

A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns, rendered in a light gray color, frames the central text. The border is composed of repeating motifs of leaves and scrolls, creating a classic, elegant frame.

**A Layman's  
Commentary on  
The Epistles of  
Paul**

**T.O.D. Johnston**

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T.O.D. Johnston's A Layman's Commentary on the Epistles of Paul -  
Galatians through Philemon

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A Layman's Commentary on the Epistles of Paul

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A Layman's Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle  
Volume 3 – Galatians through Philemon

1st Edition - 2013

Written by T.O.D. Johnston  
Published by Owen Johnston  
[www.biblestudylessons.pdf.info](http://www.biblestudylessons.pdf.info)

Dedicated for knowledge, understanding, and inspiration as we seek to follow Our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ.

Preface

After reading many scholarly commentaries on different books of Scripture, it became my mental habit to sift through the minute discussions of individual words and/or phrases, and the quoting of various scholars of the past of many differing opinions, and center on the most logical and inspirational truths that remained. Thus I relied on the studied scholarship of those who had learned the original languages and had read all the previous scholars that had written to get the best possible understanding of Scripture that I, as a non-scholar, could. It seemed that most church members would not attempt to read scholarly works - but would benefit from their knowledge if presented in a plain and straightforward manner, the truths they had perceived. The following commentary is my attempt to do this. May God bless my efforts to the extent that they increase the understanding and faith of the reader.

T.O.D. Johnston  
2005

## Galatians – Lesson I

The setting of this epistle describes the situation of the beginning church. The apostles and majority of disciples were Jews, including Paul himself. As the Gospel was spreading out and among Gentiles there were some believers formerly Jewish (called Judaizers) that continued to demand circumcision of converts to Christ. This pretty much ceased after the destruction of Israel as a nation by Titus in 70 A.D. In the churches of Galatia some of these Jews had been trying, with some success, to convince these believers that their instruction had been imperfect and incomplete.

They claimed authority of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. This undermined Paul's ministry among the Gentile churches and called into question the authority and fidelity of his conversion. It also denied that he had met with the apostles in Jerusalem over the very issue and they had agreed with what he had been preaching among the Gentiles, which maintained their liberty from the rites and laws of the Jewish religion. This liberty was also true for Jewish converts, that they also are justified by faith through Christ and no longer under the Law (as by works to earn salvation). Paul also mentions his confrontation with Peter at Jerusalem and the importance and result.

Galatia was a part of ancient Phrygia, in Asia Minor. At this time, it was a Roman colony with an appointed governor (propraetor). To the east is Cappadocia, to the west, Bithynia, to the south Pamphylia, on the north by the Euxine Sea. The Acts mention Paul visiting this area twice (6:6 about 53 A.D., 18:23 about 56 A.D.) It is generally accepted that Paul was the first to preach the Gospel in that area (Galatians 1:6, 4:13). Among those converted were Jews that continued to observe the Jewish laws. After Paul's departure, these Judaizers sought to impose their practices on all converts to Christianity, thus Paul's concern expressed in this epistle.

This issue had to be settled and put behind them, as well as in all the other churches. Justification is by faith alone, not by works. Christians are called upon to do everything as unto God's glory, and the benefit of the brethren.

### Chapter 1. Paul's Unique Call to Be Apostle to the Gentiles

#### Salutation

1 Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;)  
2 and all the brethren which are with me.  
¶ Unto the churches of Galatia:  
3 ¶ Grace be to you, and peace, from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ,  
4 who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:  
5 to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

#### There Is No Other Gospel

6 ¶ I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:  
7 which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.  
8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.  
9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

10 ¶ For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.

#### Paul's Ministry of the True Gospel

11 ¶ But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.

12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

13 For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:

14 and profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace,

16 to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

17 neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.

18 ¶ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.

19 But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.

20 Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not.

21 Afterward I came into the regions of Syria and Cili'cia;

22 and was unknown by face unto the churches of Judea which were in Christ:

23 but they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed.

24 And they glorified God in me.

#### Verse 1.

Paul was called by Jesus Christ in person, as from the Father who raised Him from the dead, to preach especially to the Gentiles as was always in God's plan. (Acts 22:14,15.) No human being or organization had any part in it.

#### Verse 2.

This message includes the love and concern of all Paul's fellow laborers in the Gospel (the brethren). This is addressed to all groups of believers (churches) of this geographical area, all judged to be in the same general situation.

