that show up, must speak a truth which is consistent with all previous revelations.
 3. To be a gospel, it must be good news for that is the meaning of *gospel*. As commonly understood, Revelation 12-14 is not good news! But, the Devil will apparently be so persuasive in the end that virtually the whole world will accept his gospel.
 4. We must study the Scriptures very carefully to be able to discriminate between these two “christs” that will appear at the end of time.
6. Is God able to foreknow enough about even our moral choices that He could know that Paul would do what he did even before he was born? (Galatians 1:15)

God was able to predict the number of people who would need to find a place in the ark in Noah’s day. He did not ask Noah to build a whole fleet of cruise ships to carry all the people who would be converted by Noah’s preaching! Jesus suggested that God knows the day and the hour when He will return. All such outcomes involve moral choices. God knew everything about us long before we were conceived. (Psalms 139) But, God is the only one who can be trusted with such a knowledge of our future. Think of how God treated Judas even though He knew Judas would eventually be the betrayer. Think of all God did to honor king Saul even though God knew what the outcome of Saul’s life would be. If we knew someone was going to be lost, we would probably be tempted to treat him less favorably. But, God does not do that. He treats all equally. (See Matthew 5:43-48)

7. What changed Paul from being the foremost proponent of Judaism and a strict supporter of the ceremonial requirements of the law to being a Christian apostle who could speak so strongly against those requirements and emphasize faith? Where do you think that change first began to take place? (Acts 7:58-8:1) On that occasion, what happened so that “His (Stephen’s) face looked like the face of an angel”? (Acts 6:15)

The basic fundamental change which took place in the life and mind of Paul between the experience at the stoning of Stephen and his becoming the foremost apostle to the Gentiles was a change in his picture of God and his understanding about God’s government. When one believes God will go to great lengths to “force” people to do His will, then if he is trying to be “God-like,” he will do the same. But, when one realizes God never asks us to believe anything for which He does not provide adequate evidence—and it is evidence which appeals to the reason (SC 105)—and further, that He would never force our will or take away our freedom, then it produces a completely different understanding of God and why He would do all the things He did in the Old Testament.

Although the “miracle” that caused Stephen’s face to shine was only a relatively simple

thing, it triggered thoughts in the mind of Paul which had enormous implications. He remembered the experience of Moses and the people when Moses came down from the mountain after spending a second period of forty days and nights with God. (Exodus 34:29-35) When God finally “floored” Paul on the road to Damascus, he could no longer ignore his conviction that Jesus had been the true Messiah. This forced a period of solitude in Paul’s life for him to completely rethink his whole theology—and change his paradigm—in light of these new developments. Paul spent three years in Arabia (Galatians 1:17,18) thinking about all those books in the Old Testament he had memorized in school with Gamaliel. He did not need more information; he just needed to put it together in a better way and understand what God was trying to do throughout the Old Testament! When Paul got back to Damascus, he was ready to speak the truth about God as presented in a correct understanding of the Old Testament.

When Paul was called from Tarsus to Antioch of Syria by Barnabus, he was ready to take up a completely new life as the great “apostle to the Gentiles.” (See Acts 11:25,26)

8. Did Paul have adequate respect for the church leaders? How could he say, “But those who seemed to be the leaders—I say this because it makes no difference to me what they were . . .”? (Galatians 2:6, *GNB*) Would you feel comfortable speaking like that about your pastor or the conference leaders?

Paul had already been preaching the gospel for some fourteen years before returning to Jerusalem to consult at any length with the brethren. Paul always did everything he could to keep harmony and peace within the church. It was his hope they could agree on a plan that would make the people in Jerusalem happy and at the same time not diminish in any way his capacity to spread the gospel in Gentile areas. Paul did not believe he needed to consult with the brethren about the gospel. He had already rebuked Peter to his face and in public for distorting the gospel. (See Galatians 2:11-14) Later, in Corinth Paul felt quite free to change the conclusions drawn at the Jerusalem conference. (See Acts 15:28,29; Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8 &10) Obviously, he was quite certain about his version of the gospel. (Galatians 1:8,9) It would appear they were having considerable trouble with the gospel at headquarters!

9. How could Paul rebuke Peter “in front of them all”? (Galatians 2:14) Is this the way a real Christian should act? How did Peter react? How did he feel about Paul later? (2 Peter 3:15) Is there ever a time for us to stand up and “call sin by its right name”? How would you know when it is right to do that?

