

# **EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS** (Lesson 9) - Pastor Joh. W. Matutis

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## **Concerning the studying**

I **recommend** you to read through the respective book in the bible at first. Our manual is the bible. And then to go through one or two pages of the material every day, which implies to also look up and read the given bible scriptures to become thoroughly acquainted with the subject. Another suggestion would be to use this material as one's regular devotion.

If you would like to **obtain a degree (certificate) at the end of the seminary**, you need to answer the **test questions** at the end of each lesson and send or email it to us with your full name and address. And now I wish you lots of joy and spiritual profit during your bible study.

**Pastor Joh. W. Matutis**

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

More than any other book of the New Testament, the Epistle to the Galatians contributed to the breaking of yoke of Judaism, ritualism of the Catholic church and especially of secular structures that kept threatening the spiritual content and liberty of the Gospel. Even though Galatians is one of the shorter letters of the apostle Paul, it is still counted one of the most important and influential texts of Paul, that widely effected theology in general.

In the early church, when Judaism and Christianity were separated, the Epistle to the Galatians helped to clear fronts. Similar to the Epistle to the Romans the doctrine of justification is the center of the content. Decades later during the era of reformation it even attained central importance. Just like in **2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians** it contains illuminating justification of the Apostolic authority of Paul. It also represents a summary of Paul's teachings.

**The Galatians were descendants of the Gauls** who eventually settled in Galatia around the 300 b.C. At that time the Gauls migrated from nowadays France and settled in the Galatian landscape of current Turkey (Acts 16,6). Around 25 b.C the Romans united this area together with Pisidia, Phrygia and parts of Lycaonia to the Roman province Galatia. Old discoveries and inscriptions of that area testify that Amytnas Celts inhabited that area at that time. The Epistle to the Galatians is addressing the Christian churches of the Minor Asian area.

The **three most important cities of Galatia were Ancyra, Tavium und Pessinus**. A numerous and wealthy Jewish colony had settled in Galatia. Galatia was occupied by the Romans since 189 b.C and became a Roman province in 25 b.C.

According to Acts 16,6 Paul travelled through **North Galatia**. On his second mission journey to the Apostle Council of Acts 15 and on the third mission journey (Acts 18,23). This is how the South Galatian churches (1<sup>st</sup> mission journey of Paul) **Ikonium, Lystra, Derbe** (Apg. 14) were established. The majority of the Galatian churches were non-Jews (Gal. 4,8/ 5,2). **Jewish teachers** tried to lead the Galatians to Judaism (Gal. 1,6-9/ 5,8-10/ 6,12-13). Paul considered those teachers a threat to the church and their faith. They tried to put **Jewish rituals** on non-Jewish Christian believers. Laws concerning food and circumcision were preached to them. He defended the Christian liberty that does not allow them to be slaves to the law.

The Epistle to the Galatians corresponds to a **forensic speech**. The topic of the letter is the freedom of Christians from the law. It is the sharpest letter of defense of the apostle. In the beginning of the letter Paul emphasizes his authority, which is not established by people but by the risen LORD.

The letter rather had the purpose to rebuke and not so much to teach. It was not written to teach the assembly (community / church) in the great truths of the gospel as we can read in the Epistle to the Romans.

Galatians does also not reveal the truths of the assembly, like we can find in the Epistle to the Ephesians. It is also not about the present experiences of a Christian as in **Philippians**. The letter was written to correct a great evil that had entered into the assembly of the Galatians.

The character of this Epistle can be compared to the Epistles to the Corinthians with some differences:

- The letter to the Galatians was written to rebuke their legalism,
- while the letters to the Corinthians were written to rebuke carnality or worldliness (1.Cor. 3).

Eventhough both letters seem to be contrary both afflictions have one thing in common: they acknowledge the flesh of the man. The **legalism** (of the Galatians) is the attempt to control flesh by rules and laws and to maintain it by religious ceremonies. The **lawlessness** on the other hand (Corinthians) is giving in to the desires of the flesh. **Lawlessness** is rejecting the foundations of the law and allows flesh to be a controlling influence in the life of a Christian.

Not persecutions of the Christians are topic of this letter, but the fact that the Galatians are endangered to believe that Jewish legalism is a requirement for salvation, rather than believing in the gospel. Because the law is turned against the flesh and through flesh the world enters the scene. This is how law, flesh and the world work together. After using the law in order to rebuke the evil of the flesh and the world, the spirit of God introduced the cross of Christ. There fore we read in the letter that **the cross** is applied to the law in Chapter 2,20, to the flesh in Ch. 5,24 and to the world in Ch 6,14.

Result: Christ instead of the law – spirit of God instead of flesh – and a new creation instead of the world

## **AUTHOR**

The letter itself gives us numerous indications. The author calls himself „**Paul, the apostle**“ in Gal. 1,1 and „**Paul**“ in Gal. 5,2. It is of special meaning that the author of the letter reveals his identity in the introduction of the letter (Gal. 1,1) – and later in Ch. 5,2. The many personal details can also not be referred to anyone else but Paul (for ex. Gal. 1,11 to 2,10).

The author considers himself the spiritual father of the Galatian Christians (Gal. 1,6.11/ 4,13-19), a privilege that only Paul could claim.

**Justification by faith**, the main topic of the letter and one of Paul's favorite subjects.

## **RECIPIENTS**

They are mentioned in the introduction: „**To the churches of Galatia**“ (Gal. 1,2). It is generally assumed that this is addressing the churches in the South. These were established by Paul, when he travelled through the Galatian area in the beginning of his second and third mission journey (Acts 16,6 and 18,23). In the book of Acts the planting of the churches in South Galatia is confirmed.

There are many indications that Paul was rather addressing the churches of the Southern area. First of all because he visited them on his mission journeys. Secondly there was a trade route that lead from Tarsus, the hometown of Paul, directly to the cities in the South of Galatia. The Judaists preferred the Southern cities over the Northern because there lived many Jews who would give heed to their teachings. Also the offerings to the poor in Jerusalem were always accompanied by a messenger from South Galatia and not from the North (Act. 20,4).

There were several home churches which were located nearby. Some bible interpreters believe that Galatians is related to the Epistle to the Romans as far as the content is concerned. This would be a logical explanation for the similarities in regard to the doctrines of justification.

In the beginning of his stay at Ephesus, Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthians praising the Galatians for their offerings. He is describing a church that is located far away from Corinth. In the end of his stay at Ephesus / In the beginning of his offering journey, he finally wrote to the Galatians about 55/ 56 A.D. Only after he wrote to the Corinthians Paul heard of the events in Galatia and therefore wrote this letter.

## **COMPOSITION**

Based on Gal. 4,13 we assume that Paul had been to Galatia twice, before he wrote this letter. The visits mentioned in Acts 16,6 and 18,23 must refer to Galatia. The first visit took place during his first mission journey (Act. 16,6), and the second one in the beginning of his third mission journey – which means in the year 55 AD (see above).

According to Gal. 1, 6 Paul cried out: „**I am shocked that you are turning away so soon...**“. This proves that the Galatians were soon led astray after the last visit of Paul. Therefore it should be assumed that Galatians was written about 55 AD, before Paul's stay at Ephesus or while he stayed there (Act. 18, 23-24/ 19,1) because he wrote a letter to the Corinthians at that time mentioning the Galatians as a role model as offering givers. He is calling a church that is far away from 'Corinth as a role model. Shortly after his stay at Ephesus, when he started his offering journey, he wrote to the Galatians (ca. 55/ 56 AD)

After he wrote to the Corinthians Paul heard of the events in Galatia which caused him to write this letter. This letter and its theology probably also served as an outline for later letters (for example the Epistle to the Romans). This would explain the theological proximity concerning the teachings of justification.

Paul mentioned in Galatians that Peter came from Jerusalem to Antioch to visit them. He stayed with them for some time. He also mentioned that Peter drew back from the Gentile Christians. Paul publicly rebuked this action. In the meantime the Jewish Christians who still kept the Mosaic laws questioned Paul's authority and taught that circumcision is a requirement for salvation. They had already influenced the churches in Galatia with their teachings. As a determined reaction to the attitude of Peter and because of the backslidings of the Galatians into legalism, Paul wrote this letter. With his letter Paul did not only want to rebuke the Judaists who entered the churches of Galatia. He emphasizes that he also wants to rebuke Peter. They tried to screw Paul's reputation in the churches. In addition they also proclaimed a false gospel. Paul therefore saw himself forced to justify and defend his authority as an apostle and his message. He is facing this responsibility in the first two Chapters of this letter. In this autobiographic part he demonstrates very convincingly that His calling as an apostle and the gospel that he preached, was established by a revelation of the risen Christ Himself.

## **AUTHENTICITY**

The numerous quotations of the scriptures in the first two centuries sufficiently prove the authenticity of this letter in the sight of contemporary witnesses.

The topic of the Epistle to the Galatians was the problem of the first Christian century of the church of Jesus and his arguments were the main issues during the Apostle Council in Jerusalem.

### Special features:

- Paul wrote it with his own hands (Gal. 6,11). The letter was very urgent!
- Due to health issues with his eyes (Gal. 4,14.15/ Act. 23,5) Paul wrote in capital letters (Gal. 6,11).
- Unusual composition: At first biographical explanations, then a teaching part.
- The biographical details are also unusual (Gal. 1-2).
- The beginning is also unusual because there is no praise or thanksgiving to the recipients (Gal. 1,6ff) .
- **The accordance** between Paul and James on one hand
- between John and Peter on the other hand (Gal. 2,9) .
- The Epistle to the Galatians was of central importance for the reformation. It was and is of influential importance in the battle against the Roman – Catholic righteousness of deeds.
- It is still an important weapon to oppose the growing confusion between Christianity and Judaism among the evangelicals.
- Paul does not mention Barnabas. They had an argument before and therefore went separate ways.

## **PURPOSE AND GOAL**

The purpose of the letter is clear. Paul is expressing that he is shocked and hurting, because the Galatians turned away from him and the gospel so quickly (Gal. 1,6-7). His powerful justification of his office as an apostle and his ministry, is followed by an assault against **the false teachers**. His opponents mocked his spiritual revelation as human and insufficient (Gal. 1,11 to 2, 14). Paul explains that the proclamation of salvation through faith is the only way to salvation and not adherence to Jewish statutes like circumcision, Sabbath, etc.

The great goal of his letter is to call the Galatian Christians back to the true knowledge and their Sonship of God, that they have received by faith alone (Gal. 3,11-13.24-26 etc.). This letter is a greater contribution to the deliverance of Christians of Judaism, Catholicism, traditions and every other form of „apparent piety“ than any other book of the New Testament.

Important words of Galatians:

- 7x the cross of Christ is mentioned: **cross**
- 3x **crucify** (Gal. 5,11/ 6,12.14)
- 7 x **grace** (Gal. 1,3.6.15/ 2,9.21/ 5,4/ 6,18)
- 8 x **justify** (Gal. 2,16.16.16.17/ 3,8.11.24/ 5,4)

## **CONTENT AND ARRANGEMENTS**

Introduction	1,1-10
Blessings	1,1-5
Rebuke of the Galatian's inconsistency	1,6-10
<b><u>1. Paul proves his apostleship of Jesus Christ</u></b>	1,11 to 2,21
Divine origin of his calling as an apostle	1,11-24
Acknowledgement of the old apostles at Jerusalem	2, 1-10
Defense of his authority before Peter	2, 11-21
<b><u>2. Paul proclaims the true gospel of Jesus Christ</u></b>	3,1-18
Personal experiences of the Galatians (reception of the holy spirit)	3,1-5
Abraham justified by faith (role model)	3,6-14
The promise is not bound to the law	3, 15-18
<b><u>3. The position of the law in the house of God</u></b>	3,19 to 4, 31
The purpose of the law (pointing to Christ)	3,19-29
The servanthood of the law (the sonship by grace)	4,1-7
The backsliding of the Galatians	4,8-20
Law or faith (Ismael and Isaac)	4,21-31
<b><u>4. Moral consequences of justification by faith</u></b>	5,1 to 6, 10
The reality of liberty	5,1-12
Application of liberty by practicing love	5,13-26
The fruit of liberty	6,1-10
<b><u>5. Conclusion</u></b>	6,11-18
Paul is only boasting in the cross of Christ	6,11-17
His grace be with all of you	6,18

**Keyword:** „Liberty“

**Key verse:** „Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage!“ (Gal. 5, 1).

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

### **The actuality of the book**

At the first sight it might seem like this letter with its discussion about the law and grace, servanthood and liberty is of little importance today. Nobody is thinking of following after the people of Israel in order to be saved. Nobody is regarding circumcision a requirement for salvation. But the heart of the matter is still current today. Aren't there still many who refuse to go to Christ without detours. They try to convince themselves that their good deeds will justify them with regard to their sins. They want to do good in order to be accepted and worthy in the sight of God.

- They build upon a lack of knowledge of God's mercy.
- They believe in the necessity of sacraments in order to obtain salvation, etc.
- They believe that it is necessary to adhere the Sabbath and Jewish feasts, etc.

Such opinions opposing the bible are dominating many minds, therefore the study of the Epistle to the Galatians is not a waste of time.

### **Characteristics**

- Paul's strict and serious tone is remarkable.
- Against his habit, he starts this letter without a word of praise and thanksgiving and does not ask for intercession of the saints.
- The teaching of justification by faith is expressed with serious earnestness than in any other letter of Paul .
- The letter is written with Paul's own hands. This is something that must have touched the hearts and conscience of the readers deeply (Gal. 6,11).

## **Detailed interpretation and reflection**

**Gal. 1,1-5 – salutation and blessings.** As it was a custom, Paul introduced himself in the beginning of the letter as the sender. In all his letters he calls himself Paul, even though his name used to be Saul. Luke called the apostle Saul until Acts 13,7 but then he also called him Paul. It reports a conversion of a Gentile the **landlord Sergius Paul**.

**The beginning of Galatians** is on one hand a typical letter of Paul, but on the other hand it is also very unusual. As we said before we can find the customary introduction of the sender and a traditional salutation, but there is no thanksgiving, and no praise of the saints that we can find in all of his other letters. Since there are no personal greetings at the end of the letter we must assume that he wants to reduce his personal affiliation with this church to a minimum because they are close to the edge of not being his church anymore.

**As the sender of the letter Paul refers to himself by name** and adds to his name the title „apostle“. This is further explained in Gal. 1,15-27: he was not sent by the carnal Jesus Christ, but by the risen One.

**The abrupt introduction** directly confronts the reader with the main theme: the assaults of the Apostolic office of Paul.

Ananias supported him with his counseling ministry (Act. 9,1-18), and Barnabas introduced him to the church in Jerusalem and to the other apostles (Act. 9,26-28). He was called by Jesus Christ and God, the Father. This alone was his honor and authority. If anyone doubted the calling of Paul they were also questioning his spiritual foundation, which is the reality of the risen Christ. Even more so, God's actions per se: who equipped Jesus with all power in His resurrection. Paul's answer to the assaults was therefore pointing to the authority of God. As an apostle and messenger of God he does not have to defend or identify himself.

**Paul had a unique office**, but he was also involved with the fellowship of the brethren. Therefore he wrote: **„.... and all brothers, who are with me“**. This did not offend his authority as an apostle, but rather enhanced it. He was not a lone wolf and not a representative of a certain theology. The terminology „Pauline theology“ is often a vain attempt to separate Paul from the other messengers of the gospel and question his authority. With this statement Paul clearly expressed that the others are his brothers and that he does not proclaim a „gospel according to Paul“ but rather new that Jesus had joined him to all the other witnesses of Christ. The authority of the witnesses of Jesus Christ is established on **three pillars**:

- the authorization of Jesus Christ Himself/
- the integration into the church of Jesus
- a personal life style of faith.

The above order refers to their importance. In his greeting all brothers who were with him were included without appearing as co-writers of this letter.