#### Verse 3.

The most favored Christian greeting: grace and peace from the Father and the Son. The most blessed things that God offers and freely gives to those that believe.

#### Verse 4.

This was made possible by the gift of Christ's sacrifice for our sins, as according to God's will and plan. The purpose – to "deliver us from this present evil world". This includes all distracting and destructive influences being recognized and rejected. The rites and works of the Jewish religion are in this category. All were fulfilled in and by Jesus, according to God's will.

#### Verse 5.

To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.



Verse 6.

Paul expresses his surprise that these believers have so soon put aside the doctrine of Grace and taken up another 'gospel'. This from the influences of certain people's ideas, most specifically the works of the Jewish law. It is not accurately 'another gospel' but a perverse teaching, though those that teach it claim they know and practice the truth.

Verse 7.

These people call their opinion an alternative, which it is not. It is not 'good news' of forgiveness but a burden of works, which perverts the grace and peace of the Gospel of Christ.

Verse 8.

The Gospel that Paul preached to them was and remains the true and only one. They must stand in it, and judge any other as false. And this even if Paul, himself, or an angel from heaven, or any other person preach any other, 'let him be accursed.' Some false teachers of the time claimed some private message from an angel. They will be cursed of God and must be avoided. These people add to or take away from the true message of God's revelation to men through His Son.

Verse 9.

To make certain of the seriousness of this stand, Paul reemphasized the threat and serious danger of turning from the true Gospel the first received. Any such person must be disregarded, and not allowed in the church. That person is accursed. To not reject such a person and their doctrine risks their (the church members) own degradation and participating in the accompanying curse from God.

Verse 10.

Paul refers to the only two motives possible for his actions. To please or persuade men or God. At one time he did seek to please men as a persecutor of the Christians. If he was still doing that, he would not be serving Christ.

Verse 11.

It is now certain and final that the Gospel that he preached to them had no human author or doctrine.

Verse 12.

No man told or taught him this message. Christ revealed it to him after His death and resurrection.

Verse 13.

He assumes that they have heard the story of his earlier life as a devout Jew who zealously persecuted the Church (Acts 9:1,2; 22:4). The Jews he is addressing are those who would have heard this. He is describing this former zeal he had as being 'beyond measure' and destructive.

Verse 14.

He also considered himself as more dedicated in speech and action according to the traditions of the fathers (a pharisee) than the great majority of his Jewish contemporaries.

Verse 15.

Paul here acknowledges God as Creator of all life in the universe and his own in particular. God's plan for his life started with his conception and birth, then his rebirth in God's calling him by His grace, changing him from persecutor to preacher.

Verse 16.

God's purpose was for Paul to know His Son, Jesus Christ – the risen Savior – and spread His Gospel among the Gentiles, the heathen. Paul was immediately and completely convinced of his calling, so, there remained no reason to confer with any human being.

Verse 17.

He also saw no reason to go up to Jerusalem and confer or seek approval of the apostles, for the same reason. When the majority of believers had scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, the apostles were left unmolested in Jerusalem during this time (Acts 3:1). Paul continued his journey into Arabia near Damascus, where he later returned. Since Luke was not with him at this time, there is no mention of this journey in Acts.

Verse 18.

A period of 3 years passed, and then Paul went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter, and stayed with him 15 days. Unfortunately for us, there is no record of their conversations. Paul was accepted as an equal in the Lord.

Verse 19.

Among the apostles, Paul only saw James, the Lord's brother. James, the brother of John, had been killed (Acts 12:2) much earlier.

Verse 20.

Paul's point was that he went, not to learn the Gospel or seek approval or a commission from the assembly of apostles there. God is his witness to this true account.

Verse 21.

From Jerusalem, Paul journeyed to Syria and Cilicia (Acts 9:30).

Verse 22.

Paul had no acquaintance and was not known by any of the Churches in Judea. They had never seen his face.

Verse 23.

All they knew about him was that he had formerly been persecuting Christians and seeking their destruction, and now he was preaching that faith. Obviously this was such an unexpected and dramatic about face that it was widely spoken of.

Verse 24.

The also obvious and correct credit for this change was what God had done in him. God alone deserved the credit and was glorified for this.

A great deal of Paul's concern is to make clear that this call, his commission, his conversation, his every action is from God and not from any human being, group, or worldly concern. He is God's servant alone. He knew the danger of mixing the two – trying to please both God and man always leads to destruction.

Next, Paul relates his much later trip to Jerusalem and what took place in meeting with the apostles.

