

Galatians 2
(Chapters 3 & 4)

Jesus Christ is publicly portrayed as crucified

This is the second use of the word 'crucified' in Galatians (3:1). There is nothing secret about Christianity. The whole drama of salvation is very public. The gospel is publicly proclaimed and the benefits of God are publicly available. Church is not a secret society. Worship is always public worship: anyone can come. Closed and secret societies are usually manipulative and cultic. Jesus Christ is portrayed publicly not as glorious but as crucified. Crucifixion is the preferred image for the public impact of Christ. Paul is asking them why they think Jesus was crucified. What was the crucifixion all about? Calvary represents a work that has freed us from the works of the law to release us into the freedom of the spirit. The Cross is the Christian way. The Cross is despised by the world yet it is God's preferred way in the world. Paul is (seeks to be) covered by the offence of the Cross (5:11). **3:1-:5.** The sign of becoming a Christian was receiving the Holy Spirit and living in its supernatural power. So Paul asks did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith. Are they starting in the spirit and finishing in the flesh? This introduces a major argument in Paul's thinking in this letter: the contrast between spirit and faith with flesh and law. Living by the law is a work of the flesh; living by faith is a gift of the spirit. The law represents a gradual approach to some moral ideal (commandment) by slow and tedious effort, with an emphasis on our self-effort and achievement (or lack of it). Salvation by works is a work (an achievement) of the flesh. Whereas salvation by faith is a gift (a place) of the spirit. Faith places us immediately in the spirit goal: the problem is staying there. The finished work of Christ has won a place for us that we can immediately occupy, if we have the faith to occupy it. We then have to occupy the salvation space by living the Christian life in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Promise to Abraham. Paul goes back to the start of the old covenant to point out that before the people had the works of the Mosaic Law, Abraham was living by faith in the promise of God. 'Abraham believed God and God accounted it to him as righteousness' (Gen 15:6). By faith Abraham obeyed God and left his homeland, by faith he dwelt in the land of promise and by faith he waited for the city whose builder is God (Heb 11:8-10). Therefore the true sons of Abraham are those who receive the promises of God by faith. In fact, Paul says that the Scripture (seeing that God would justify the gentiles by faith) preached the gospel to Abraham saying that in him all the nations of the world will be blessed (Gen 12:3). This is Scripture as agent rather than just a record of events. That is the power of the word of God.

3:10-:14. The Word of Faith. The Law has its own problems. There is a curse on all those who do not keep all the law. It is an incredible burden trying to keep all the law (if this is even possible). Again, the OT actually claims that the just will live by faith (not law) (Hab 2:4). This is one of only two uses of 'faith' in the OT. (The other is Deut 32:20.) But the problem of the curse is removed by Jesus Christ who became a curse for us, because it is written 'cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree' (Deut 21:23). Paul's message to the gentiles (and all Christians) is that we receive the blessings of Abraham in receiving the promise of the Spirit by faith. The mechanism for blessing is faith.

Law is not based on faith but upon obedience. People can believe for their salvation by keeping a set of rules. This salvation is received at the end of the successful rule keeping. The Christian receives their salvation up front by faith. Faith places them in the salvation space. The challenge is then to remain there and live out (work out) their salvation in the power of the Spirit by faith. The whole Christian life depends on faith. Jesus Christ is the Faith Person. God responds to faith not need. Every aspect of the Christian life requires faith. The Church is the faith community, the company of believers. If you do not have faith you can get it: Faith comes by hearing (and hearing by) the Word of God (Rom 10:17). I need to hear and receive the Word of God at ever deeper levels of my being. I need to be a faith creature who speaks faith and lives by faith.

3:15-:25. The Word of Life. The Mosaic Law which comes 430 years after Abraham cannot annul the covenant made by God (in Christ) with Abraham which was by promise. What then is the purpose of the Law? The Law was added because of transgressions, because people make mistakes. But the law cannot give life. Law can contain or direct life. We can live by regulations but the regulations in themselves are not life-giving. It is the spirit alone that can give life because the Spirit is the Lord and Giver of Life. Jesus said 'It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit and they are life.' (John 6:63). Jesus as the Word of Life brings the words of life that we have in the Spirit. Hearing the words of Christ is life-giving and faith-bearing. This passage also claims that Scripture consigns (wraps up, confines) everything under sin (3:22). This is a second example of Scripture as agent. This is the word of God ruling over our opinion and perception. We may conceive the world as biological, material or psychological: the Scripture conceives it (and places it) under the bondage and corruption of sin (Rom 8:20-22). That is the explanation for the rule of death over matter. This also explains the power of words. Jesus Christ is described as the Word (John 1:1) and as the Word of Life (1John 1:1-3). Jesus Christ is the Word of Life who they have heard, seen, looked upon, handled and declared as a witness. Jesus Christ, as the understandable and declarable Word of God, is of the substance of the Father, wholly incarnate, wholly Man, wholly God. There is a purpose for the Law and that is to be a tutor to bring us Christ. Before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law. But now that faith has been revealed we are no longer under a tutor. Our guide now is the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 16:7-15; 1John 2:20, 27). As we abide in the faith place the Holy Spirit empowers our capacity to be as Christians.