The **specification: „to the churches in Galatia“** distinguishes the letter as a circular letter. It was astonishing that Paul did not send them a letter of reproof to the false teachers. He did not even associate with them. He addressed the church directly. His letter was therefore not a private letter for public reading of Apostolic teachings in the church gatherings.

The authority of his Apostolic office and that of the brothers were backing the letter. If a teaching is right or wrong cannot be judged in a private argument. That is an issue for the whole church of Jesus and for the public. Paul made this very clear.

Gal. 1-2 opposes in every aspect the Jewish requirements of circumcision and adherence to the law. In Galatians Paul does not primarily defend His apostleship and his personality, rather he explains the substance and theological foundation of the gospel they proclaimed. The accusations against Paul that came up in Galatia can be summarized this way: Paul rejects the law – therefore he tries to make life easy for his followers – for he wants to be popular – this reveals that he is very insecure – he cannot be trusted – his message should be rejected – and the Galatians were supposed to accept the message of Paul's opponents and adopt their teachings.

**In Galatia the Apostolic office of Paul was severely threatened.** But unlike in Corinth it was not about questions concerning the apostolic rights, spiritual abilities or eloquence of speech, but rather the factual – contentual message of the gospel that Paul proclaimed. He did not declare the thora but Christ, the risen one and therewith makes the clarity of the Gentile Christian gospel evident. He evangelized the Israelite image of God and proclaims God as the One who saves from death and forsakenness. With this confession Paul created a new world and history. In all of this Paul now considers the resurrection of Jesus as a new beginning and all things before have grown old.

**In vers 3 he emphasizes the „grace“ of God.** That is a key word when it comes to biblical justification. The apostle assumes that we people all have the same father and that God is not the father of Jesus Christ alone but also of all who are in Christ.

**For Paul Jesus' death on the cross started a new era** (Gal. 1,4/ 2.Cor. 4,4/ Eph. 2,2/ Joh. 12,31). The dominion of sin and law is over (Gal. 3,19), the tyrannns were defeated and the door to the kingdom of God was opened (Rom. 14,17/ Col. 1,13/ Eph. 5,5). But the final and complete deliverance, the physical resurrection will only take place when Jesus returns (Rom. 5-8). And all that happened and happens according to the will of God. This „Doxology“ (prais of God) Paul deliberately closes with „Amen“. This is an indication of the glory of the creator of salvation. In addition this introdoction is not followed by thanksgiving, pointing the the backsliding of the recepients.

**Gal. 1,6-10 – Rebuke of the Galatians' inconsistency.** The Celts (Galatians) loved new things and the Celtic temper was inconsistent. When the false teachers moved through their area and preached salvation by deeds and the necessity of circumcision, the Galatians hastily adopted these new teachings (Gal. 1,6). Paul heard of theri backsliding. How he heard of their condition is unknown. Paul was shocked. His amazement can be explained by his expectations towards the Galatian Christians.

They turned away from the One who called them by (or in) grace. The Galatians had turned towards a **"different gospel"**. This is unfaithfulness towards the Gospel (Gal. 1,6-10 and 2,11-21) and a rejection of Jesus. The „other gospel“ according to the opinion of Paul, described the new way / development of Judaism of that time. It is not a delivering or saving message. Only the gospel of Jesus, the son of God is real. In Vers 7 the apostel corrects this statement, by emphasizing that there is no such gospel but the one he proclaimed based on the revalation of Jesus (1.Cor. 15,11/ Rom. 1,1/ 1.Cor. 1,17).

Remarkeable in this letter is Paul's extraordinarily negative attitude towards the Jewish religious law in its entirety. This negative attitude must be acknowledged with regard to the historical backround: the discussions about the integration of the Gentiles into the salvation of God.

**The agitation of the apostel** (in Gal. 1,8) lets us know, that the message strongly differed from the gospel that he had proclaimed. A gospel that opposed the proclamations of Paul, can in no way be called gospel – even if Paul or an angel of heaven proclaimed it. Beause the gospel must be preached by messengers of Christ, who are the mouthpiece of God and know Him intimately.

If a man proclaims such false teachings, he deserves to be cursed.

The repetition of the curse in V ers 9 shows how important this matter is to him. It is not only about a disagreement, but a threat of salvation for all the church members of Galatia. In addition it might be possible that Paul already suspected such a thing to happen, because he wrote: **„what you have received“** instead of „what we have proclaimed“.

He emphasizes (Gal. 1,10-12) that the gospel he proclaims was not given to him by men, but by Jesus Christ Himself. Therefore he is bold enough to claim that his gospel is the only true gospel and that there is no other besides it if it is different or even opposing his message. In his explanations he excludes such messages from the right to be even called gospel, because gospel means good news!

The requirement to proclaim the gospel is not to do it just to win or please people. It must be declared by a servant of Jesus Christ, not aiming to please people. Such a person also does not try to **„persuade“** people. „Persuasion“ is always something negative, it is an action of cajolery which is against the divine policy of free will, even if it happens on behalf of the Gospel of Jesus. **„Peruasion“** was the common activity of religious charlatans who tried to persuade people to serve them or their God by means of witchcraft, temptation, curses, etc.

Whoever preaches the gospel will win God, not necessarily the people who might reject it. This often happened to Paul. Paul did not preach the gospel to please men, but rather to please God. Therefore he tries to say: I am not seeking to win people but God.

Even the last critics were supposed to realize that Paul is not a flatterer and is not trying to kiss up to anybody. He calls himself a „servant of Christ“. As such he serves Jesus Christ alone, who is his Lord (Gal. 1,3). The terms **"servant"** and **"Lord"** remind us of the antique slavery: A wealthy lord, for example a landlord, owned slaves that had to serve him and had to be available to him.

The slave metaphor in Gal. 1,10 seems to be influenced by Jeremia and Isaiah. And the term "servant of Christ" is to be understood as a title of honor. Paul takes possession of the traditional Old Testament image of "servant of God". On the other hand he also claims the antique order of authority, the status as the highest slave who shares in the authority and honor of his lord.

## **Gal. 1,11 to 2, 21 – Paul proves to be a true apostle Jesus Christ**

**Gal. 1,11-24 – Divine origin of his apostolic office.** Paul highlights the uniqueness of the gospel he proclaims by pointing out that it originated not of humans. He therewith distinguishes himself from the teachings of his opponents. In Gal. 1,11-17 he thematised this through his exceptional calling. And in Gal. 2,1-10 he also speaks about the acknowledgement of his office by the other apostles. Paul emphasizes the independancy of his apostleship and his gospel. Furthermore he underlines the fundamental alignment – as an exterior image of the unity of the church – with the apostles in Jerusalem. The relation to the pillars of Jerusalem, however, is ambiguous. On one hand it stresses the divine origin of his gospel and the limitation of the contact with the pillars. On the other hand it testifies his willingness to submit by presenting the gospel to the pillars. The relationship was not free of tension as we can see in the conflict with Peter / Kephas. It is interesting to watch how Paul is dealing with those conflict.

Paul is tracing the gospel he proclaims back to a revelation of Jesus Christ – which he considers a life changing experience of calling. He describes this event very briefly in V. 15-17. Before that (in V. 13-14) he also mentions his experiences before his calling. In order to underline the special meaning of his calling, Paul tells us something about his former lifestyle. His earlier life as a Jew was known to the readers because they had heard it before. Everybody knew that Paul relentlessly persecuted the church of God and had put all of his time and effort in their persecution and destruction. If Paul was asked to persecute the Jewish Christians or if he did it deliberately we do not know. He himself stated: I persecuted – so that we can assume that it was not only one assignment but rather something he did for a long time.

## **The conversion and the calling of Paul is the pattern of Israel's former repentance unto the Lord**

Paul was a diaspora Jew. He was deeply rooted in the historical and religious inheritance of his people. In his time before the conversion he was a diligent student and obtained better results than his fellow students. He is referring to the strict adherence to the Jewish traditions. He excelled compared to others living according to the laws of Judaism.

In Gal. 1,15-17 he finally writes about the decisive experience that caused his conversion. This was the starting point of his proclamation and in no way to be traced back to a human being or the human mind. It was by the grace of God. This revelation of Jesus Christ determines the whole life of the apostle. He assumes that he was called for the proclamation of His revelation from his mother's womb. Saying this he points back to the calling of the prophet Jeremia (Jer. 1,5) and the "servant of God" in the book of Isaiah (Is. 49,1,5).

Paul tries to make it clear that his proclamations are based on a revelation of Christ only and not on a human tradition or teaching (Gal. 1,10-12). It is striking that Paul does not value his conversion itself, but always considers it in the light of his calling as an apostle. He also reports his **first visit at Jerusalem**, that only served the purpose of getting to know the „pillars of the church“ - especially Peter and his ministry.

Why Paul wanted to meet Kephas and not another apostle is not clear. 1.Cor. 15,5 reveals that Kephas was the first to whom the resurrected Jesus Christ appeared (before the Ascension) To the „twelve“ he appeared after that. The Twelve refer to the closest disciples of Jesus. Kephas also belonged to The Twelve – therefore the resurrected Christ appeared to him twice.

What Paul and Kephas did during the 15 days of Paul's visit cannot be extracted from the text. If you consider the visit in the light of the revelation of Jesus Christ at Damascus, it must be anticipated that they talked about the event. Maybe Kephas also reported his encounter with the Lord and therewith they both testified to each other and exchanged experiences. They probably did not discuss the content of the gospel since Paul received the gospel from Jesus Himself according to Gal. 1,12. It is also possible that Kephas shared with Paul his experiences of life with Jesus until the crucifixion. How far aspects of a future mission played a role within those 15 days is doubtful. There is no valid information as to how far Kephas was already active as a missionary.

**Peter** was the first apostolic witness of the risen One and Paul was the last (1.Cor. 15,5.8).

Paul must have had an important intention to visit Peter and Kephas. To Paul **Peter** was the one who was called by the carnal and risen One. He wanted to exchange experiences and information with him for assurance. Later he also met **James**, (even though he did not belong to the Twelve and did not believe in Jesus before his resurrection he was the „biological“ brother of Jesus and became one of the church leaders in Jerusalem after the day of Pentecost. When Paul met with **Peter** and **James** he must have informed them of his calling to the Gentiles and asked for their blessing.

After the end of the visit Paul did not stay in Jerusalem any longer, not even in the area nearby the city. He went to the far away areas of Syria and Cilicia. During his stay in those areas he was working in the office of an official messenger of the church of Jerusalem. Just like he decided to travel to Jerusalem as a private person, he probably went to Syria and Cilicia as a private person.

Why Paul went exactly to these areas we do not know. Probably because **Damascus and Tarsus** were located in those area. Damascus played an important role for the apostle with regard to his conversion and Tarsus was his hometown (Acts 9,11/ 21,39).

Paul makes it clear that he did not minister in the area of Jerusalem (Judea).

Gal. 2,2 tells us that Paul focused his ministry on the Gentiles. Therefore Gal. 1,22 is pointing to the fact that he left the Jewish mission in Palestine to other missionaries.

The **second visit of Jerusalem** took place more than ten years and served the acknowledgement of Paul's mission and his message opposing circumcision and legalism. For him the revelation of Jesus Christ had one certain purpose: He was supposed to proclaim Jesus **among** the Gentiles. The proclamation is to be made to all nations! In the light of this information it is easy to understand why Paul did not evangelize in the promised land, and why he regularly preached in synagogues that were located among the Gentiles. Paul was supposed to preach the gospel outside of Israel.

From Damascus Paul went to Arabia. Where exactly he went is not clear. It might have been to Mount Sinai (Gal. 4,25), which also belonged to Arabia, or Petra. We are also not sure what he did in that area. Did he draw back to process his revelation experiences? 'Did he draw back to Mount Sinai where Moses received the Ten Commandments from God (Ex. 19-20) and according to Jewish tradition also the whole „written law“ as well as the traditional law (Gal. 1,14)?

Neither do we know why Paul returned from Arabia to Damascus. Supposedly because this is where Jesus revealed Himself to him (Acts 9,1-9) and he wanted to restart his mission from there (Acts 9,19b-20).

There are some voices that claim to know why he went to the desert of Arabia and not Jerusalem. He wanted to be alone with God and meditate and prepare for his Gentile mission. He did not want to confer with flesh and blood. He wanted to act according to the Pinhas-Elija-tradition. Pinhas (Num. 25,7-13) as well as Elija (1 Kin. 19,14) were as eager as Paul. Maybe God wanted Paul – just as Elija – to refrain from his zeal and opens his ear to him anew. After that (compare Elijah 1 Kin. 19,15) he gave him a new assignment and a new anointing to return to the place of his calling.

Gal. 1.23,24 The believers in Judea had heard of Paul's change of disposition by word of mouth and traced it back to his conversion to God and therefore praised him.

Paul did not preach in Judea because he used to persecute the believers therein and had caused a major damage to this church (Gal. 1,13). Paul also wanted to express, that the believers in Judea also knew that Paul had received a different assignment than to teach them and proclaim to them the gospel. Therefore he emphasizes that they „**praised**“ God for it, were even relieved not to have face their former persecutor with mixed feelings.

Paul is also trying to say, that this was one of the reasons why God sent him to the Gentiles instead of the Jews. Later Paul collected offerings for the poor believers in Judea, who had to escape and leave their possessions behind partly because of his persecution and therefore became very poor.

**Gal. 2, 1-10 – Acknowledgement by the apostles of Jerusalem.** In the mean time 14 years had passed between Paul's first and second visit at Jerusalem. Paul had ministered at the church of Antioch and was sent on a mission journey from there (Acts 13-14).

Then there was a fight between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15,36-41). It caused a separation and arguments at Antioch (Gal. 2,11-14). Paul had effected his mission work independent of the church of Antioch and therewith established churches in Galatia, Macedonia and Achaia. All of this happened before the Apostolic Council at Jerusalem.

**The incident with Barnabas** and the separation from the church in Antioch must have been one of the reasons for the Apostolic Council (gathering).

With his second visit at Jerusalem he brought his mission works before the assembly and the leading men of the church for inspection. He was sure of his calling by Jesus and His gospel. After a long and severe discussion the brethren were convinced not to put any more restrictions on the Gentile Christians. This resolution definitely referred to the believers outside of Israel. The reason for it was that in the Thora there were no definite regulations for the cohabitation of **Jews**(Christians) and **Gentile** (Christians) **outside of Israel.** This was not the original plan of God. Israel was already destroyed, taken into captivity and scattered among the nations.

The Apostolic Council was not held to examine or confirm the **apostolic office of Paul.** It was only to determine what the Gentiles must do in order to belong to the people of God.

At the Apostolic Council the disciples realized the „grace“, that God has extended to all people. After James, Kephas and John had discerned this grace, they reached out to Paul and Barnabas. This was a symbolic act to reinforce the unity. The statement was: With their Gentile mission Paul and Barnabas did not go out of the church but rather remained in it. There is only one church and James, Kephas, John as well as Paul and Barnabas belong to it. Through the mission Jews as well as Gentiles can be united in the church of Christ. It is not necessary to circumcise the Gentile Christians or force them to adhere Jewish regulations and commandments.

From this point the **mission to the Gentiles and the Jews were equally respected.**

James, Kephas and John were responsible for the mission work among the Jews.

Paul and Barnabas were in charge of the mission work among the Gentiles. Two very different kind of ministries had started that were now united by a spiritual (rabbinical) compromise.

Paul uses the term "**respectable**" ironically, which leaves the impression that Paul submitted to the authority of the Jerusalem church leaders. 'This was an easy thing for him to do because the „respectable“ had not put any restrictions on Paul. All of his former missionary activities were confirmed by them. The apostle uses the past events to bring light to the current situation. He underlines that there is no question of the justification of his actions. In addition it can be seen from the text (Gal. 2.6) that the „respectable“ still remained among the living and could therefore be questioned any time. According to Gal. 2,7 the "respectable" rather confirmed the righteousness of his activities because they saw the grace that was given to him by God.