Paul was in a very difficult situation in dealing with this Galatian problem. While he wanted to be respectful of church leadership, in his mind it was far more important to prevent the Galatian believers from being deceived. Paul wanted them to understand that the gospel he had given them had all the authority necessary behind it. He wanted to be sure the new believers were not led astray by church leaders, the Devil, or anyone else. In order to do that, he had to convince the new believers that the church leaders were merely humans like themselves. No doubt, Paul understood what kind of accusations these Judaizers had made against him. He wanted the new believers to think matters through for themselves and not be unduly influenced by titles or positions.

We should feel the same today. Christians should always be kind and gracious. But, compromising with the Devil’s picture of God is not included in being kind and gracious! One of the Devil’s most successful approaches to move human beings has been the approach of authority. Many Christian churches are based on this premise. God wants us to think things through for ourselves and not be unduly influenced by those who exercise that kind

of authority. No one is to stand in the place of God! Those who attempt to stand in God's place should be exposed for what they are.

Is there any indication in this passage that Paul did the right thing? Did a voice sound from heaven saying, "Well done, Paul!"? There are many things which were done by leading personalities in the Bible that we should certainly not regard as examples for us. Think of all the things that happened in Judges! Should we follow the example of David and Solomon in all they did? Peter and Paul were Christian gentlemen, but they were both still growing spiritually. Later, Paul wrote that the church was built on Peter and the rest of the prophets and apostles. (See Ephesians 2:20) Peter referred to the writings of Paul as sometimes difficult to understand but nevertheless a part of Scripture. (See 2 Peter 3:15,16) Jesus himself had to rebuke Peter on one occasion with the words, "Get away from me, Satan!" (See Matthew 16:23, *GNB*) By comparison, Paul's rebuke was relatively mild! Remember that in this passage we have only the words Paul used. We cannot see his face or hear the tone of his voice. Surely, Paul spoke those words in love. Peter, the humble and uneducated fisherman, and Paul, the university-trained Pharisee, certainly had different points of view on many subjects. Their lives ended almost at the same time in Rome. Perhaps they were imprisoned together in Rome. The power of the gospel made it possible for them to work together side-by-side as Christians.

10. Could you write out your understanding of the good news or gospel in a paragraph or two? What are the essential truths that would have to be included? Does Paul say, in Galatians, what he believed the good news was? Did he describe it in any of his other books?

There are many different ideas about what constitutes the good news. These vary all the way from the legal and forensic statement that "Jesus paid the price for me" to include many doctrinal ideas as well as stretching to beautiful statements about God. Consider the following:

I believe that the most important of all Christian beliefs is the one that brings joy and assurance to God's friends everywhere—the truth about our heavenly Father that was confirmed at such cost by the life and death of his Son.

God is not the kind of person his enemies have made him out to be—arbitrary, unforgiving and severe. God is just as loving and trustworthy as his Son, just as willing to forgive and heal. Though infinite in majesty and power, our Creator is an equally gracious Person who values nothing higher than the freedom, dignity, and individuality of his intelligent creatures—that their love, their faith, their willingness to listen and obey, may be freely given. He even prefers to regard us not as servants but as friends. This is the truth revealed through all the books of Scripture. This is the everlasting Good News that wins the trust and admiration of God's loyal children throughout the universe.

Like Abraham and Moses—the ones God spoke of as his trusted friends—God's friends today want to speak well and truly of our heavenly Father. They covet as the highest of all commendations the words of God about Job: "He has said of me what is right." (Job 42:7)—A. Graham Maxwell, *Servants or Friends*

Paul never stopped to spell out his definition of the gospel. However, he did say, "The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith." (Romans 1:16) He often repeated the statement, "I was sent to preach the gospel." (1 Corinthians 1:17) "It is the gospel by which we are saved." Paul did not recognize even the existence of another gospel

other than the one he preached. (Galatians 1:6-9) He said the gospel came directly from God. (Galatians 1:11) The gospel was preached as far back as Abraham's time. (Galatians 3:8) It is based on the truth and comes with the promise of the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 1:13) It requires our obedience. (2 Thessalonians 1:8)

The best news of all is that God is just like His wonderful Son! (John 14:9)

11. Why did Paul go to Jerusalem and explain his gospel to the church leaders? (Galatians 2:1-3) Did he want their agreement? Or, did he want to make sure he had the "good news" straight? Did he want to win them to the same viewpoint? Were they having troubles with the gospel at headquarters?