Galatians – Lesson II

Galatians chapter 2.

- 1 Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also.
- 2 And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.
- 3 But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised:
- 4 and that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage:
- 5 to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.
- 6 But of those who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person: ) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me:
- 7 but contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter;
- 8 (for he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles;)
- 9 and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.
- 10 Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.

Paul Rebukes Peter at Antioch

- 11 ¶ But when Peter was come to An'ti-och, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.
- 12 For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.
- 13 And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.
- 14 But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?
- 15 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,
- 16 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.
- 17 But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.
- 18 For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.
- 19 For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.
- 20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.
- 21 I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

Verse 1.

The 14 years mentioned were from Paul's conversion (33 A.D.), his visit with Peter (36 A.D.) and the council of Jerusalem (52 A.D.). This chronology is also recorded by Luke in Acts (11:30). Barnabas and Titus also were with Paul on this trip.

Verse 2.

That he went up by revelation could mean that he was directed by God to go at this particular time, or that he felt duty-bound to explain that his call to preach Christ among the Gentiles, and that the Jerusalem leaders would understand and accept his ministry as a genuine work of God in the spreading of the Gospel of His Son. He met with the most eminent men 'privately'. In this way, his direct testimony would be heard without interruption, as opposed to a mixed gathering where opinion and rumors, and spurious questions would cause only disputing and confusion. This could make it appear that Paul's ministry was not truly spiritual, but vain. This must be avoided.

Verse 3.

After meeting with these apostles, the result was acceptance of Paul's ministry to the point that they didn't insist on circumcision of the Gentile converts, but also did not require Paul's present companion, Titus (a Greek), to be circumcised.

Verse 4.

The problem was that some of the Judaizers were present in the assembly 'to spy out our liberty' in the Gospel preached to the Gentiles. Their purpose was to better plan ways to oppose him, to require all converts to be circumcised and follow the Law. Paul labels this as being brought into bondage, reverting to salvation by works, thus subverting the free gift of God in Christ. This must be avoided, period.

Verse 5.

At no time did he give in – 'no, not for an hour.' His ministry was from God, blessed by God, and true as he preached it to the Gentiles. Therefore, they may continue in that truth, and they are equally Christians with the Jews, without the Jewish law.

Verse 6.

In the conferences with those 'who seemed to be somewhat' describes persons of the best reputation and maturity. Paul felt equal to them. They could not add anything to his account of his ministry. God accepts no person according to any worldly value or accomplishment.

Verse 7.

They clearly understood the difference: the gospel of the uncircumcision, God had given to Paul and blessed his ministry; just as the Gospel of the circumcision (to the Jews) was Peter's ministry.

Verse 8.

The work of God was effectual in Peter and in Paul, even though with different groups: Jews and Gentiles.

Verse 9.

James, Cephas, and John are called pillars, or those most eminent and recognized leaders of the Jerusalem church. They perceived the grace that God had given Paul. As a

natural result, they gave him and Barnabas the 'right hands of fellowship' to proceed with their blessing to continue their ministry to the heathen, even as they would to the Jews.

Verse 10.

The only thing they did suggest was to remember the poor, which Paul had also previously wanted to do.

Verse 11.

Peter came to Antioch while Paul was there. When this happened is not mentioned. It is generally thought that this was after the Jerusalem council with Paul. Peter did something that Paul had to call him on. Apparently, Peter had acted on his conviction that faith in Christ did not require Gentiles to follow Jewish Law, in this particular instance, concerning food. He had been observed with Gentiles, even eating with them. Then certain Jews came from James (who apparently still insisted on following the Law) and Peter reacted to their coming by separating himself from the Gentiles. Knowing their prejudice, he thereby wanted to avoid the criticism and controversy.

Verse 13.

Other Jewish believers, for the same fear, followed Peter's example after he took this action. This behavior also strongly caused Barnabas to follow their example in following Jewish Law and reject the Gentiles and their freedom in the Gospel – thus their inequality.

Verse 14.

This was wrong for them to do – 'they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel'. In one of their assemblies, Paul stood before the group, and called Peter on being a Jew that lived after the manner of Gentiles. He had not required that these believers to live as Jews, but he had changed his mind and sought to compel them to now do as the Jews.

Verse 15.

The point, put simply, identifies the two opposite sides. Jews, by nature, include those born in Israel, of Jewish parents, and brought up in their religious traditions. The other side includes the sinners of the Gentiles who had no acquaintance or knowledge of the true God but lived as idolaters and in spiritual darkness.