Paul does not even enter the topic of circumcision. Circumcision was one of Israel's images pointing to the requests, regulations and commands that can be found in the Thora (Genesis – Deuteronomy) and had to be strictly adhered and were only limited to the land of Israel / Canaan. Since the destruction of the temple this was no longer possible. Since Jesus had fulfilled the law it was no longer necessary.

For whoever **is in Christ** is a partaker of the works of Jesus. (Christ means "truth from God" or "the truly anointed One of God"). That **Titus** (the only Gentile Christian) was still circumcised was because Paul wanted to take him to Jerusalem and Judea to serve there.

**It was a practical decision.** The apostle did not abolish circumcision in the area of Judea and Paul totally accepted that. For those nations God's covenant with Noah applied (they were supposed to follow those conditions) and not the covenant of God and Israel. This would have been „enslavement“ of the other people and nations. Therefore Paul calls those false teachers dismissively "**false brothers**", who want to turn people who believe in Jesus into Jews. Paul himself stated, that we will never (not one hour) yield to their requests.

**Peter and Paul have equal rights and authority.**

The proclamation of the gospel to the Jews is entrusted to Peter.

**The gospel was given to both of them,** and the areas of responsibility are clearly divided:

- Peter proclaims among the circumcised, the Jews.
- Paul proclaims among the uncircumcised, the Gentiles.
- Both were not assigned by man.

According to Gal. 2,8 God gave Peter and Paul the power of the „**apostolic ministry**“. Paul wrote in 1.Cor. 12,6/ Phil. 2,13 that God alone called him to be an apostle (Gal. 1,15/ Thess. 2,12/ 5,24/ Rom. 9,12 and also Gal. 1,16/ Acts 9,1-9), and in Rom.15,18-19 he explains that he believes 'Christ is extended to the Gentiles through him.

The explanation why **Peter** was mentioned 2<sup>nd</sup> place in Gal. 2,9 might be that at that time James and not Peter was the authoritative leader of the church at Jerusalem.

**In Gal. 2,7-8 it sounds like an agreement between Paul and Peter**, that was made when Paul visited Jerusalem for the first time.

Gal. 2,10 exhorts **not to forget the poor**. This is not referring to a spiritual commitment or requirement for the Gentile mission. Sprung forth from a common thought of unity within the church, this was rather a plea. Who the „poor“ truly were, is not further explained. Paul emphasizes that he is eagerly trying to meet this need. In fact he mentions a collection of money (offering) in several of his letter (1.Cor. 16,1-4/ 2.Cor. 8-9/ Rom. 15,25-29). This was meant for the „saints“ (1.Cor. 16,1.3) respectively the poor among the saints (Rom. 15,26) in Jerusalem.

To meet the needs money had to be collected, whereby this collection was a onetime gift of grace and not a permanent tax payments. (more details about this offering: 1.Cor. 16,1.3) When Paul wrote this letter he had already declared this money collection to most of the parts of his mission area, also in Galatia (1.Cor. 16,1). If this task was already completed at this time we do not know. The fact that Paul is mentioning his eager effort, tells us that this assignment was advancing. Since he does not further mention it in his letter to the Galatians probably means that they had already sent their offering.

We assume that the Epistle to the Galatians was written after the Epistles to the Corinthians. At that time the money collection was already in process but not finished yet. It is not clear if this letter was written after the Epistle of Romans, when the money delivery was at hand.

**In Gal. 2,1-10 Paul opens a new phase of his mission work in agreement with Peter** (respectively the ancient church) based on a divine revelation. According to this resolution of the Apostolic Council, Paul refrained from a mission among the Jews, provided that Peter would effect this mission. This labor division enabled Paul to establish churches that were free from the law. However, he did not threaten the existence of the Jewish Christians who lived under Jewish jurisdiction. At the same time it initiated the universal, political-and-cultural-walls-of-the-synagogue-breaking world mission of Paul . The Jewish Christians had often declared their willingness to support such mission.

If those Jews would have seen their interests preserved, they would not have tried to oppose the mission. Paul however, did not accept their request that the Gentile Christians should associate with Judaism by payment of temple taxes, but promised to support the poor of the primitive Christian community.

The **term „poor“** probably referred to Is. 61,1 and to the churches of Jerusalem and Judea that would be considered poor because of their lifestyle (Acts 1-5). In the texts of Rom. 15,25-31/ 1.Cor. 16,1-4/ 2.Cor. 8-9/ Gal. 2,10 Paul intensely focusses on the administrative issues and problems that are associated with the offering **for the „poor“**.

The mention of the offering in the end of the mission convocation (Apostolic Council) confirms the assumption that the church of Jerusalem used their ecclesiological understanding (ecclesiology is the doctrine of the ones who were called out of the world, the teachings of the assembly or the church). This was not to reveal the Gentile Christians as such who stole something from the Jews (salvation) and had to return something.

They deliberately gave something back to the roots. Therewith they compensated the Jewish Christian churches for their sacrifices and their devotion. They are not paying a temple tax. The church leaders at Jerusalem saw their own advantage when they granted Paul to evangelize the Gentiles. They expected Paul to accommodate them with regards to the support of the poor at Jerusalem. This was a requirement for the church in Jerusalem to agree with Paul's Gentile mission: **the poor should be in the center of attention**. This request was supposed to represent the extension of Jesus' loving care for the poor.

**Gal. 2,11-21 – defense of his apostolic office before Peter**. In Gal. 2,1-10 it speaks about the discussion between Paul and the church of Jerusalem. Especially speaking to the „respectables“ in the light of the question if there could be found any fault with it. The Gentile mission was granted to Paul without restrictions. He was only supposed to remember the poor in the form of a money collection for Jerusalem.

**In Antioch there was a certain „incident“** (Gal. 2,11). The attitude of Peter could be justified. Paul would have done the same thing in a similar situation (Rom.14,21/ 1.Cor. 8,13/ 9,20/ Acts 16,3/ 21,26). But Peter acted like a hypocrite. He was not being honest. He himself was led by God in a different way than we can see in the proclamation of the gospel at the house of Cornelius. Because Kephas the rock trespassed, Paul faced him publically. He even did this personally from face to face. He did not speak evil of Kephas behind his back.

In Gal. 1,6-10 Paul is blaming the Galatians for unfaithfulness towards the gospel. In Gal. 2,11-21 he is blaming Peter / Kephas for it because he should have known better.

This **incident at Antioch** must have been so severe that Paul and Barnabas saw themselves forced to travel to Jerusalem right away. They wanted to solve the problem that must have been the reason for the Apostolic Council. Peter and „the friends of James“ were supposed to be addressed in public.

The situation of the first Apostolic Council was not free of tension, as it can be seen in the conflict with Peter / Kephas. Luke was known to dismiss an argument with silence. With as little words as possible he tried to calm the fronts. The church fathers tried to restore the harmony between Peter and Paul in a more or less violent way.

**Paul calls out the reason for Peter's hypocrisy.** It is „the appearance of James and his friends“ (Gal. 2,112). Peter acted appropriately before. But at this point the unity of the church was shaken. The whole discussion started over a futile thing: Are Jewish and Gentile Christians allowed to eat together? And were they allowed to take the symbolic „communion“ together?

From the Jewish Christian point of view the whole situation was different: The resolution to allow the Gentile mission without restrictions only meant that the Gentile Christians did not have to follow the Jewish food regulations. **This did not apply to the Jewish Christians.** From the Jewish Christian point of view there can be no fellowship during the meals, because they had to adhere the food and purity requirements. As long as there are no common conditions, Gentile and Jewish Christians cannot eat together.

In the whole apostolic discussion the status of the Jewish Christians remained the same. Only the ritual status of the Gentile Christians was debated.

**From the Jewish or Jewish Christian point of view food can be defiled for several reasons:**

The offered food could be related to Gentile idol worship and sacrifices thereof (Ex. 34,15). Even Gentile Christians were confronted with the legitimacy of such spiritually defiled foods and therefore a problem to eat with Gentiles (1.Cor. 8,1-13/ 10,14-22). The served meat could be from an unclean animal (Lev.11,1-20). Even fruits or grains were not supposed to be consumed under certain conditions (the detailed food regulations can be found in Lev. 19,23-24/ 23,10.14). Eventually the served dishes might have been prepared the wrong way. For example if the meat was not exsanguinated correctly (Lev.17,10-14/ Deut.12,23-25).

To cook the meat of a he-goat in the milk of his mother was a taboo(Ex. 23,19). And not only the food could be unclean, but also the vessels they were contained in (Lev. 11,32). Jews and Jewish Christians were supposed to keep themselves from unclean things because it was considered contagious.

This purpose of being clean and sanctified was accompanied by many regulations such as washing items, washing the body and especially certain body parts such as the hands before eating (Mark. 7,2-4).

**Kephas (Peter) ate with the Gentile Christians before James and his friends arrived.** We do not know if he did it deliberately or if he had to be convinced. Verse 14 suggests a certain measure of free will. Furthermore he did not only eat with them once but rather several times, maybe even often or regularly. His attitude, however, changed as soon as **the friends of James** arrived.

Who were the „friends of James“ arriving at Antioch and what their intention was, Paul does not reveal. They might have been doing a regular visit at the church. This might also have been a „control visit“. The only detail given about those people is that they were somehow acquainted with James – the brother of the „Lord“ - who either appreciated James a lot, or were even sent by him to Antioch.

It is not certain if they were present in the discussion at Jerusalem, but it is possible. The „friends of James“ cannot precisely be identified the **„false brethren“** to whom Paul did not submit (Gal. 2,4-5).

However, they must have been **„convinced Jewish Christians“like the false brethren** who criticized the idea of Gentile Christianity. It is confirmed that their appearance at Antioch had a great influence upon the present Jewish Christians.

**Peter had drawn back** he made a „backdown“, he isolated himself, changed his behaviour or maybe deliberately submitted to the Jewish Christians. Is this a bad thing? (1.Cor. 9,19,23)

Peter was right in Antioch and chose the better thing. Paul later accepted and even advised the conduct of Peter (1.Cor. and Rom.).

Paul mentions that Kephas feared **"the circumcised"** Jewish Christian friends of James. If he was really afraid of them is debatable. Perhaps their special position in the Jerusalem church intimidated him. But probably Kephas just chose the most peaceful solution in view of the new situation he was facing. Until the friends of James arrived, Kephas' behaviour was church unity oriented. Since he, being a Jewish Christian, was a single guest in a church where a large part was Gentile Christian, he adopted to the Gentile Christian way of life. Otherwise he would not have been able to eat with his Gentile Christian hosts. He would have had to justify his behaviour in front of them.

But when the friends of James arrived, the situation changed: The number of Jewish Christian guests increased. The ones who just arrived were traditional, holding on to their former lifestyle and the Jewish regulations and commandments. From the Jewish Christian point of view they had good and reasonable arguments. If Kephas would have continued to eat with the Gentile Christians he would have been in a difficult situation to explain his behaviour. His attitude would have been declared in Jerusalem, maybe even denouncing him. It is understandable that he tried to escape such trouble.

Since he was a respected „pillar of the church“ (Gal. 2,9) he had a lot to lose. Therefore Kephas chose a peaceful way of handling the situation. Skilfully he avoided a confrontation with James' friends by eating with them without complaining. Paul strictly interpreted his behaviour as hypocrisy. How far the Jewish Christians discussed Peter's habit of eating with the Gentile Christians we do not know.

**In the beginning faith was a balancing act.** The actions of Peter show clearly the agreement that included the liberty from the law for the Gentile Christians in Gal. 2,9 as well as the basic covenant of the Jewish Christians with the regulations of the Thora. It is interesting that Paul does not criticise the friends of James but rather the contradictory behaviour of Peter and his friends.

**The content of Gal. 2,15-21 is topically directly related to V. 11-14. Paul reasons by theology why eating together (Gentile and Jewish Christians) is legally correct.**

'At the time of the New Testament eating together was a deep expression of fellowship. It was a statement of loyalty if you would sit and eat with someone. Therefore Jesus was so strongly criticised when he ate, for example, with the tax collector Zacchaeus. Table fellowship is enhanced as a uniting act throughout the whole bible. It illustrates unlimited acknowledgement of brotherhood when Peter sat with the Gentile Christians and ate with them.

Out of this context Paul criticises Peter, because at first he ate with them and associated with them. And as soon as the lawful Jews from Jerusalem showed up he would not eat with the Gentile Christians anymore. This was tragical in two ways, because Peter was supposed to be a role model. On one hand he made others follow his example: even Barnabas, a co-worker of Paul, followed Peter's attitude. On the other hand he offended the Gentile Christians by introducing the table fellowship with Jewish Christians to them, and then acts in a way that suggests that they are not perfect Christians yet! There is something still missing!

For those reasons Paul criticised the ambiguous attitude of Peter and confronts him publically. It is not so much about Peter's hypocrisy, but rather about the course of the young Gentile Christian church in Galatia. It is about the gospel. Peter knew that faith is not bound to external adherence of the law (Acts 11,1-17).

**Paul starts vers 14 with the word „WE“.** Peter and Paul were both Jews by birth. Contrary to the Jes Paul calls the Gentiles „sinners“ in general. Since Paul speaks to Peter from Jewish Christian to Jewish Christian, it is possible that he speaks from the Jewish Christian point of view. „We“ includes all Jewish Christians like for example Barnabas (Gal. 2,13).

In his argumentation of Gal. 2,15-21 Paul does not say that the Jewish regulations and statutes – the law – are negative. He rather underlines the limits of „the law“:

The "law" is able to protect us from sin, but it cannot make us righteous before God, since it provokes actions based on fear. Righteousness before God is accomplished by the free, loving faith in Jesus Christ. Paul emphasizes that only the firm, unshakeable faith in Jesus Christ makes us righteous and not the dictated works by the law. He says that by strict adherence of the Jewish regulations and commandments we are still not without sin before God.

The words in Gal. 2,16 "**...flesh cannot be justified by deeds...**" Paul is referring to Ps.143,2, which means in a nutshell, that before God no one living is righteous. Gal. 2,16 emphasizes that the deeds of the law cannot justify flesh or man before God. Looking at Gal. 5,17-21 we can interpret Gal. 2,16 like this: A man with all of his desires and trespasses is not able to fulfill the law.

In order to understand the true meaning of Paul's teaching about justification we have to read Gal. 2,16 in the light of Gal. 3,2.5. A careful analysis shows us that **the justification by faith and the gift of the holy spirit are identical.** Without the gift of the holy spirit and His work there is no justification before God. Rom. 8,3 describes the Thora's (the law, external statutes) lack of power, like Romans 7 also described the depth of the powerless human life (Gen. 15,6/ Gal. 3,6/ Rom. 4.2./ Ps. 143,2/ Rom. 3,20/ Hab.2,4/ Gal. 3,11/ Rom. 1,17).

### **What is justification?**

Justification is a term (especially highlighted by Paul) that describes the fullness of God's divine act of salvation for us humans. This applies to the revelation of sin, the acknowledgement and confession of sin and the forgiveness and restoration thereof, up to the new birth, the true completion of man before and in God. It is the restoration of the relationship between man and God through God Himself. It is the true restoration of the relationship between the creator and the creature, between spirit and spiritual children, between God and soul, Father and child. According to the meaning of the word „**justification**“ it means the „**proclamation of righteousness**“ and the „**restoration of righteousness**“ to mankind (Rom. 3,20.28) through God Himself (Eph. 2,5-10/ Tit. 3,5.7/ 2.Tim.1,9). God granted to mankind, his beloved children, the streams of his salvation without requirements (Gal. 3,2/ Rom. 4.3.9/ 5,1) and also „**redeemed our bodies**“ (Rom. 8,23).

The justification of God cannot be accomplished by the efforts of men. This would only lead to self-righteousness and cause the opposite to happen. Even the attempt to try, by human effort, to fulfill the law in order to be saved, carries sin in itself. This ambition would only take humankind deeper into sin. Such idle ambitions would be rebellion, disobedience and opposing God, our own Father of creation (Rom. 10,3/ Phil. 3,6,9/ Rom. 5,12-21/ Rom.7).