Paul realized he not only needed to teach his followers the truth, but also he needed to teach them how to get along with others in the church—not always an easy task. As far as we know, Paul was much better educated than any of the disciples. It would have been very interesting to see them discussing some of the central points of Christianity together. Paul wanted to learn as much as he could from the eyewitnesses who had lived with Jesus for years; and at the same time, he wanted to share with them what he had experienced and learned during his three years in Arabia. Unfortunately, the leaders at Jerusalem, while recognizing the truth of Paul's gospel, were constantly trying to get him to live and preach a version of the gospel more consistent with their more conservative and traditional views of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. Ultimately, this led to Paul's compromising with them and taking that vow, as well as spending several days in the temple in Jerusalem in the summer of A.D. 58 and then being arrested and imprisoned. "But he was not authorized of God to concede as much as they asked." {*Acts of the Apostles* 405.1}

12. What do you think led Paul to raise the central question in the book of Galatians, "Why then the law?" or "What was the purpose of the law?" (Galatians 3:19) Do we know the answer today?

This should have been the first question raised by the new Christians when these Judaizers entered their churches and began asking them to follow all those additional requirements. But, in a larger and deeper sense, it is a very fundamental question that faces all those who follow any of the "commandments" laid down in Scripture. If the truth is supposed to set us free (John 8:32) and if each person is expected to make up his own mind about the truth, (Romans 14:5) then how can God expect us to keep any of His commandments?

It should be clear that Paul was not suggesting that in Old Testament times men were saved by the works of the Law while in Christian times they are saved by faith in the grace of Jesus Christ. (See Romans 3:27-31) This, however, is the view of many Protestant Christians. It is easier to dismiss the whole issue in that way. The real problem comes for those who believe at least some of the Old Testament "commands" of God are still valid for our day. Protestants will usually explain that we are now saved by grace and all the Old Testament requirements were done away with by "being nailed to the cross." (Colossians 2:14) If you ask them if that does away with the Ten Commandments so that we are now free to kill, commit adultery, lie, and curse God, they will try to explain that all of the commandments which are still necessary are repeated in the New Testament. This does not answer the question. It is only a way of trying to avoid answering the question.

There are no commandments, as such, given in the New Testament. Many of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament in a variety of situations suggesting that the New Testament authors still regarded them as binding. The real problem comes when

we discuss the Sabbath commandment. Those who believe the Ten Commandments are still binding must, of course, observe the day, while those who think they can do away with the Ten Commandments do not believe Sabbath observance is necessary any longer.

So, Paul was watching his Jewish-Christian opponents trying to convince new Christians they were required to practice all of the ceremonial and moral requirements of the Old Testament before they could be considered real Christians. As he thought this issue through in his own mind, he was forced to carefully evaluate his own background and consider what place those requirements held in his own mind. What we read in Galatians 3 are his conclusions.

13. If the truth is supposed to make us free, (John 8:32) why **does** God make so much use of law? In 1888, Seventh-day Adventists held a General Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota at which this was the central question. At that time, the General Conference president, Elder G. I. Butler, said it was the most controversial issue ever to be discussed among Seventh-day Adventists. Ellen White had apparently summarized the truth back in 1870. (See *1SP* 261-265) We are still discussing it. Does this mean Paul did not answer the question adequately? Why do you think the delegates at that 1888 conference spent most of their time arguing, not about the main question, but about “which law was added, the moral (or Ten Commandment) law or the ceremonial law”? What does it mean to say, “The truth will set you free”? (John 8:32) How can the truth set someone free?

In the early 1800s, there was a great religious revival around the world. It was especially strong in the new nation known as the United States. However, to almost all Christians at that time, salvation consisted of reading the Bible to discover what God required of them and then doing their best to obey. The Seventh-day Adventist Church and many others were born out of that environment. The early Adventists spent a lot of time in intense Bible study and felt very confident that they had gone beyond the requirements of almost all other churches by observing all of the Ten Commandments including the Sabbath commandment. Based on their reading of Revelation 14:12, 12:17, and 19:10, they taught that the final triumphant church of God would keep the commandments and have a special messenger sent to them by God, known as the “spirit of prophecy.” Unfortunately, some of them even believed they were somehow superior to members of other churches because they worked so hard at keeping the commandments. Ellen White, the one they regarded as God’s special messenger, finally told them they had preached about the law so long that they were “as dry as the hills of Gilboa without dew or rain!” (See 2 Samuel 1:21; *RH*, March 11, 1890; *1SAT* 137; 1888 p. 557,560)

In the early 1880s, a young physician and a young pastor began to write from California about “righteousness by faith.” They suggested we could never be saved by keeping the law, but rather we are saved by what Jesus did for us on the cross almost two thousand years ago. This alarmed some of the “faithful” who had been preaching the law for so long that the faithful wanted to do something to stop them. E. J. Waggoner, the young physician, wrote a series of articles in the *Signs of the Times* which strongly emphasized the new ideas of righteousness by faith.