Verse 16.

No matter what order you put it in, the facts remain the same: no man is justified by the works of the Law. No man is able to perform it perfectly. Justification before God only comes by faith in Jesus Christ - 'for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.'

Verse 17.

Those justified by faith in Christ are still sinners and still unable to fulfill all righteousness. The criticism put forth is that believers can then do whatever they want, and Christ is blamed, as if He condoned such sinning. God forbids such a false position. Believers are joined to Christ – a new creation, no longer under the power of sin and empowered to follow Christ in word and deed, to bring glory to God.

Verse 18.

To go back to observing the law so obviously opens up the criticism that Christ and His sacrifice on the cross was not enough, and that believers still have to work according to the Law for salvation. This is wrong; to do this, Paul would make himself a transgressor. This was also the danger that Paul observed in Peter's actions at Antioch.

Verse 19.

To carefully consider all the requirements of the law, everyone must accept the fact that there is no possibility or hope to perfectly fulfill every part. The penalty is death. The only way of escape is to accept the Gospel in faith, and its salvation from death unto life as a child of God.

Verse 20.

Christ fulfilled the law and yet was put to death to pay the price for mankind's sins. He took upon Himself the requirements of the law so that no one was still condemned to death by the law, if they accepted His substitutionary death. And yet, the believer is dead to the law, but alive in the flesh with Christ's Spirit within and an eternal destination with God. Paul now lives by faith in the Son of God, Who loved him and gave Himself for him. God provided through His Son, that which no human did or ever could do.

Verse 21.

It is only by the grace of God – His free gift. To say or do anything contrary would be to frustrate or deny that grace. Paul writes - 'I do not frustrate the grace of God'. Anyone who claims that observance of the law can save us, must also judge Christ's death as pointless. '...for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.'

To believe that is to deny the changed nature of a Christian, who is seeking and maturing in actions and conversation to become more like Jesus, and living for God's glory, not our own.

A most important question: what was the condition of the world before Christ? And one that follows from that: what would it be like if Christianity was removed? The answers begin to show the reality of its unique blessings, provided for man by God through the gift of life and love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Its truth and purity must be maintained.

In Chapter 3, Paul continues his absolute certainty of justification by faith alone.



Galatians – Lesson III

Galatians chapter 3. Further proof of justification by faith alone.

The Spirit Received through Faith

- 1 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?
- 2 This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?
- 3 Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?
- 4 Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain.
- 5 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?

God's Covenant with Abraham

- 6 ¶ Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.
- 7 Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.
- 8 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.
- 9 So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.
- 10 ¶ 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.
- 11 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.
- 12 And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.
- 13 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:
- 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.
- 15 ¶ 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.
- 16 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.
- 17 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.
- 18 For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

The Purpose of the Law

- 19 ¶ 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.
- 20 Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.
- 21 ¶ 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.
- 22 But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.
- 23 ¶ But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterward be revealed.



- 24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.  
25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.  
26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.  
27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.  
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.  
29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Verse 1.

Paul calls these believers 'foolish' because it seems like somehow they have been enticed, or drawn away from the truth, in the Gospel of the crucified Christ. They had received this Gospel. Now they put aside their good sense and sight, and have chosen to be blind and without reason.

Verse 2.

They must look back, when they received the Holy Spirit. Did they receive it by the works of the Law, or by the hearing of faith?

Verse 3.

They are foolish if they would put aside the free gift of Salvation, the Spirit of adoption as a child of God, and now require a fleshly work to perfect it. This most likely refers directly to the fleshly rite of circumcision.

Verse 4.

Have they experienced the loss of those Spiritual blessings, that their possession was in vain?

Verse 5.

Paul describes his ministry to them, which included miracles. Did he do so by claiming he had this power by his own works of the law, or by his faith in Christ and the Spiritual blessings that faith included?

Verse 6.

To put all claims of the Jews and Judaisers in their proper place, Paul goes back to the very beginning in the person of Abraham. This was recorded in Genesis 15:6. Paul also quoted this in Romans 4:3-5. Abraham believed God and was accounted righteous – he was justified by his faith. Thus he was the father of the faithful, for all believers that came after. There was no circumcision or law then. God's promise to Abraham is also clearly recorded in Genesis 22:18 - 'and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.'

This verse is quoted in Acts 3:25 - 'Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.'

Verse 7.

Abraham was among the Gentiles (or heathen) when God called him, therefore all believers after him, are accounted as his children by the same faith.

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