The only thing that man has to do to be justified is **to freely accept God's grace.** In the baptism the inward acceptance is accomplished on the outside (Rom. 6/ 5,17). The acceptance of Jesus and the related work of Jesus (the fulfillment of the divine law and the godly requirements) and the execution of baptism, a man **is integrated into the covenant of the God of Israel** and become partakers in all Old Testament covenants and blessings (Rom. 3,5.25/ 15,8.9).

**Actually redemption** relates to the Jewish Christians only because the Gentile Christians never lived under the curse of the law. But since Paul saw the danger that Judaistic preachers would try to move the Gentile Christians among the Galatians to follow the Jewish traditions, his proclamations apply the Jewish and Gentile Christians alike.

The **teachings of justification is applied Christology** (teaching of Jesus Christ). It has to be considered in the light of Roman inheritance law. The Emperor Augustus renewed the legal law of inheritance in the whole Roman Empire. Everyone who could present a notarial document or "per fidei commissum" could inherit. In this case no notarial document was required in order to claim an inheritance before the judge. **It was rather based on the honesty and integrity of a mediator.** Therefore our salvation is depending on the **honesty, faithfulness and integrity of Jesus Christ** to mediate our claims of inheritance before God the Father. By means of **fidei commissum** according to Roman inheritance law, the decedent could determine two heirs, which would not have been possible before. **The first heir would have to adopt the second heir.** With regards to Gal. 3 this means: Abraham the decedent had one heir, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was faithful enough to bless every believer and adopt them as second heirs.

Therefore **the saving moment** for us is not Jesus' faith and not our faith in Jesus Christ alone, but our trust in Jesus, the assurance of his honesty and integrity that God would hear him and apply his rights in order to help us. The Father already confirmed this to us many times when Jesus was still alive „This is my beloved Son ... in whom I am well pleased ...“

Paul calls Jesus Christ the "**Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me**". His love is directly related to the representative sacrificial death on the cross. Jesus Christ could only die on the cross for the sin of the world, because he was not a usual man or some kind of prophet. He was the mediator of God, the Son of God who was the authorized representative of God the Father Himself. Just like Jesus said, who has seen Him has seen the Father.

This is the reason why the gospels depict in detail the ancestry line of Jesus from Abraham and David, respectively from Adam, as well as His virgin birth and the conception by the Holy Spirit to confirm the **honesty and integrity of Jesus Christ** to mediate our inheritance with God.

Jesus does this by saying, I will ask the Father to send you the Holy Spirit. Pentecost is the answer to this request and the confirmation of its legitimacy before God. Therefore the gift of the Holy Spirit is the pawn of our divine inheritance.

The **works of the law** are ethnic (...determined for the Jews in order to mark their identity and distinguish the nation of Israel by behaviour and lifestyle...) and moral (...according to modest and reasonable standards...) works (Eph. 2,9/ 2.Tim.1,9/ Tit. 3,5,7/ Jam.2,24).

The word **works of the law** is referring not only to the „good works“ but also the traditional practices of the Pharisees and Jews that separated the Jews from the non-Jews (circumcision, keeping the Sabbaths, food regulations, etc.). These external regulations were supposed to characterise the Jews as the „chosen people“.

**Therefore a return under the law** is not acceptable, because the believer – crucified with Jesus Christ – died to the law. A true believer lives through God and not through himself. Christ was submitted to the law (Gal. 4,4) in order to take upon Him the curse of the law and redeem the from it (Gal. 3,13, 20).

**Gal. 2,19 - „I am crucified with Christ“.** To be a disciple of Jesus is therefore to live and suffer with Jesus. Jesus was nailed to the cross as blasphemer. And the Jews indeed thought that based on their dead law they did the right thing (Lev. 24,16). The cross of Jesus Christ was therefore the end and fulfillment of the law. That the law died to the law was made visible in Jesus Christ. It was also made visible on all of his disciples / followers like Paul who also experienced such things. The Jews of Jerusalem also sought to kill him because the law apparently required it (Acts 9,29). He was also sentenced to death because he proclaimed the blasphemer Jesus as the Messiah. From the point of view of the Jews He died the death on the cross based on an official law, even though the holy commandment said: „thou shall not kill“ which was given through Moses and dwelled in every believer by birth through the spirit of God.

Paul even goes deeper into the matter than in Romans (Rom. 7,4-10), that the „new man“ died to the old Jewish law. **The law still applies**, but it has no meaning for salvation and redemption.

**It's power and importance were abandoned and put to an end.** Jesus came and fulfilled the unique work of complete salvation. There is nothing left to do.

Gal. 3,1 starts by: ***O you foolish Galatians! Who has tempted you, to whom Jesus Christ was given as a picture of the crucified?*** It is an exclamation of disappointment. Paul is very disappointed in the Galatians. They are turning towards a teaching that claims that the death of Jesus Christ was not necessary and unreasonable. To make it clear to them that God wants to enter into a relationship with them by faith, Paul asked the Galatians 4 questions.

They were supposed to answer in order to receive knowledge and understanding. Because they had lost their knowledge by following those false teachers and doctrines. They had become foolish, which means without knowledge and understanding for the act of salvation of God. They were foolish, and a fool was already described in the Old Testament as somebody who thought and acted without understanding. This deluded and wrong thinking influenced their behaviour and attitude towards God (Ps. 14,1/ Luk. 24, 25). This lack of insight into God's good and sovereign actions in favor of salvation for all captive souls – they opened the door for an attack of an evil power. But it was not only a lack of understanding among the Galatians. Paul also saw something different. It was almost like someone had „bewitched“ them. It was a spell of deception and temptation. The truth of the father of lies, Satan, and his deception became visible. He wanted to snatch the assemblies of Jesus under his dominion. Witchcraft is also referring to idol worship, and this was detestable unto God (Deut. 18,12).

The false brethren who were sneaking into the churches of Galatia had therewith cast a spell upon the churches. They fascinated and tempted them with their message. This was an attack against Jesus Christ Himself. Paul had painted Jesus Christ before their eyes instead. He had opened their eyes for God's way of salvation.

In the message of the Crucified preaches the historical Jesus with his message as well as the resurrected Christ. If someone speaks of the cross he also speaks of the reincarnation, the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus.

Upon the cross as a sacrifice, sign and symbol of unmeasurable love was the center. There the Lord said: **„It is accomplished!“**

Therefore Paul asks four questions:

- Have you received the spirit by doing the works of the law or by the word of faith?  
His first question is: **„How did you receive the holy spirit?“** (Gal. 4,6)
- His second question was: **„You have started it in the spirit, do you want to finish it in the flesh?“**  
By the sacrifice of Jesus the old, legal, Jewish rituals of sacrifice were accomplished and fulfilled. Jesus had met every requirement of the scriptures.

- The third question was: „**Have you experienced so much for nothing? It was not in vain, was it!**?“ Perhaps this was referring to the persecution that the apostles and the newly converted in Galatia had to suffer. On their return trip of their first mission journey Paul and Barnabas prepared the Christians in Galatia for persecutions, which were likely to follow (Acts 14,21-22).

This was very possible to soon come true. Paul reminds them, that they would proclaim their earlier conversion a lie if they turned to the law for salvation. All of their experiences would then be in vain. But this can also be understood in a positive way. He asked the Galatians: „**Were your experiences with the work of the holy spirit, the fruits of faith and the goodness of God's grace in vain?**“ Their life with Christ under the leadership of the holy spirit was a life of fulfillment. He emphasizes that they were about to fall back into their old life in spite of their experiences of the fullness of the spirit. This was possible because God forces no one! And if we abandon God we lose his spirit and his blessings. .

- The fourth question was: „**The one who gave you the spirit and worked such things among you, does He do it by works of the law or the message of faith?**“ (Gal. 3,5) He is saying: **“How does God accomplish his wonderful works?”** There was no doubt, that God worked his powerful miracles among the Gentiles through the spirit and that the law could never have accomplished it (Acts 14,3.8-11).

By the way until that time the Galatians have not known most of the Jewish law and they were only confronted and defiled with it by the false teachers.

**In Gal. 2,20 phrases a statement of sacrificial surrender**“ (Gal. 1,1-5/ 2,15-21/ Rom. 4,23-25/ 8,31-39). It is a theological statement about the „pre-existence of Christ“ as well as a historical statement about the demeanor of the carnal Jesus, who one lived, died, rose again and now determines all of our eternal lives. Therefore he is our justification that originated alone from heavenly goodness, grace, longsuffering, kindness, patience, love and mercies of the Godhead. Jesus paid for all (Rom. 4,25) and God did not spare His only Son, which reminds us of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac (his first-born son with Sarah Gen. 22) that God in his mercy did eventually not allow. In addition Rom. 8,32 and Gal. 2,20 relate Jesus' sacrifice and His „unselfish love“ so that everybody can say: **“He who loved me and gave Himself for me.”** - and everyone can refer to himself by saying that.

### **Who are those different missionaries?**

The different missionaries are Judaizers, in other words **very consequent Jewish Christians**. They required the Galatians to be circumcised (Gal. 5,12/ 6,12f). The different missionaries blamed Paul that he simplified the divine Thora by human means. Therefore he cannot be sent from God. Paul distanced himself from the beginning of this letter and proved the immediacy and vitality of God in his gospel.

Besides the Judaizers there were also the **Libertines**. In addition there were also the Jewish **gnostics**. They probably interpreted „circumcision“ as a magical symbol. According to Gal. 1,6f and Gal. 3,26-4,7 it could also mean that they were no conservative Jewish Christians but rather Jews bound to a synagogue who simply wanted to win proselytes (spervened or converted) for Judaism. The requirement of circumcision of the Judaizers is an expression of the history of salvation in the light of covenant theology. Descendants of the people could become partakers when they became Jews. This was the idea of early Judaism.

**Those different missionaries were convinced, fanatic Judaizers.** There are several possibilities where they originated from.

**Sectarian Jewish missionaries from the diaspora.** In Judaism there was a great tension at that time. Judaism was scattered, divided and estranged. Judaism was not a united power anymore. All Jewish churches were separated and independent. Every doctrine and school was fighting on their own. Jerusalem was close to its political breakdown.

**Those Jewish missionaries came from Judea,** respectively they were sent from Jerusalem. This would also explain why the circumcision could prevent persecution (Gal. 6,12ff). Such persecutions were only effected in Jerusalem and Judea. Paul himself was such a persecutor who was authorized by the city of Jerusalem and went to Damascus. Therefore the Judaizers probably came from Jerusalem to the Galatians in order to bring them to the „true way“.

It is also possible that they were **former Gentile Christians** who allowed themselves to be circumcised because they were lead astray and now proclaimed their gospel. This assumption refers to Paul's statement that their demeanor was no longer in agreement with the gospel that was preached to them.

Paul fought the request of circumcision by the other missionaries **who claimed that Christianity outside of the people of Israel was impossible**. In Phil. 3 and perhaps Rom. 15 speaks of the same situation. Therefore Paul's churches during his visit at Ephesus were both threatened by the **enthusiastic** (1. + 2.Kor.) and the **Judaistic** danger.

On the opposite Gal. 3,1-5 and Acts. 15,5-9 confirm that the experience of hearing the gospel and the conception of faith and the holy spirit are the **decisive argument** against the apparent necessity of circumcision of the Gentile Christians.

### **Gal. 3,1 bis 4,7 – The Christians and the law**

After his autobiographic explanations in Gal. 1,10-2,21 Paul addressed the Galatians directly. And it is not neutral greeting but rather an accusation. Paul calls the Galatians "**fools**". He asked them „who bewitched you“ or cast a spell on you. Indirectly he assigns this temptation to demonic powers, or even demons themselves at work. This means that Paul actually states that the false teacher who spread "**a different gospel**" in Galatia are either Satan in person or people possessed and controlled by him. Paul's understanding of the situation is in agreement with that of other authors of the NT, who share the general imagination of an active presence of Satan and his demons in this world. Gal. 3,1 can be compared to 2.Cor. 11,3.13-15. Paul blamed his rivals, the „apostles“ in Corinth, that they were Satan who claims to be an angel of light.

**Gal. 3,1-18. Paul proclaims the true gospel of Jesus Christ.** The blessings of Abraham, the father of faith, is the father of all people. „Abram“ was born about 2200 years before Christ's birth. As Abraham he turned 175 years before he died. God chose Abraham based on his faith, respectively his faithfulness. According to Paul Abraham's children are not children according to origin but according to the spirit. Whoever has faith in God like Abraham is a child of Abraham and therefore a child of God.

Paul reduces the promises of God to the blessings of the nations. The main argument Paul uses is not a promise of God and can only be completed 430 years later by a law that would be given by an angel. Faith is not obeying the law, but rather trusting, hoping and relying on God's promises.

**Paul asked the Galatians** (Gal. 3,1-5): “Have you received such great things or so many things through the law? Should all of this be in vain?” Especially when they remember what God has worked through the holy spirit (1.Cor. 12,6/ Phil. 2,13/ Rom. 15,18-19). It speaks of the evidences of God's power; His miracles. Also the conception of the holy spirit was not caused by obeying the law, strict adherence to Jewish regulations and commandments, but rather because they heard the Good News and received faith thereof.

**Gal. 3,6-14 - Abraham's justification by faith** (role model). Paul quotes **Gen 15,6** almost word by word, whereas he adds the name "**Abraham**" in the beginning. He does that because the majority of the Galatians were Gentile Christians (Gal. 4,8/ 5,2-3/ 6,12-13) who were not so acquainted with the Hebrew texts like the Jewish Christians. This scripture highlights the faith of Abraham that was counted his righteousness. Paul allegorically interprets the passages about Abraham (Gal. 4,21-31).

**Paul is an excellent rhetorician.** Especially in the Epistle to the Galatians we find several rhetorical strategies and convictional techniques in his argumentation. To establish his position he often refers to the Hebrew bible. His Judaistic opponents would have done the same. He is using the scriptures to prove that faith alone can justify us. Paul used the terminology "**sons of Abraham**" not to refer to Abraham's biological children, but rather his spiritual descendants in the sense of Abraham as the father of faith. (Also his name is a metaphor of his special position: „Abram“ = „high father“, „the father is sovereign“ / „Abraham“ = „father of a multitude“, „father of many“, „father of many nations“, „father of a mighty, related to God generation“.)

In Gal. 3,8-14 Paul used a mixed quotation of the **blessings of Abraham** (from Gen. 12,3 and 18,18) that was given to the patriarch before Judaism or Christianity was introduced. The mixed quotation says that the blessing is not only reserved for the biological descendants of Abraham (the people of Israel) but also to the other nations, the sinful Gentiles (Gal. 2,15). The Hebrew text of both verses says "the generations of this earth" (Gen. 12,3) and the "people of this earth" (Gen. 18,18) will be blessed. It means whoever acts like Abraham is a partaker of this blessing. The faith enables us all to share the **blessings of Abraham**. According to Gal. 3,9 every one who believes in salvation through Jesus Christ inherits a portion of Abraham's blessings. The blessing is therefore not exclusively limited to the biological descendants of Abraham, the Israelites. In Vers 10 he points out that all who want to live by obeying the law will not have a part in the portion of 'Abraham. Those would still live under the curse.

**The curse resulted from one guideline:** All things written in the book of the law must be kept by those who have made a covenant with it. To keep the law is not a curse (Rom. 2,13). It is a curse if you want to live by the law but you fail to adhere to all of it up to the smallest detail. Paul quotes Deut. 27,26/ 28,58/ 30,10 and puts together this phrase.

The texts of Deut. only say that cursed is he who does not follow „these instructions“. This refers to the **twelve curses** pronounced for the time after passing the Jordan and Israel's conquer in Palestine (Deut. 27,15-26). In Deut. 28 there is a disproportional large number of curses devoted to this curse (Deut 28,15-68). Perhaps the trespasses against the „instructions“ were expected to happen. This refers to the whole written law of the Old Testament (Gal. 1,14).