The General Conference President at that time, G. I. Butler, believed it was necessary for him to do something. So, he wrote a small book entitled *The Law in the Book of Galatians* and hoped it would settle the question. Dr. Waggoner responded by writing a small book of his own entitled *The Gospel in Galatians*. He very effectively refuted all of Butler’s arguments. Many believed it was then necessary to call a series of meetings for pastors to

discuss this matter. Those meetings were held in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1888. Just before the meetings, Butler was called to some business in Florida. While there, he became sick. He realized he would not be able to attend the meetings and so wrote a letter to many of the pastors who would be there instructing them to “stand by the old landmarks.”

When the meetings started, many of the ninety people who attended had already taken sides on the issue. Those from the western United States mostly agreed with Dr. Waggoner; those from the east agreed with Elder Butler and Elder Uriah Smith, the editor of the *Review and Herald*. When the question of Galatians 3 was discussed, the Devil succeeded in stirring up a lot of controversy and managed to sidetrack the discussion to the question of *which* law was added, the ceremonial law or the moral law of Ten Commandments. In 1896, reflecting on those meetings, Ellen White wrote:

An unwillingness to yield up preconceived opinions, and to accept this truth, lay at the foundation of a large share of the opposition manifested at Minneapolis against the Lord’s message through Brethren (E.J.) Waggoner and (A.T.) Jones. By exciting that opposition Satan succeeded in shutting away from our people, in a great measure, the special power of the Holy Spirit that God longed to impart to them. The enemy prevented them from obtaining that efficiency which might have been theirs in carrying the truth to the world, as the apostles proclaimed it after the day of Pentecost. The light that is to lighten the whole earth with its glory was resisted, and by the action of our own brethren has been in a great degree kept away from the world. *Selected Messages*, Bk. 1, 234,235 (1896); *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 1, p. 130; *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 1575

Soon after the meetings, Ellen White very clearly wrote about the need to take a new approach to this issue. She said we must realize the real gospel is not just about how God saves you and me; but rather, it is about Him. The good news is that God has successfully answered Satan’s charges in the great controversy and adequate evidence has been provided that God can be trusted. Unfortunately, few have studied this issue all the way through and been willing to admit the mistakes that were made. Even one hundred years later, in 1988, the Seventh-day Adventist Church “celebrated” the “progress” that was made at Minneapolis!

Today, we need to recognize that God has never asked us to do anything which was not for our best good under the circumstances at the time. All of God’s “laws” were given to us as human beings in a form that has been adapted to our needs. The basic principles have not changed and will not change, but the particular form of the law given to human beings was “added” to meet our needs. If we can come to realize this, and then comprehend why God has made so much use of law—even though He prefers not to—we will realize that all of God’s laws are for our best good and we should obey them—not because God has asked us to, but because they are the right thing to do! Viewed in this light, God’s laws become a protection for us and not a requirement. We love the One who would stoop down to reach us where we are and give us guidance in our ignorance and immaturity. But, we also understand that none of God’s laws should have been necessary because if we had understood as we should have at the time, we would have done them simply because they were the right thing to do.

14. What did Paul mean when he said, “The law was in charge of us until Christ came” (or, “to bring us to Christ”)? (Galatians 3:24, *GNB*) What is implied in this verse about the purpose

of the law?

Look carefully at the context of this verse.

Galatians 3:19,20,23-25, *GNB*): ¹⁹What, then, was the purpose of the Law? It was added in order to show what wrongdoing is, and it was meant to last until the coming of Abraham's descendant, to whom the promise was made. The Law was handed down by angels, with a man acting as a go-between. ²⁰But a go-between is not needed when only one person is involved; and God is one...

²³But before the time for faith came, the Law kept us all locked up as prisoners until this coming faith should be revealed. ²⁴And so the Law was in charge of us until Christ came, in order that we might then be put right with God through faith. ²⁵Now that the time for faith is here, the Law is no longer in charge of us.

The Message:

²³⁻²⁴Until the time when we were mature enough to respond freely in faith to the living God, we were carefully surrounded and protected by the Mosaic law. The law was like those Greek tutors [babysitters, bodyguards, escorts], with which you are familiar, who escort children to school and protect them from danger or distraction, making sure the children will really get to the place they set out for.