3:26-4:7. The Word is One. We become sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ. Those of us who have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ. This is also a faith move. As Christians we are to put off the old man (nature, identity) that grows corrupt with deceitful lusts, we are to be renewed in the spirit of our minds and we are to put on the new man (nature, identity) created according to God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:8-11). This new nature means that there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female for we are all one in Christ Jesus. This means that in Jesus Christ cultural, economic and sexual distinctions are overridden because of our new significance in Christ. We are all heirs of the same salvation in Christ. There are no distinctions in the divine inheritance which we receive by faith. However, cultural, economic and sexual differences continue to exist. Faith is the one means by which we enter into what God

has for us and faith can be exercised by anyone regardless of any physical or cultural distinction. If you are Christ's you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to promise.

The Stoicheia. The Greek word 'stoicheion' means 'element', or a 'rudiment of knowledge'. It can also refer to the material elements of the universe or the forces that constitute a view of reality. These elements represent a break-up of reality into a theory of component parts whereby people submit to the rule (even worship) of these elemental parts. It can become a worship of the creature rather than the Creator (Rom 1:25). The word 'stoicheion' is used in (Gal 4:3, 9; Col 2:8, 20; Heb 5:12; 2Pet 3:10, 12). In submitting to the law one is submitting to this rule of elemental forces. One's behaviour is being driven by the rudiments of experience rather than by receiving a promise in God by faith. Submitting to these elements (rudiments, 'stoicheia') is submitting to the bondage and worship of elemental forces and not to God by faith. This understanding of 'stoicheion' can be developed by a further translation which indicates a meaning of elemental spirits or forces or demons. Therefore submission to this elemental understanding of reality can be seen as a submission to demonic or guardian spirits which we serve by worshipping days, relics, laws, behaviours and moral examples. By contrast the gospel refers everything to God and His promises.

4:8-:20. Demonic worship. This means that they have served things that are by nature not gods (4:8). You observe days and months and seasons and years and things that perish with the using (Col 2:20-23). Paul asks the believers to imitate him. They cared for him with his physical disability with his eyes (which may have been his 'thorn in the flesh' 2Cor 12:7). Paul is afraid that they will lose the blessing they once had. He is zealous for them. Like a mother he is suffering birth pangs until Christ be formed in them. He fears that they will be exploited by people who wish to boast (glory, triumph) in their flesh (Gal 6:13).

4:21-:31. The Two Covenants. Paul here introduces a major theological distinction between the Old and the New Covenants. Jesus Christ has not done away with the Law, rather He has fulfilled the rules of the Law for being made acceptable to God. Those who want to be under the Law, do they listen to the Law? Do they understand what the Law is really delivering? Paul then compares the two covenants. This may be done as follows:

<u>Old Covenant</u>	<u>New Covenant</u>
Hagar	Sarah
Maidservant	free woman (wife)
Mt Sinai	(New Jerusalem)
Moses	Abraham
Law	Promise
Jerusalem below	Jerusalem above
In bondage with her children	mother of us all
Ishmael	Isaac
Slave	son/heir
Flesh	spirit
Bondage	freedom
Born of the flesh	born of the spirit
Children of slavery	children of promise
Children of the maidservant	children of the free woman

It is interesting to note that there is no earthly parallel to Mt Sinai. This is because Christianity (the gospel) has no sacred sites. Denominations may have places or buildings that are peculiar to their separate brand of denominationalism, but they have no meaning for the gospel. If we insist on a sacred

site for the Christian then the sacred site is the Person. We, as believers, are the temples of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 6:19). Christians can meet anywhere, under any circumstances, and are required to go no where to be saved or even made holier. The deep question for the Christian is the depth of their obedience to the revealed will of God in them. This in itself is a faith statement that requires faith to be implemented. The Christian life is about speaking from the faith place, maintaining the faith stance and achieving the faith goals. Faith requires contradicting and counteracting the attacks of unbelief.

Christian Freedom. For freedom Christ has set us free (5:1). What is Christian freedom? Christians are not free from the constraints of reality, physical disease, financial ruin, material embarrassment or moral corruption. NT writers prefer to call themselves the slaves of Christ (Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1; Titus 1:1; James 1:1; 2Pet 1:1; Jude 1; Rev 1:1). In our culture, slavery is the opposite of freedom. How free is the Christian who is bound to Christ? The freedom is not found in ourselves but in Christ: He is the one who is free. The freedom is from the bondage to sin. He who commits sin is the slave of sin (John 8:34). Our old personality is crucified with Christ so that the body of sin (our sinful identity) may be abolished. This means that we will no longer be slaves of sin (Rom 6:6). We first of all choose to follow Christ (which is and has to be an act of freedom). Then we enter into the freedom that is located in Christ. This is freedom from sin and the tyranny of our old self. We persist in patterns because we cannot see an alternative. Or if we can see an alternative we do not permit ourselves to pursue it. We are locked in, which is bondage. The security of Christ is the freedom to pursue a future that is a genuine alternative to nature, that is conceived in truth and is part of our inheritance in Christ.

'Make me a captive Lord and then I shall be free.'