Why are "All ..., who trust in the works of the law..." under a curse?

The Jews truly believe that the adherence of the law leads to salvation. Paul tries to prove it wrong by using Hab. 2,4 and Lev. 17,16 by contrasting these verses. He supports his statement with Deut. 27,26 and shows the Judaizers that they are automatically under the curse of the law, if they refuse to believe in Jesus Christ. He exposes them as „enemies of God“. 'Since the law cannot be fulfilled Paul explains that the people of the law are still subject to the curse (Gal. 3,10-12/ Rom. 3,9-20).

Since righteousness by faith came through Jesus Christ, Lev 18,5 can be interpreted as a warning of the Thora not to miss it. If Paul arguments by quoting the Hebrew bible, not so because he wants to promote his own theological point of view, but rather to prove that he is in agreement with the content of the bible. This is not about a theological opinion of an interpreter, but about the foundational themes of the Hebrew bible per se.

**Gal. 3,14 – We are redeemed** from the bondage of slavery to the regulations, commandments of the Hebrew bible, the Thora to be precise. This had the consequence that also Gentiles who converted to Christianity could be partakers of Abraham's blessings without adherence of circumcision, regulations or commandments. The most important thing is the trusting faith in salvation through Christ. Therefore the blessings of Abraham are extended to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus.

The blessings of Abraham is also related to "**the promise of the spirit**". The spirit was not promised to the believers for the future, but for their life after baptism. The work of the spirit is the characteristic of the life of a Christian (Gal. 3,3-5/ 4,5-6).

**Faith is active as well as passive.** It is passive as long as the divine word, which does not originate from that person, is received. Since the acceptance of the holy word can only be effective by deliberate devotion to the proclaimed God, faith is also active. Both aspects are contained in the phrase "**hearing faith**".

**The law does not have a complementing or saving function.** It was much more a „disciplinarian“ who put people under a curse until the coming of Christ who destroyed the yoke.

The Jewish law is a spell that Jesus broke through His death on the cross. Now the same thing applied like with Abraham: „He believed God and it was counted to Him as righteousness“ (Gen. 15,6). In Galatians the justification of Abraham before God is used as an object of divine action – in Romans he is used as a role model. Paul shows how Abraham and the gospel are related with each other.

**His election is Christ - analogue.** God must have worked with him immediately, just like He worked in the gospel. This is what characterizes Paul's impression of Abraham. He is not the father of Israel, but a man who stands before God just the way he should: holding fast the faith in God's glorious promises (Gal. 3,7). Whoever lives by such faith is a spiritual descendant of Abraham. Whoever believes just like Abraham is his child. The genealogy (ancestry) does not matter as much as the faith of the heart (Gen 12,3/ 18,18). This means that all who believe in God the Father, just like Abraham, and all who act like him are spiritual children of Abraham and therefore receive his blessings – the sonship and the spirit.

Paul placed all (especially the Judaizers) who still lived under the law **under the curse** (Gal. 3,10/ Deut. 27,26/ Gal. 1,8). Because no one is able to fulfill the complete law. Therefore all are cursed (Hab. 2,4). Jesus redeemed us from the curse, in order to receive the promise: the holy spirit. The law was not able to take away the power of Abraham's blessing and it could also not compete with it (Gal. 3,15-22). They are two very different objects that should be contrasted as strongly as possible. Just like Abraham and Moses (the law) cannot be associated with each other, so also the gospel and the law must be distinguished from each other.

The Judaizers were very offended by this opinion, because they based their message on a story of salvation that was still in process. A picture where Godfather always turned to Israel anew, even though they failed again and turned away from God. They imagined a way of salvation that would proudly make them the messengers of salvation for the whole world. They were also offended that Paul applied the blessings of Abraham to only one person: Jesus Christ, and not all the people of Israel.

By the way: The churches of the New Testament are never addressed „sons of Jacob“, they were always called „sons of Abraham“. According to Gal. 3,17 the Jewish law is only an interlude in between. The time indication of 430 years (Ex. 12,40) shows **that the law was to late to** cancel the covenant of Abraham and his descendants which was already put into action. Therefore the law is outside of the Abraham-Christ-Covenant and therefore cannot mediate the promised blessings or the grace of God to anyone (Gal. 3,18). For Paul the gospel and the law cannot be united.

The divine righteousness that Jesus Christ gives to people out of his love, does not agree with righteousness that wants to be accomplished by obeying the law.

**Gal.3,19 – But what is the assignment of the law?** For Paul the law was a supplement and a mirror of sin, that had to be added in order to expose the trespasses against God. It only exposes the impurity, hostility and fall of humankind. According to God's will it is supposed to protect the people from wandering even deeper into the darkness. It does not have the ability or power to heal the people. It helps to control sinful desires. Only the accomplished sacrificial work of Father God through Jesus Christ finally redeemed the people from „**the curse of the law**“, from condemnation, guilty conscience, etc. which were caused by the law. The Judaizers, however, believed that the law had always existed and would remain forever.

In a very emotional manner Paul continues to argue why circumcision and Christ do not walk hand in hand. In his statement he even strips the Jewish law of its divine revelation character (Gal. 3,19-20). The **law was commanded by angels** (several angels) and given by the aid of a mediator. When the law was delivered God Himself was not mentioned at all, it only speaks of angels. Even before the law could be delivered to the Israelites the first commandment was trespassed and Moses himself destroyed the tablets (Ex. 32,7-16). After he destroyed them he – being the mediator – had to handwrite them anew (Ex. 34,1-4). Paul implies if the law would have been given by God Himself there would be no need of angels and a mediator (Gal. 3,19).

Paul also emphasizes **that no one can override a testament** except the decedent himself. In this case it is God Himself who personally changed the testament (the law His angels delivered).

**Paul invited the Galatians to read the Thora thoroughly**, (Gal. 3,21.22) and challenged them to examine themselves and if they could really fulfill all of its requirements, submit to every regulation of the law in all its details.

Christianity which is **free from the law** belongs to Sarah's side, the people **who practice circumcision** belong to the side of Hagar (Gal. 4,21-31/ Gen. 16,17.21). The son that was born to Abraham by the slave Hagar (Abraham was 90 years old) was conceived in a natural way, the son who was born to him 10 years later by the „free woman“ was conceived by the power of promise.

**Ishmael** is the son of a slave. He was created in a human way and was born into slavery. **Isaac**, however, was the son born of Abraham's marriage. A son of divine promise. In addition his birth is also spectacular and exceptional compared to the birth of Ishmael. In the anti-thesis captivity – freedom, world – spirit, darkness – light, the promise of God is on the „freedom side“. These two women represent two covenants. The story is relevant for the Galatians and tells us something about the churches. It is not only about the historical story of two women, it deals with the story of salvation and the deliverance of the nations. Each woman represents one covenant. The old covenant („Hagar“) is old and over, while the second covenant („Sarah“) still applies – also for the Christians in Galatia.

**For Paul the freedom from the law is a very important subject** and is also a central theme of the current discussion (Gal. 4,29f. Belongs to 5,11 and 6,12).

**Gal. 3,29** – Paul goes into a Jewish interpretation of Gen. 21,9 where it says that Ishmael and Isaac played together. The Jewish interpretation depicts it in a negative way and says **that Ishmael tried to kill Isaac**.

**Gal. 3,30** – **God agreed with Sarah's request about putting Hagar and Ishmael out**. Christians should also separate themselves from those who seek salvation through the law (Vers 31). Therefore brethren, we are not the children of a slave but of a free woman.

**Gal. 3,15-18 – The promise stood and stands independent of the law**.

**Information concerning the term testament:** If a usual testament was declared legally binding in the profane Hellenistic world – and this is the point of view that Paul assumed **it was not possible to effect any kind of alterations any more**.

A simple testament was also a decree of inheritance according to the will of the decedent.

**Gal. 3,16** – In the opposite of Gal. 3,14.17.18.22.29/ 4,28 Paul uses (like in Gal. 3,21) not the singular "**promise**", but the plural "**promises**". Therefore it is about more than just "In you all nations will be blessed." (Gen. 12,3/ 18,18).

The „**promises**“ were given to Abraham and his seed, which means all his descendants (Gen. 13,15/ 17,8). God promised to Abraham and his descendants the land of Canaan for their eternal possession. In Gen. 17,1-9 we find two further promises: the fruitfulness of Abraham and his descendants as well as the covenant with God for Abraham and his children. What matters to Paul is that this promise did not apply to Abraham and a multitude of biological children, the Jews, but only to Abraham and a single offspring which is Jesus Christ. In Gen. 13,15/ 17,8 it speaks of „your seed“. Paul refers this word „seed“ to one single person, which is – of course – Jesus Christ.

He wants to prove to his readers that the promise of blessings and the spirit is related to faith. The kind of faith that is related with salvation through Jesus Christ.

**Gal. 3,17** – Paul does not only contrast „law“ and "promise“ as two irreconcilable religious types of systems. He also claimed that God blessed Abraham with all of humanity in mind, and not only one race or one people. All nations were supposed to be blessed through Abraham. Paul's position is not anti-semitic or anti-judaistic. He did not want to keep the Jews from holding on to their traditions. Even Paul still went to the synagogue. But he wanted to offer them the gift of the Gospel – the fulfillment of God's intentions for the people of Israel and the manifestation of the blessing of Abraham. Paul understands the promis(es) of Abraham and his descendants as a testament, a decree of inheritance that now is legally binding.

**The validation of the testament** is underlined by the fact that it is old, older than the law which was added later. The old played an important role in the ancient world and its traditions. If the testament was valid before the law existed, the law (because it was added later) represented an alteration. This does not disqualify the whole law, but rather tells us that the promises of God to Abraham and his „seed“ would be changed or overruled.

**Paul indicates when the law was established:** 430 years after Abraham and „his seed“ received the testament. To Paul the „new covenant“ is in no way a renewed version of the old covenant, but rather a radical anti-thesis of the old covenant. But Paul did not so much regard the time sequence so that the new covenant would replace the old. He did not at all see a continuous story of salvation. Much more the new covenant applies to the oldest covenant that God established with Abraham and fulfilled through Christ.

Since the promises to Abraham and "his seed“ was revealed 430 years before the law was introduced and had not been changed or nullified, the inheritance was only restored based on a divine promise. In the Epistle to the Galatians the inheritance is explained in the promise and directly related to the conception of the holy spirit (Gal-3,15-18). Therefore the promise is not based on Abraham's or "his seed's“ effort but was and is a gift of grace by God alone.

**Even though the letter to the Galatians was often only referred to as a letter of combat**, it is actually also a testimony of Paul's loving care. With open harshness, mixed with loving care, the apostle Paul is warring for the churches and every single one who belonged to them.

**Gal.3, 19-29 – The purpose of the law (a disciplinarian for the Jews until the coming of Christ).** The true heir of Abraham must be born of promise. The law was established more than 400 years later (Gal. 3,17). Therefore the law is only a supplement of the promise. If anyone trespassed the supplements, he did not have a portion of the promise. The only advantage of the law is that it exposes sin (Gal. 3,22/ Rom. 3.20/ 4,15).

According to Gal. 3,16 the "seed" (offspring) is one single person, which is Jesus Christ. Until His coming the law kept its function. When the letter to the Galatians was written, Jesus Christ had come to the world a long time ago, had been crucified, buried, risen from the death and ascended into heaven. Gal.3.19 tells us that the time when the law was meaningful **had passed**. Paul assumes a clear time limit that gave the law a rightful meaning: from the time of its deliverance (430 years after the promise Gal. 3,17) until the coming of Jesus Christ. Paul thought it was impossible to follow the law in ALL of its details.

At least for all the believers the law lost its meaning since the Messiah had come. The believer was pronounced righteous and is no longer a sinner before God. He does not need the law to be saved. The law had the main purpose to expose sin. After their conversion the believer is guided by the „law of the spirit“, by „the holy spirit“, the spirit of God.

Paul, who defended his Gentile mission which was free from the law, used Jewish theology that applied to the proselytes and ties on the promises of Abraham (Gal. 3,16,19).

**Gal. 3,20 – For Paul God is „ONE“, or „single“** (Deut. 6,4-9). The promise to Abraham came from God himself – without a mediator or a human being. Therefore the promise had a higher authority for him than the law, which was given by the angels of God and delivered by a man.

**Gal. 3,21 – The law is only an interlude.** Paul relates the promises to „life“. The term „life“ in this case, does not speak of physical life as a contrast to death, but much more the life-bringing good works that God granted – and eventually even the justification before 'God at the end of days. Only the ones who are justified and not burdened with sin have a hope for eternal life with God.

If the law would bring life it would oppose the promises. Gal. 3,18 shows how life – the apostle speaks of inheritance – either comes based on promise or based on the law. A compromise between the two is not possible.

Paul rejects the possibility that the law could be superior to the promises. He explains that law does not create „life“. It does not lead to blessing or spiritual gain. Therefore it does not justify before God nor does it lead to eternal life.

In Deut. 6,24-25 we find a phrase that Paul used in Gal. 3,21-22 for his argumentation. Life and righteousness were related to the deeds of the Thora, which nobody could ever accomplish. The many requests of the law cannot be fulfilled. Sin enters the scene as a power that man cannot escape from. There is therefore no possibility how a man can obtain blessings and the holy spirit by effort. Before Christ it was impossible to be justified before God and receive eternal spiritual life. In such darkness, without the light of love in their hearts, are most of our souls. No matter how strictly a person tried to follow the Jewish regulations and commandments, since no one could ever fulfill the whole law it did not help (Gal.3,10-11).

**Gal. 3,22** – Trust in Jesus is the requirement to receive the inheritance of Abraham. Jesus alone is the trustworthy heir who shares the portion with all who belong to Him (according to Roman inheritance law). echt). In view of Gal. 3 it means that Abraham, being the decedant, had one heir: Jesus Christ. Jesus in turn is faithful and blesses every believer as co-heir. Jesus faithful performance and fulfillment of God's requirements in the law, made Him the only true Israelite (Jew) and the only true heir of Abraham.

In **Gal. 3,23** the submission under the law which leads to recognition of sin, is depicted as a temporarily captivity until the fulfillment thereof had taken place. Thus the law is not against God but rather a tool that helps to accomplish a certain divine goal. The aim of God was and is the reconciliation of men with God through Jesus and the subsequent justification of men before God based on their faith in His accomplished work.

**Gal. 3,24** - „disciplinarian“ - this was the old Greek term for an educated or released slave who was allowed to go to school with the son of a sophisticated family. In addition he was also in charge to oversee the lifestyle of the boy. When Paul called the law „disciplinarian“ this must be interpreted in a positive context. Someone has a helping hand for guidance and protection of a sinful lifestyle.

This is why Paul only called the Gentiles „sinners“ and not the Jews (in Gal. 2,15). The slave who was supposed to help the son of the house was often harsh and very strict to his student and thus not very popular. The law was also very hard and strict as we can see in Gal.3,10 : All the regulations and commandments had to be fulfilled and this is impossible. The trespasses present the man as a sinner without the possibility to get rid of his sins and stand before God as a righteous man. Therefore men were aware of the necessity of someone to wash away his sins. This happens through Jesus Christ to whom the law is pointing and in whom it finds its end.

At that time teachers were usually foreigners who were taken captive in the course of a war. A teacher was a stranger, a moral person of authority to whom the student had to pay respect. He was not only the teacher but also accompanied his student wherever he went. For this reason they were called disciplinarian because they always watched and rebuked their students.

Sometimes the respect they gained from their students almost established a friendship-like relationship. The season of supervision was temporarily limited. It ended when the student became an adult. Sometimes the former student still kept in touch with his former teacher. The metaphor „disciplinarian“ describes the whole effect of the law: temporarily limited and comparable to living under captivity / supervision.