There are several major theological questions raised by this passage. First of all, what law is being discussed? Is it the moral law (the Ten Commandments), the ceremonial law (all of the other instructions given to Moses), or possibly all, that is, both the moral law and the ceremonial law? Seventh-day Adventists are very protective of the Ten Commandments because we claim that we are one of only a very few groups who keep the whole law (including the fourth commandment) and, quoting Revelation 12:17; 14:12; and 19:10, we believe that keeping all of the commandments is a distinguishing mark of the end-time church. In the 19th century, our pastors were often challenged to debates over our doctrines, and the Sabbath commandment was frequently the issue. The Bible was on our side on that issue. We have always taught that the Ten Commandments are a transcript of God's character.

God requires perfection of His children. **His law is a transcript of His own character, and it is the standard of all character.** This infinite standard is presented to all that there may be no mistake in regard to the kind of people whom God will have to compose His kingdom. *Christ's Object Lessons* p. 315.1.

So, how could Paul say that the Law was "added"? That suggests the Law has not always been there, but God's character has certainly always been the standard of the universe.

Ellen White has once again shed some important light on the issue:

If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision. And if the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant, of which circumcision was a sign, they would never have been seduced into idolatry, nor would it have been necessary for them to suffer a life of bondage in Egypt; they would have kept God's law in mind, and **there**

would have been no necessity for it to be proclaimed from Sinai or engraved upon the tables of stone. And had the people practiced the principles of the Ten Commandments, there would have been no need of the additional directions given to Moses. *Patriarchs and Prophets* 364 (1890)

So, God *did* find it necessary to “add” the Ten Commandments! Those commandments had not been verbalized in that form at any earlier time we know about.

So, in what sense was the Law “in charge of us,” or our “custodian,” “guard,” or “tutor”? First of all, we must look at the Greek word and see what it actually says.

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.—*Strong, J. (1996), The exhaustive concordance of the Bible: Showing every word of the text of the common English version of the canonical books, and every occurrence of each word in regular order.*

Paul is still thinking of the essential part that the law did play in the plan of God. In the Greek world there was a household servant called the *paidagogos*. He was not the schoolmaster. He was usually an old and trusted slave who had been long in the family and whose character was high. He was in charge of the child’s moral welfare and it was his duty to see that he acquired the qualities essential to true manhood. He had one particular duty; every day he had to take the child to and from school. He had nothing to do with the actual teaching of the child, but it was his duty to take him in safety to the school and deliver him to the teacher. That—said Paul—was like the function of the law. It was there to lead a man to Christ. It could not take him into Christ’s presence, but it could take him into a position where he himself might enter. It was the function of the law to bring a man to Christ by showing him that by himself he was utterly unable to keep it. (*Daily Study Bible* for Galatians 3:23-29)

In other words, these *paidagogoi* (that’s the plural word for child-guides) were babysitters, bodyguards, or escorts whose responsibility it was to make sure the boys were kept from danger and received an education (although they were not the teachers). There were scoundrels around who would have loved to kidnap a young boy belonging to a rich family and then hold him for ransom. Remember that some 60% of the population at that time in history were “slaves.”

With respect to the Law, that is its function as well. It guards us against doing things that are not good for us until we mature enough to understand why we should not do such things. The Law was never to be done away with. God’s character will not change. But, when we become law-abiding citizens, then the laws really do not affect us anymore because we naturally do what the law requires. (See Romans 2)

15. What is implied by Paul’s words in Galatians 3:28 about how Christians should relate to each other? What do you think Paul’s Judaizing opponents thought of this verse?

In Galatians 3:28 Paul says that the distinction between Jew and Greek, slave

and free man, male and female is wiped out. There is something of very great interest here. In the Jewish morning prayer, which Paul must all his pre-Christian life have used, the Jew thanks God that “Thou hast not made me a Gentile, a slave or a woman.” Paul takes that prayer and reverses it. The old distinctions were gone; all were one in Christ. (*Daily Study Bible* for Galatians 3:23-29)

This must have been glorious news for the Galatian Christians, for in their society slaves were considered to be only pieces of property; women were kept confined and disrespected; and Gentiles were constantly sneered at by the Jews.—Wiersbe, W. W. (1996); *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Gal. 3:27). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

The Judaizers—and even modern Jews who know anything about the New Testament—tell us that they do not really have any problem with Jesus. The real problem they have is with Paul! This verse is a perfect example of why they hate Paul. Paul destroyed all of their “specialness.” The worst part is that since Paul had been a “Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee,” (Acts 23:6) they could never claim Paul made such statements because he did not know anything about Judaism.