The disciplinarian protected his student from distraction or damage. In the like manner the Thora protected Israel from mixed marriages or defilement of their faith, until the coming of the „seed“ through the birth of Jesus to whom the divine promise applied. The term „disciplinarian“ in Gal.3,24 is influenced by Numb.11,11-12. In those verses Moses complains that he is not responsible for the demeanor of the Israelites who complained about the manna in the desert and were longing for the wealth and possessions of Egypt. Therefore Moses asked God not to make him the supervisor or foster father of those people.

In Gal. 3,25 Paul is saying that the law, the disciplinarian, found an end in the redemptive act of Jesus Christ and the faithful believe in this Master. Therefore men are no longer under the law and their life must no longer be determined by it.

Paul understands the death on the cross and the resurrection of Jesus as the salvation of the Jews who were under the curse of the covenant because they had broken the law. Christ redeemed them by becoming a curse on their behalf.

**The redemption of the Jews is the salvation of the Gentiles at the same time because the Jews were the representatives of all nations.**

According to **Gal. 3,23-25** we could speak of an end of the effect of the Thora. In Christ there was no longer a necessity of a Thora. The end referred to the function of the law as disciplinarian. This relates directly to the Jews only, because the Gentiles were never under the law.

**Gal. 3,26** – Paul's terminology „in Christ“ represents the eschatological realm of salvation where the sonship takes place – an impression of a close connection with Jesus Christ. „In Christ also symbolizes an integration into the body of Christ. .

**Gal. 3,27** – The acceptance of faith is practiced publically through baptism.

Baptism literally means to „dive into Christ“, which is an image of the passing through from one realm of power into another. If the baptizant had lived in the power realm of the world, sin, other gods or the Jewish law, baptism meant to enter into the spiritual realm of power of Christ who therewith became his Lord. In the baptism the baptizant is received by God as a son and therefore is granted the spirit of the Son, the holy spirit which Jesus asked His Father to send.

To be baptized and put on Christ is to become a new creature in every aspect. From a profane point of view things might not change, but in view of the spiritual aspect the old man is gone. All Christians re ONE, in their baptism they were added to the body of Christ immediately (1.Cor. 12,12-26). This spiritual event characterizes a Christian's existence through Jesus Christ, in whose healing realm of power they now live.(This can also be seen the the meaning of his names „Jesus“ and „Christ“. Jesus is the Latin form of the Aramaic name Jeschua or Jehoschua = Jehova and means “power of God“. Christ means „the anointed One“, „the truth of God“, „the truly anointed One of God“.)

„You have put on Christ!“ is a description of Christian baptism. For the Christians this was an act of innermost union with Jesus Christ.

But **also Judaism knew baptism**. If someone wanted to convert to the Jewish faith he had to meet three requirements: he had to be circumcised, bring sacrifices and become baptised. In addition this was connected with ceremonial washings, the cleansing of defilement, typical Jewish religious practises (Lev. Kap.11-15).

A Jewish baptism was effected in the following manner: The hair and nails of the **baptizant** were cut and he had to take all of his clothes off. The baptizing water was contained in two large barrels that could hold about 500 liters of water. All body parts of the baptizant had to be dipped under water. After that the baptizant had to confess his faith in front of three men, the so-called baptism fathers. When that person was still in the water parts of the law were read to him, encouraging words spoken and the blessings of God plead over him. As soon as the baptizant would come out of the water he was a member of the Jewish community.

To the Galatians Paul explains that the believers **are all ONE in Jesus**. Since all believers become one with each other in Christ they lose all of their human differences lose their former meaning. No one is spiritually superior to another. This implied that no Jew was more privileged than a Gentile who believed. The term „Greek“ was a generic term for all Gentiles and was a contrast to the term „Jew“ (Col. 3,11). A slave who believed was not inferior to a believer who was a free citizen. And a man who is a believer was not superior to a woman who believed.

The separations of society were abandoned in and with Christ and all had become one. Paul declared all differences null and void. Spiritual privileges or a certain hierarchy would not exist in the body of Christ.

When Paul claims that in the kingdom of God there are neither Jews (circumcised) nor Gentiles (uncircumcised) this meant that the adherence of Jewish regulations and commandments in view of salvation in Christ lost their relevance. If now the Judaizers tried to convince the Galatian churches that they still had to be circumcised and adhere the law this was a contradiction to the thought of Christian unity which is not bound to Judaism.

The Christian lives in a field of tension. Through Jesus, according to salvation, all differences of this world are abolished, even though social differences would still be present in the visible world. A Christian lives between two worlds and has to endure tension and contradiction. We live in a time between promise and fulfillment / past and future / yesterday and tomorrow (Rom. 8, 23-25).

We have already attained it, but yet we have sorrows. He have not yet reached our destination. We have already received the first gift. We are in the final phase but not yet finished. But we have the blessing promises of our Father and the spirit of the eternal Father (Acts 1,4-5).

**We have redemption** (Eph. 1,7). Through Jesus we are redeemed and have forgiveness of sins (Col. 1,14). But we are still waiting for redemption (Rom. 8,23) because the day of redemption lies in the future (Eph. 4,30). We have eternal life, respectively we seize eternal life (1.Tim. 6,12).

**We are already sons of God** (Röm.8.14) but we are still awaiting the „sonship“ (Rom. 8,23).

**We are already in the kingdom of God** (Col. 1,13/ Hebr. 12,22) and we enter into the kingdom of God (Acts 14,22) or we inherit the kingdom of God (1.Cor. 6,9.10). God has glorified us (Rom. 8,30) and He will glorify us (Rom. 8,17).

**The Christian lives in the area of tension between „being and becoming“.**

We have the downpayment, the ransom or the pawn of the Perfect One Who Is To Come (Eph. 1,14/ 2.Cor. 1,22/ 5,5). When Christ, our life, shows up the glory will be made visible – the truth that we live with Him (Col. 3,4). On one hand we have already died (Col. 3,3/ Gal. 2,19/ Rom. 6,6), and the other hand it says, „we put to death our members“ (Col. 3,5). We are dying but behold we are alive (2.Cor. 6,9). It says **we are saints** (Col. 3,12) and then it says „we shall be sanctified“ (1.Thes. 5,23). On one hand **we are already perfect** and then it says „not that we have already attained“ (Phil. 3,12) because we are not yet perfected. The believer has to learn how to move in the area of tension. He commutes between the work of God – what God does for him – and what he himself still has to do. (2.Petr. 1,3/ 1.Thes. 4,11/ Col. 4,12). Our sanctification is God's work (1.Thes. 5,23/ 1.Cor. 6,11) and then we still have to chase „sanctification“ (Hebr. 12,14). It is commuting between the gifts and the assignments based on our responsibility and God's grace. It is effort without toil.

Our faith experiences the eternal God already within the boundries of space and time (Joh. 3,36). Through our spirit we are in Christ (Joh. 17,11/ Rom. 8,9) and yet in our bodies (2.Cor. 5,6). We are superior to death and yet forfeited to death (2.Cor. 4,11.16). Therefore we are also in the area of tension between strength and weakness (2.Cor. 12,9).

**The message of this letter** is a powerful challenge to the patriarchal structures of the Greek-Roman and the Jewish society with their regulations.

Paul is turning against the Jewish blessing that only renders a privileged position to men. He also includes the women. The ritual of initiation was men-oriented only. Only they were circumcised. Baptism includes the women also. Therefore baptism is the entrance to the people of God and not circumcision. Furthermore Paul refers to the destinguishment of clean and unclean as well as a reflection of recurring seasons. Subsequently **women and Gentiles** can no longer be excluded from services or other church activities based on ritual uncleanness.

The contrasts from Gal. 3,28 between Jew and Greek, a free citizen and a slave, male and female have become meaningless through faith in Jesus Christ. The equality of all men before God is proclaimed. It turns against discrimination. The separataion of man in male and female in the process of creation had been overcome.

The formulation of the letter to the Galatians document the experiences of Paul's mission churches and are an indication to the new reality of Christ. All people are equal before God. Through Christ all former social differences are placed on another level. Therefore a church has a different foundation. It takes her away from the old, former foundation the the divine plan of order that must be accomplished. The old differences and contradictions are no longer relevant for salvation. Much more the gift of salvation through Christ is emphasized – there is no personal requirement that has to be met.

**Since the mid of the 1<sup>st</sup> century b.C. There were social tumults in the cities of Asia Minor** where especially Jewish churches were involved. This spirit, trend or stream was out there in the world and also sneaked into the Christian churches. These tumults lasted for almost two centuries. They were mostly inter-ethnic conflicts.

When Paul refered to the „Greeks“ he did not refer to the Gentiles but rather to the Greeks in an ethnical context. They were a minority of the Asia Minor citizens. The conflicts between the Greeks and the Jews were of socio-economic and political nature.

The "right" nationality – and therewith related the „right“ religion was a matter of religious perspective. Surprisingly the opinion that slaves and women were inferior was spread throughout all cultures. The abolishment and dissolution of the social, national and biological patterns of the Antique society (Gal. 3,28) came by baptism to Christianity and surrender to Jesus. It was something totally new.

Among the Galatians the current questions were concerning Judaism **and gender**. Women were allowed to be baptised and were admitted in the churches. Suddenly men felt confused about their identity. The desire of male Galatians to be circumcised refers to a deep desire to return. They longed for more clarity to know what it mans to be a Jew, to be free – and above all to be a man. Only based on this backround information we can interpret Paul's argumentation of Gal. 3,28.

**Gal. 3,28 praises the singleness of the body**, where all social, cultural, religious, national and biological separations and differences of gender are overcome and all structures of dominion are denied. In the „new creation“ not all gender differences are abolished! It is rather that they lose their meaning. To be a man or a woman does not make a difference in the relationship with God or other people. Man and woman are reconciled to one another as a union.

The Corinthian church members considered the order of creation in view of the gender and sexuality abolished and therefore promoted (foolishly) living in abstinence (1.Cor. 7).

In **Gal. 3,16** it says: "The promises were given to Abraham and „his seed“. Paul highlights that it does not refer to a multitude of Jews but to a single one, Jesus Christ. Therefore, to be precise, **Christians** do not belong to the „seed“, the descendants of Abraham. But by faith and being one with Jesus, all men can be descendants of Abraham. It does not matter if that person is a Jew or not, he is an heir of Abraham and of eternal life. In Gal. 4,1-7 the apostle explains **maturity** with regard to the inheritance.

**Gal. 4 1-7 – The servanthood by law (the sonship by grace).** Paul is trying to explain the development of a spiritual heir with a parallel example of the secular world. He assumes to phases in the life of an heir: the **phase of youth** and the **phase of maturity**. An heir is someone to whom is given an inheritance from the beginning and not from the time of access to the inheritance. As heir he is "Lord of all" the rightful owner of a property including all things and people therein.

The responsibilities related to it, however, can only be granted to him as soon as he is mature enough. Before that he is not different from a slave who has no own right but has to submit to a Master who gives him orders. After the death of his father an heir is subject to many guardians who will take care of everything for him. He is depending on a multitude of stewards – usually slaves – who care for the property, all objects and people therein.

**When they are mature** the believers receive **the "sonship"**, which means God adopts them.

In the ancient world, in contrast to today, usually adults and not children were adopted (by wealthy people or the Emperor). The adopted by God are "God's children". Based on a restriction of inheritance right for male descendants only V. 5 is referring to „sonship“. But the believers, no matter if male or female, are sons and daughters of God (Gal.3,26) who receive the inheritance.

Since the situation after the death of a father must be evident, he must appoint a date in his will that determines when the heir will be authorized to possess his inheritance and obtains full decision-making power. The appointment of a date by the father implies that there was no date determined by the state.

In **Gal. 4,4** Paul shows when the **transition from youth to maturity** takes place. He describes it with the phrase: "**when the fulness of time had come**". This phrase is not only related to the fulfillment of the Old Testament requirements, but also the beginning of the Eschatological era (the climax and end of the appointed season of universal time) with all of its salvation-historical content. In his argumentation Paul assumes **three consecutive ages**: 1. the age of Abraham's promises which was followed by the 2. the age of the Mosaic law which in return was replaced by 3. the redemption of Christ.

According to Gal. 3,24-25 the time of spiritual childhood is the time when the people are subject to the **"disciplinarian"**, subject to the law. Gal. 4,3 is not only referring to the world of Judaism with all of its religious laws, but in general to the world before Christ to which belonged the Jews as well as the Gentiles. Subsequently it does not only speak of the disciplinarian or the law but also the **"elements of the world"**. This is not about chastisement or sin-consciousness but about slavery.

**„Elements"** refer to creatures, the substance and material that determine the basic principles of this world. Elements are a part of it but must not be acknowledged like God, Jesus or the holy spirit. This refers to the laws of nature, letters, spirits, stars, etc. and it also includes a major part of the Jewish laws as for example those about the luminaries (moon, seasons, time, etc) the subsequent feasts and sabbaths, regulations for food and all other laws that enslaved the people (Gal.4,9-10).

The Jews as well as the Gentiles were depending on the moon and the sun. The Jews for example relied on them in order to determine their calendar. Many Gentiles worshiped them as gods. Through the coming of Christ now sun and moon lost their meaning for the Christians because the Jewish calendar became meaningless and the Gentiles forsook their old gods.

If Gentile Christians would now commit to the reverence of the moon and adherence to the Jewish calendars they would devote themselves to things that are similar to their Gentile practices.

**The moon and the sun belong to the "elements of the world" of which the Christians were delivered.**

According to Gal. 4,7 every one **who received the Good News** is no longer a slave of the elements of this world.

Furthermore the term „elements“ also refers to Atheistic philosophies such as „evolution“, the „big bang“, etc. The term „elements“ also includes the four **physical elements**: fire, water, earth and air and Paul also implies the great **powers of this world**: flesh, sin, death and powers and principalities of the unseen world (Eph. 3,10/ Col. 2,15/ Tit. 3,1).

At the time when Paul wrote this letter the Galatian Christians has turned back to the "weak and poor elements". However, Paul is not referring to 'Gentile gods. This is not the theme of this letter. Paul does not speak about a backsliding into paganism, but the steering towards legalism. Such habits are related to the Jewish faith that is oriented to the laws, regulations and commandments of the Hebrew bible (the Old Testament). Paul calls those elements „weak and pathetic“. They are because they cannot provoke salvation. Facing this fact Paul is shocked that the Galatians are steering towards it.

Gal. 4,10 tells us what is associated with devotion to elements: The strict adherence of certain times: days, months, seasons and years. The adherence to those times is related to legalism that the apostle refers to Judaism. According to certain times and dates certain feasts had to be celebrated, etc.

The Jewish feast calendar was tightly connected with the luminaries. Paul might want to remind us of the sabbath, a day of rest that endures one day, from one sunset to the next. One of the celebration days was also the day of atonement (Yom Kippur) on the 10<sup>th</sup> Tishri. The Jewish months belonging to Tishri were moon cycle oriented.

Other days were determined by the accurate observations as for example the day of new moon that marked the beginning of a new month. It was determined by the day of new moon. There where whole months were no feast was to be celebrated and other months when there had to be feasts. For example the feast of tabernacles (sukkoth) in the month of Tishri, Pass Over in the month of Nissan and Shavuoth was to be celebrated in Siwan. Also feasts that last longer than a month and are determined by the cycle of the sun (the sabbath year, and every 7x7 years the year of release) were counted element worship by Paul.

According to **Gal. 4,5** all who were under the law had been redeemed by Jesus based on his representative death on the cross for the sins of this world (also Gal. 3,13). Redemption caused deliverance from the responsibilities concerning the Jewish regulations and commandments.

If those under the law are enslaved by it, depends if you count the law among the elements of this world. Because only with reference to those Paul speaks of slavery.

**When the believer becomes mature** he receives the „sonship“ which means God adopts them.

**Gal. 4,6** – The requirement for reception of the holy spirit that God sent is the sonship.

And not the believer cries „Abba, Father“, but the spirit within us. It is the spirit of the Son (Mark.14,36) of the historical Jesus who suffered and totally submitted to the will of God. It is the divine spirit of reconciliation. Without the spirit and His intention related to the Father a man would not be able to call out to God in such a manner. **„Abba, Vater“** (the Father name of God) is the holy spirit crying out and the human spirit who confirms that the Christian is a child, a „son“ of God. As Abba God wants to be called in the hearts of His children at all times. The spirit of God within the child enables a man to worship God as the Father with assurance that the Father hears him all the time.

Since the spirit is only given to Christians, the one to whom the spirit was poured out in his heart, can be called son of God. The sonship includes maturity as well as the acceptance of the inheritance.

In **Gal. 4,7** the amendment "**through God**" is rather amazing because God is considered the mediator and origin of something in the sense of being the One who makes all believers heirs of His promise.

### **Gal. 4, 8-20 – The backsliding of the Galatians.**

If you read Galatians attentively it seems like this chapter (Gal. 4.8-20) is a different letter. As if it is an amendment of the actual letter, addressing other people...

In 4,1-7 Paul presents the recipients as sons of God – mature heirs of the inheritance. As such they are tightly connected to their Father. As a matter of fact we cannot recognize such a relationship with the Father in the behaviour of the Galatians. This is what is confusing Paul.

In **Gal. 4,8** Paul makes no difference between the Jewish and the Gentile Christians. He simply says: „you“. „You“ served other gods and were bound to them. According to 1.Cor. 10,20-21 all of them were just demons. It can only be said for sure that Paul only acknowledges the God who is the Father of Jesus Christ. Since from his point of view the salvation of humanity came through Jesus Christ, the Christian God is the only one who brought salvation. Therefore only He must be worshiped.

**Gal. 4,9** tells us that the Galatians had known God, a God they did not know before. To „know“ also means that a conscious decision for this God was related to a subsequent alienation from all the gods they worshiped before. The verb „to know“ suggests that the Galatians actively converted to Christianity. Paul emphasizes that conversion is not an activity but much more a **deliberate act of God**. Therefore he states that the Galatians were also known by God. It was only by God's guidance alone, that they even heard the proclamation of the Christian missionaries and were enabled to convert.

In **Gal. 4,9-10** Paul is attacking Jewish and Gentile Christians who tried to reintroduce **Judaistic feasts and rituals** into the church. The content of the list in Gal. 4,10 is obviously **a list of Jewish seasons based on the Jewish calendar**. Also Col. 2,16.17 can be considered such a list.

**Gal. 4,11** – Paul had put so much effort into the Galatians. In Gal. 4,12 he challenges them to become like him. It looks like Paul is presenting himself as a role model in every aspect. But his behaviour must be interpreted based on his statements in Gal. 3,1 to 4,11. He is referring to his maturity and his liberty. Much more because the majority of them were Gentile Christians (Gal. 4,8/ 5,2-3/ 6,12-13) and therefore never submitted to the law. Now the Jew Paul, who gave up his legalism after his conversion to Christ, has to clarify to them that they are free from Jewish religious laws. He is eagerly trying to prove them wrong.

Starting with the **allegory of Sarah and Hagar** (Gal. 4,21-31) he commences a **chapter of disproof** that is continued throughout the chapters 5-6. Gal. 4,12-20 is the interlude from the main argumentation (Gal. 3,6-4,7) to the chapter of disproof.

**Paul interprets the bible (OT9 to the Galatians)**. It is interesting to watch how he does that. He asked: „What does the scripture say?“. Followed by the second question: „What does it tell us today?“ The personal aspect of the question „What does it tell you / me?“ - is what matter most!

This is how Paul interprets the scripture. He is asking for a meaning - „What does it symbolize?“ and shows us how to interpret the scriptures in an apostolic sense.

**This applies to every interpretation of the scripture:**

1. It must never contradict the entirety of the scripture,
2. It must never twist the meaning of a word in the opposite direction,
3. It must be effected in order to clarify the text, and
4. every interpretation must be reasonable.

Thus Paul interprets this story and explains: **There are two testaments**.

Because in Hagar and Sarah and their two sons Paul saw two lines of salvation history. This meant two decrees and two orders God established. The testament was not to be confused with the old and the new covenant. It should rather be regarded as two will declarations of God. Hagar represented the order of God that was revealed on Mount Sinai – the order of the law – the foundation of God.

This reflection was not surprising after everything that the apostle said prior to that. But this decree gave birth to servanthood. If someone submitted to this order he lived in slavery. He was marked by the decrees and commands whose fulfillment required total obedience. Paul expresses that the son of Hagar was and remained a slave. After all he was born by a slave and the same way legalism would only lead to slavery.

In **Gal. 4,13** he reminds them how he proclaimed the gospel to them for **“the first time”** by presuming certain knowledge of the Galatians (Acts 13,13-14,27/ 16,6/ 18,23). Therefore the recipients of the letter must have experienced the establishment of the faith in their area. Paul does not take „their willingness to accept the gospel“ for granted. The proclamation unto them was made in all „weakness“ and „without power“. In 2.Cor. 12,7-9 Paul mentions that he had a thorn in his flesh. He must have preached under physical pain and weakness when he arrived at Galatia. They were still excited. Due to his physical condition they could have reacted with disrespect (Gal. 4,14). They could have mocked him and traced his physical weakness back to the work of a demon. But no, they received like an angel or Jesus Christ in person. The Galatians had been open for his message – in spite of sickness and weakness – because they saw his sincerity and devotion to God. This convinced them.

**Gal. 4,15** **The Galatians received Paul like an angel of God**. This was a blessing for them (see Mat. 25,31-46). The Galatians were so open that they were even prepared to give large offerings: They would have given their eyes for Paul. If this comment is based on an eye complaint is doubtful. If this was the case it can be understood literally: they would have given him their eyes if it were possible. But it is only for sure that this terminology is referring to a gesture of deep affection.

But the present rejective behaviour of the Galatians towards him and his teaching, Paul can only explain that they now consider him an enemy (Gal. 4,16) because he told them the truth and does not agree with Judaism and its cult. According to him this would be denial of Jesus and His gospel as well as a backsliding (see Gal. 2,1-5/ 5,1-7).

**In Gal. 4,17 Paul exposes the Judaizers /Jewish preachers“.** What are they really about!?

They do not want to help the Galatians or truly serve them. They only want to gain a profit. They hope to gain something from them, tie their souls to them in order to make them dependant. Paul opposes such selfish zeal. Being the founder of their church he has a heart for them and only wants their best (Gal. 4,18-19). Such wrestling and struggling causes pain and effort that Paul compares to „labour pains“. The use of this term presents the apostle as the mother and not the father of the church. During the labour pains one cannot be certain if the birth will go well. In its spiritual meaning it states that Paul knows that the Galatian church members are not surely convinced of the gospel yet. The „birth“ is accomplished when Christ is embodied among them. This happens as soon as their salvation is again based on the sin-forgiving death on the cross of Jesus Christ, His victory over death and His resurrection. As long as their salvation is based on careful obedience to the law, Christ is not among them.

**Gal. 4,20 – Paul longs to be with the Galatians.** He could adress them personally and close the mouths of the Judaizers. Just writting a letter gives him no assurance if his words truly reached them.

**Gal. 4, 21-31 – Law or faith (Ishmael and Isaac).** 'The occasion for this letter is that the Galatian Christians had been tempted by Judaizers to follow the law and had therefore fallen from the accomplished work of salvation of Jesus. In order to present his case Paul does not use a regulation or a commandment but the story of **Hagar and Sarah**.

It is a rhetorical argumentation and analyses. The picture of those two women was easy to grasp for the Galatians. In their old pagan traditions their land (Anatolia) was supervised by mother-godheads of the mountains. Paul presents two supplementing interpretations of the story of Abrahams women and sons of Gen. 21. The first one is an allegorical interpretation (v. 22-27) and argues that the Thora is servanthood and did not give birth to children of promise. The second interpretation (V. 28-30) adds a warning to the story of the Old testament (Gen. 21,10). **The terms "slave" and "free woman"** point to the matter Paul wants to emphasize: The contradiction of captivity and liberty. The woman who gave birth secondly (Sarah) is in the light, while the mother who gave birth first (Hagar, the slave) is in the dark. The children of Hagar (an image of the world, the law and the Jews) were disenherited while the children of Sarah (an image of all who believe in Jesus) are the true heirs (Gen.16-21/ Is. 54,1). The story of the firstborn son of Abraham according to the flesh ends with expulsion and dismissal.

The son of the slave was **"conceived in the flesh"** (Gal. 4.23) But the promise was that Sarah, who was unfruitful would also bear a son for Abraham (see Gen. 17,16-17/ 18,10-15/ 21,1-2). Ishmael was not a child of promise.

Both of the women are pointing to the two covenants (Old and New Testament). **Hagar**, the slave represents „Sinai“. (the name Hagar means stranger) She gives birth to a slave. Paul compares "Hagar" with Mount Sinai of Arabia firstly because her name sounds like the Arabian word for "rock / stone" = "hadjar". And secondly because the Mount Sinai is located in the area of Hagar's decendants (Gen. 25,12-18, 1.Chr. 5,10.19/ Ps. 83,7). And from the prophetic point of view Sinai was not a part of the promised land but of the desert that Israel had to go through on their way to the promised land.

Therefore Paul claims that by legalism „present Jerusalem and her children“ are subject to the Jews just like Mount Sinai and the slave Hagar were subject to **"slavery"**.

In **Gal. 4,26** Paul speaks of the **heavenly Jerusalem** and calls her **"our mother"**.

This is metaphorical and inspired by the tradition of the Hebrew language. Cities are described as females according to the Hebrew language. The apocalyptic concept of the heavenly Jerusalem is based on a contradiction to the earthly Jerusalem which is marked by the sins of her inhabitants an the uncleanness and insufficiency of the earthly temple. This yearning is expressed towards the future Jerusalem, the holy city and her tabernacle. The "present" Jerusalem Paul was refering to had been under oppression for a long time. It was a city, occupied by the Romans. When Paul refers to the heavenly Jerusalem and calls it a free city, it speaks of the ideal of a politically free city, such as the cities in Greece.

As a free mother it represents the free woman, Sarah. (The name Sarah means princess, mistress) It must be assumed that she gave birth as a free woman according to the promise. Therefore ther must be a heavenly Jerusalem besides the present Jerusalem. If the contradiction would be based on time, Paul could have written „future Jerusalem“. Since he did not do so, perhaps he could already behold the heavenly Jerusalem present in the spiritual realm and the difference is between „above and below“. The „heavenly Jerusalem“ which is not bound to this world and therefore permanent is a contradiction to the "present Jerusalem" that is here on earth. If someone wanted to get to the heavenly Jerusalem he had to go up, which is impossible for a man as long as he lives in his mortal body. The "heavenly Jerusalem" is not like the "present Jerusalem" subject to slavery, but it is free.

It is therefore not the place of the people who obey the law, but rather the ones who were delivered from the law – those who put their hope and trust in the gospel alone.

This hope and opinion of Paul obviously originated from Is. 50,1 and 54,5,6 where it speaks of the city of Jerusalem that is compared to an unfruitful desolated woman during the time of Babylonian exile. Because of the destruction of the city and the captivity of her children and inhabitants. He promises to the city that she will have plenty of children again and will be richer than before the exile when she was divorced from God, her husband.

**But you, my brothers, are children of promise like Isaac** (Gal. 4,28 and 5,13a). Paul refers to the non-Jewish Galatians and also the Jewish troublemakers as **brothers**. Both Ishmael and Isaac were also half brothers. But it does not tell us that Ishmael persecuted Isaac in the Old Testament (Gen. 21,9). It only says that Ishmael mocked or played him, depending on the interpretation.

Only a Rabbinic interpretation said that Ishmael persecuted his half brother with dart and bow. Maybe Paul based his statements upon the Rabbinic interpretation. According to that interpretation the persecution was not limited to a certain moment but lasted for a long time because it was about the inheritance. Maybe Paul's interpretation is influenced by own experience or opinion. He himself used to be a persecutor of the Christians until the day of his conversion (Acts 9,1-2).

After his conversion the Jews whipped him with five times forty stripes (2.Cor. 11,24). With regard to the Jewish Christians the apostle knows how they had to suffer under the Jews (1.Thes. 2,14-16). The comment: **"and so it is now"** suggests that Paul interprets Gen 21,9 in the light of the present events. Perhaps the Galatian church members were truly suffering persecution by the Jews.

In the concrete example of Ishmael and Isaac (Gen. 21,10) Paul challenges the Galatians to send away the slave woman and her son (Gal. 4,30), „to cast them out“/ respectively to exclude the Judaizers from the church. This would be the logical consequence concerning the occasion of the letter that intensely deals with the threatening of the church by the Judaistic preachers. It is also possible that the church members who followed after their teachings were supposed to be excluded from the church community.

**„Therefore...“** (Gal. 4,31) is a conclusion of Gal. 4,21-30. The question how to accomplish salvation is a main theme of Christianity. After the explanation why the careful adherence to the law, Jewish regulations, etc cannot accomplish salvation, the conclusion is evident that Christians should only rely on their faith in Jesus in order to become a co-heir. Vers 31 is a transition to Gal. 5,1-6.

### **Gal. 5,1 to 6,10 – Moral consequences of justification by faith**

In **Gal. 5,1-12** Paul explains freedom in contrast to the law in a polemic, sometimes even sarcastic kind of way. It is followed by instructions for practical application of this freedom. If it does not result in **loving your neighbour** there is no freedom. The mention of **the command of love** (Lev. 19,18) refers to the Thora. He does not reason the importance of love based on the Thora – he had declared it meaningless at great length – the actual reason is stated in: The command of love is anchored in the freedom of Christians and this freedom can only be applied by serving our neighbor.

**Gal. 5,16-24** – The continuous battle in the life of a Christian is between his spirit and his flesh. A man is the battle field of two opposite powers. Paul, however, does not regard his flesh as a foreign power. Otherwise a man could not determine the end of the battle or his own behaviour. He rather describes this war between spirit and flesh as the conscious zeal and desires within a man. Walking in the spirit is living in freedom. Whoever walks by in the spirit can resist the flesh. But yet the flesh is not a power that is simply overcome by the spirit.

The spirit always encourages us to serve in love. Therefore it is not a man's assignment to follow a law, but rather not to resist the motivation of the spirit. If true love is motivated by the spirit it accomplishes the fulfillment of the law and therefore we can get rid of the law.

**Gal. 5,19ff. - This is mentioning the famous virtues and immorality.** Paul speaks of the „works of the flesh“ and „fruits of the spirit“. Spirit and flesh are powers that influence men which were given to them by birth. In the course of our lives we have to learn how to deal with them.

It is possible that Paul is using a catalogue of immoral behaviour or just summarized them himself. Fornication, unclean things and lust are referring to sexuality. Idol worship and witchcraft is referring to the worship of foreign gods. Enmity, strife, anger, jealousy, fury, lies and envy are sins that destroy unity. He also mentions gluttony, drunkenness and feasting.

A multitude of works of the flesh are opposed by few fruits of the spirit. The term „fruit“ expresses that it is nothing that a Christian can do himself but it springs up from the spirit. The catalogue is also traditional: **love, joy and peace** build a group of the most remarkable demeanors of a Christian community.

**The spiritual change is expressed in common acceptance** (Gal.5,25 to 6,6).

According to Gal. 6,1 Paul does not consider the church a place of punishment, but rather a place where a sinner is brought back to the right track by love. What was started in the flesh is a contrast to the attempt to finish something in the flesh.

**Gal. 5, 1-12 – To freedom Jesus Christ has set you free** is referring to the deliverance from the Jewish regulations and commandments of the Hebrew bible. This is the freedom to which Christ has called all believers. The opposite of this freedom is the submission to the yoke of slavery. A yoke is a harness for draft animals, especially oxen, that is used to hitch them up to a plow or chariot. The yoke is fastened on the head or the neck and connected to a vehicle. The pressure that comes from a yoke in order to move an animal was metaphorical for slavery. Paul is challenging the Galatians not to submit to the yoke of Judaism or carry its burden.