16. Why had Paul become so opposed to circumcision? Was he himself not circumcised? How could he possibly say what he did in Galatians 5:12?

This is likely a play on the fact that nearby in Phrygia there was a goddess by the name of Cybele whose priests castrated themselves in honor of their love for her.

Paul was not opposed to circumcision for Jews as a sign of their Hebrew heritage. He had Timothy circumcised before he began working with Paul. (Acts 16:3) But, if one believed that circumcision was a path to salvation, Paul would have been all over him! Nothing that we can do will earn any right to the kingdom of God. We cannot earn merit by works of any kind.

If you start thinking that something you do may earn you salvation, where will you stop? The Pharisees had a lot of rules you can try!

17. When someone is fully a Christian, is he not supposed to be “controlled by the Spirit”? If so, why did Paul write that the “Spirit produces . . . self-control”? (Galatians 5:22,23, *GNB*) As we grow to be more and more like Christ, (1 Corinthians 11:1) will we have more “self-control” or less?

This is a very important passage in describing what God really wants of His children. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. But, notice the culminating “fruit” is self-control. God does not want robots however willingly they obey Him. God wants followers who understand (John 15:15) and know Him; and since they understand and know Him, they want to do what He asks because they recognize that everything God asks us to do is for our best good! There will be no need for policemen or jails in the New Jerusalem because everyone who lives there will want to do what is right.

We accomplish this goal by contemplating and following the example of Jesus. But, we cannot even do that on our own. The Holy Spirit will come into our minds and thoughts and transform us if we allow Him to do so. Then, the old temptations and habits will slowly fade away as they are replaced by much better things.

As Samuel Chadwick points out, commenting on Galatians 5:22,23:

In newspaper English the passage reads something like this: the fruit of the Spirit is an affectionate, lovable disposition; a radiant spirit and a cheerful temper; a tranquil mind and a quiet manner; a forbearing patience in provoking circumstances and with trying people; a sympathetic insight and tactful helpfulness; generous judgment and a big-souled charity; loyalty and reliability under all circumstances; humility that forgets self in the joy of others; in all things self-mastered and self-controlled, which is the final mark of perfection. How striking this is in relation to 1 Cor. 13! (Quoted by *Believer's Bible Commentary* on Galatians 5:22,23)

18. In the book of Galatians, Paul talks a great deal about freedom. What do you think he meant by that? How free does God really want us to be? What is the relationship between freedom and consequences? Why did Paul say, "A person will reap exactly what he plants"? (Galatians 6:7, *GNB*) Is it safe to allow a two-year-old to do whatever he wants?

When people are really free, they are fully responsible. Whatever they choose to do is their own choice, and the results are fully their responsibility. They cannot blame others for exerting pressure on them because they are really free.

There are a lot of people who are not safe to turn loose in a free universe because they would very soon destroy themselves and others. The only people who are safe to have in a completely free universe are those who are mature enough to always choose to do what is right because it is right. No one needs to fear such people. They are a blessing to all around them.

19. Why do you think Paul said, "See what big letters I make as I write to you now with my own hand!"? (Galatians 6:11, *GNB*) Didn't he write all of his letters? Could this have had anything to do with his poor eyesight which some think was his "thorn in the flesh"? (2 Corinthians 12:7; see Galatians 4:15; compare Romans 16:22)

Paul had already written to the Thessalonians that false letters apparently claiming to be from him were going around. (2 Thessalonians 2:2; 3:17) He wanted to take every precaution to make sure no one else could write a letter claiming it was from him and lead believers astray.

It is also likely Paul had a problem with his vision. There are several suggestions supporting this idea. (Galatians 4:13-15; 2 Corinthians 12:7-9; *6BC* 1058.2,4)

20. Would you agree with Paul in Galatians 6:15? How many other Christian issues would fall into the same category as circumcision does in this verse? Does *anything* ultimately matter if it does not lead to "being a new creature"?

To Paul the gospel was everything. (Galatians 1:8,9) The truth about God was so important that any human work made no difference at all. Once we get a clear view of Christ, to turn away to anything else is completely foolish. (Galatians 3:1) Since Jesus has provided a full and complete salvation at no cost to us, why would anyone want to fall back into those old ways that have proved useless—even dangerous—again and again?

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