Paul considers Gentile religiosity and Jewish legalism alike as „yokes of slavery“. The believers should stand firm on their freedom (Gal. 5,2-6) and not let anyone distract or intimidate them.

**Paul thinks** that a Gentile is a converted Jew by circumcision and therewith also is under the law and the curse like a Jew. Circumcision cannot be considered an isolated act. It is bound to the responsibility to follow all Jewish regulations and commandments, even the whole law – no matter if they are Jews or Proselytes (foreigners who converted to Judaism). Now the problem is not to follow the law, but the hope that it results in **salvation** (Gal. 3,10-12,21-25).

When Paul speaks of „freedom“ he is giving them a command to practice it without restrictions, which means to live daily in the realm of freedom Jesus gave to us by the power of the holy spirit. The life of a Christian in freedom and love is guided and empowered by God's own spirit.

The commandments of the law are fulfilled in Jesus. Therefore the law has no meaning for us because we believe in Christ alone. He is the only one who is able to give us righteousness, only He maintains us and takes us to salvation. Faith is practiced by love. It is therefore no lazy or complacent faith, but effective faith that releases all energies of love. Therewith Paul is expressly rejecting the „ethic of legalism“.

**Gal. 5,5 states that the resources of a true Christian's life are faith and the spirit“.**

It is characterised by the works of the spirit (Gal. 3,3/ 5,16.18.25) and the faith in Christ's work of salvation (Gal. 2,16/ 3,8-9.11-12.22.24). In Gal. 5,6 Paul explains what counts when you are in Christ: It does not matter if a Christian is circumcised or not, the only thing that matters is that you believe in Christ's death on the cross and His resurrection (Gal. 3,26-28). The full activity of faith is expressed in active love (Gal. 5,6).

The meaning of love must be established upon the fact that it was Jesus Christ himself who loved the people first and expressed it when He gave Himself for us on the cross (Gal. 2,20). Now a Christian who had put on Christ (Gal. 3,27) was supposed to follow His example and also practise love.

The Galatians were running well (Gal.5.7) and lived their lives according to the right, Christian standards (1.Cor. 9,24-27/ Gal. 2,2/ Phil. 2,16/ Hebr. 12,1). You can lead a good life as long as you are truth-oriented and remain in the Holy Spirit and His love.

**If Paul would still preach circumcision he would not be persecuted“** - he would be acknowledged and accepted by the Jews. In Gal. 5,12 he mocks the Judaizers and challenges those troublemakers to mutilate themselves instead of mutilating others. From the Jewish point of view castration had bad consequences, because according to Deut. 23,2 a man who was castrated was not allowed to attend the assembly of Yahweh. What he is trying to tell the Galatians is, that legalism only leads to exclusion from the people of God.

**Gal. 5, 13-26 – Freedom is practised by loving your neighbour.** Paul no longer deals with the legalism and its consequences, but rather depicts the spirit that carries Christian freedom. First of all the calling to freedom took place in the past and was already accomplished. Since freedom is something that releases any kind of bondage this freedom might also inspire different things. Therefore he requires: „Serve one another through love“. Paul makes it clear that he rejects legalism and not the law – referring to the biblical religious law. He also wants to see the law fulfilled but realized that it can rather be fulfilled by practising love than to try to follow all of the commandments.

The „**commandment of love**“ was **not** canceled on the cross. To the contrary, by love the whole law is fulfilled (Gal. 5,14/ Rom. 13,8-10).

The image of Gal. 5,15 **was taken from the animal world**. Such a wrong behaviour does not serve your neighbour but rather destroys him, whereas this destruction is referring to the soul or good reputation. Thus freedom can be taken advantage of in order to live a life in loving service for your neighbour – which is the fulfillment of the law / or it can be taken advantage of in order to misuse it to lead a life following fleshly desires.

**Paul is challenging the Galatians "let the Holy Spirit guide your lives."** Therefore he introduces a catalogue of virtues and vices (Gal. 5,16-23) that are opposing the spirit. The words "**spirit**" and "**flesh**" refer to the two components of every man. The formulation about flesh and spirit provide a concrete imagination of two cosmic powers that war *for* or *in* us (Gal. 5,17). Paul is warning the Galatians not to give in to the flesh, for it seeks to make us do things we do not want to do.

**If anyone is guided by love** his life is characterised by the ministry of love (Gal. 5,6.13-14.22). Such a selfless ministry motivated by unselfish love, the kind affection towards our neighbour is the fulfillment of the whole divine law (Gal. 5,13-14). Thus it is not necessary to follow the detailed instructions of the Hebrew bible (OT) that the law represents.

**Gal. 5,19-21 names a couple „works of the flesh“.** Christians are not supposed to align their life to the law of the Old Testament but the holy law of the spirit. The Holy Spirit results in a life serving our neighbour in love, and therefore fulfills the divine law (1.Cor. 13,13 to 14,1). "**There is no law against such things**". We assume that Christians live in a realm that has no relation to the law, because the law never required such „fruits“.

By faith a person receives the Holy Spirit and produces the fruits of the spirit. The ministry of the spirit is centered around Christ. The Holy Spirit provides us with the reality of Jesus in our lives. Jesus - „**He will testify of me**“, „**He will glorify me**“. In every phase of our way to Christ the Holy Spirit is at work. He testifies of Christ, opens our eyes for the truth in Jesus and the fact that He alone can save us. The Holy Spirit reveals our sins and takes us away from sin to trust in Jesus who came to deliver us thereof. The Holy Spirit causes the new birth and is a witness of Christ's presence in our life. The spirit gives us inner assurance that we are God's beloved children. The priestly spirit gives us true insight and deep understanding of the truth. The Holy Spirit opens the eyes of our soul and shows us a wonderful, sweet fruit of the spirit. The holy spirit changes us from top to bottom, „**into the image of Christ**“ (Gal. 4,19).

Another function of the Holy Spirit is **to equip us for the ministry of Christ in the world**.

He gives us the necessary gifts to complete His assignment. We see our assignment in the light of Christ's ministry, because Jesus said: „Just like the Father sent me, I must also send you“ (Joh. 20,21). The Holy Spirit gives us the gifts we need according to our calling and enables us to serve with joy, strength and love.

The Christians of Galatia had forgotten that a Christian lifestyle can only be maintained as long as the Holy Spirit is in control. This is what the Galatians lost sight of, when they heard the Judaizers preach. They started to live according to old Jewish laws instead of living by the Holy Spirit. But it is the Holy Spirit that brought them to faith. They had started in the spirit and now wanted to finish it in the flesh. Have they forgotten that only the Spirit of Jesus gives the believers the victory over sin and evil? Have they forgotten that the Spirit is cleansing us from sin by applying God's word to our life?

The terminology »**the fruit of the spirit**« teaches us from the beginning that the following features can only be produced by the Holy Spirit. An unbeliever is not able to reveal even one of those virtues. Also a true believer is not able to develop them out of his own strength. If we think about these features we must always remember that they originated from a supernatural source – a different world: a spiritual and heavenly kingdom which is our true home. No man knows real joy until he finds the Lord. It is then that a man comes to life which Peter calls „a glorious joy“ (1.Petr. 1,8).

Fruits are revealed in our relationship with others. Someone described **the fruits of the spirit as the eight elements of love:**

- Joy is the **cheerful** love.
- Peace is the **confident** love.
- Patience is **serene** love.
- Kindness is **considerate** love.
- Goodness is the **character** of love.
- Faithfulness is the **reliability** of love.
- Meekness is **graceful** love.
- Self-control is **hurdling** love.

In the opposite of the works of the flesh in Gal. 5 and the gifts of the spirit in 1.Cor. 12 and 14 the fruit of the spirit is singular.

While the works of the flesh are in conflict with each other, the fruit of the spirit shows a great union. Each feature activated by the Holy Spirit is adding to the testimony and beauty of a union. The fruit of the spirit can be divided in **groups of three**:

- The first three features reveal the relationship of a Christian to God.
- The last group refers to the relationship of a Christian to himself.
- The following three describe the relationship of a Christian to others.
- The first three stand for three experiences – **love, joy, peace**.
- The second three stand for three-fold demeanor – **patience, kindness, goodness**.
- The third three stand for character – **faithfulness, meekness, self-control**.

**Gal. 5, 24** does not refer to the real behaviour of the church members but the ideal.

One is joined to Jesus Christ in baptism. Just like Jesus Christ was crucified in the flesh, the flesh of a Christian is overcome by baptism. It refers to an event that happened in the past and was already accomplished. In Rom 6,1-23 Paul describes life in the spirit – the new life – in detail. In Gal. 5,25 Paul distinguishes "**living in the spirit**" and "**following the spirit**".

If someone lives in the spirit he does not automatically follow him, it requires an active decision to change your lifestyle by the help of the spirit. The reception of the spirit is related to baptism (Mk. 1,9-11/ Mt. 3,13-17/ Lk. 3,21-22/ 1.Cor. 12,13). By experience we know that there are many Christians who do not live according to the spirit. This revelation might have caused the apostle to say that even though these Christians have received the Holy Spirit, but did not follow Him.

**Gal. 5, 26** – Conceit is suitable of „fleshly“ demeanor. To esteem yourself higher than your neighbour, to consider someone to be a competition, to disrespect or mock someone. Such attitudes among people is opposition comparable to a wrestling match.

In the context of the current situation it refers to the influence of the Judaizers on the Galatians by challenging their pride and therefore making them pursue legalism also: Boasting in their faithfulness to the law, challenging one another to do better than oneself. Envy quickly takes over when we see someone following the law more correctly than oneself. Paul considers even the foundation of such boasting vain since the adherence to the law itself is meaningless, only the love produced by the heart of the spirit counts.

**Gal. 6, 1-10 – The fruit of freedom**. This chapter contains several exhortations and are directly related with chapter 5,13-26. Love is described as the fruit of the spirit. At first Paul encourages in Gal. 6,1-5 to humbly and gently help one another to do good. We must read this chapter in the light of the verses prior to that, where Paul urges not to be boastful. Life in the spirit cannot be characterized by comparison, challenges and envy. Such a thinking is produced in the flesh. A spiritual, reasonable lifestyle is expressed in brotherly love based on a relationship with God. Such a love among brothers and sisters denies any humiliation or conceit.

That church members are able to correct someone who has lost his way with a gentle spirit is depending on the spiritual gifts. Since all of the readers of the letter had received the Holy Spirit Paul calls all of them "**spiritually gifted**". The term „**spiritually gifted**“ is not referring to an elite group within the Christian community. This term should rather remind the church of their identity as the people of a new covenant with the Spirit. As such people the church is obligated to help a person to repent after their trespasses were revealed.

Spiritual gifts are the basic requirement in order to align their lives with the Spirit of Christ and produce the fruit of the spirit according to Gal. 5,22-23. Instead of boasting in their righteous lifestyle they should rather help others bear their burdens, especially burdens that are related to temptation, tribulations and trespasses. Just like Jesus carried our burdens and still carries them. When a Christian is helping someone to carry a burden, it must originate from the love of the spirit in order to fulfill the law of Christ. This is the main theme of Christian fellowship (Gal. 6,2).

**If a believer is overcome by sin** (Gal. 6,1) he needs some help in order to get back on the right path to live in unity with the spirit again. Paul regards those trespasses as a temptation that we could all experience.

The practice of the law to love your neighbour is the new interpretation of the Mosaic law – the Thora, by the power of God.

The **messianic Thora** is therefore based on a new law. The Mosaic law was not canceled, changed or shortened – it only dismissed the **exclusiveness** of the people of Israel and the promise was extended to all nations. Jesus said in this regard, that He did not come to abandon the law, but to fulfill it.

The terminology "**law of Christ**" must be interpreted in the context of the message of Isaiah – especially in related to passage of the servant of God that Paul is using in a Christological meaning (Is. 42,1-4). Paul is using this passage to emphasize that he is not without law, but under the law of Christ (1.Cor. 9,21). By the use of this terminology he opposes all false interpretations of his message. The freedom in Christ must never be used in order to justify or follow one's own desires! In the opposite – who belongs to Christ is subject to Him as Lord. But this must be based on free will, based on your own decision.

The law still has a positive aspect for Paul. Actually the assignment of the law lost its meaning through the redemptive work of Christ and therefore it was no longer necessary to follow it. The believer, however, is not released from the command of love. It is rather the opposite: he should now love his neighbour in spite of national, ethnical or other distinguishing features.

Every Christian is measured according to the love he has and will once be judged by the Father of Creation in view of his heart / his love for God and brethren in thoughts, words and deeds (Gal. 6,2-5). And then we will be established again based on how we dealt with acknowledged trespasses, temptation and others. Jesus said with the measure we use, we will be measured (Mat. 7,2).

### **Gal. 6,6-10 implies the second part of the closing exhortations.**

After Paul had challenged them to brotherly, gentle exhortation he continues with more exhortations.

At first he takes a look at the **relationship between a student and a teacher** whereas the transition to this part is very abrupt. A student is taught in the word. But the word does not stand by itself, for the result of a teaching will never be to learn just one word or even just one sentence. It is logical to assume that Paul is not referring to any kind of teaching but rather directly to Christian doctrine. This must have been based on the Hebrew bible at that time and on oral tradition of events and experiences with regard to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. As time went by Christian scriptures were written. Part of them were integrated in the Greek bible that we call New Testament. In this manner Christian texts became part of the Christian canon.

Paul does not explain what exactly he means by „word“ and it must be assumed that it should remind the Galatians of the Christian doctrine of faith. It is not indicated who the student or who the teacher is. The student could be a Gentile, a baptizant or a baptised Christian who needed further instructions in Christian faith. We do not know if there was just one student or a group of students. The teacher could be a missionary, a teacher in an institution or a church member who was able to teach (an elder, etc.) We also do not know what kind of teaching it was exactly.

### **The relationship between student and teacher should be characterized by sharing**

Facing the fact that financial provision for the missionaries was a recurring theme of Paul's letter (compare esp. 1.Cor. 9,1-18) it is possible that he is referring to material goods. In Rom. 15,27 und 1.Cor. 9,11 (also Phil. 4,15) Paul speaks about an exchange of goods: The converted Christians had received spiritual goods and should therefore grant the missionaries a share of material goods.

Paul is calling on the students to give the teacher (preacher, missionary, etc) his wages (money, clothes, housing, etc.) and not to be greedy, regarding their possessions as their own. Paul does not want the teacher to have to beg for recompensation. Free giving should be self-evident for the student.

In Gal. 6,7 Paul warns of a slack attitude towards the God-given, healing and suggested lifestyle. If someone neglects the requirements of the Father, he is treating his creator with disrespect and mocks Him.

The **warning of the mocking of God** follows right after the concrete request to give the teachers their share of goods. God is mocked if a spiritual teacher **does not receive a wage** (Gen. 31,7/Lev. 19,13/ Is.19,10/ Ez. 29,20/ Jam. 5,4-5).

A Christian never owns a man anything and never ceases to do good (Gal. 6,9-10). Every good deed expresses love. .

The Christian **brotherly love** is firstly to be practised within the church (Rom. 14,15/ 1.Thes. 4,9-10/ 2. Thes.1,3). The good deed of practicing love must also be a testimony to all God-created people (Rom.12,17) and must eventually be extended to all (1.Thes. 5,15/ Rom.12,18) even our enemies (Rom.12,20).

**Gal. 6,11-18 closes the letter** and is lacking the customary greetings to Galatian church members. The word „**behold**“ (Gal. 6,11) points to two special features of Paul's letter. He wrote this passage with „his own hand“ - it is his handwriting – in capital letter. The use of capital letters might be explained by eye complaints, pain in his hands or another physical handicap. However, Paul only mentions his personal "physical weakness" casually in the course of his letter (Gal. 4,13-14).

When he first encountered Jesus he was blind for three days (Acts 9,8-9) which could be the cause of his „thorn in the flesh“ (2.Cor. 12,7-9). He also dictated the 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle to the Corinthians and only signed the letter with his name (1.Cor. 16,21). That he wrote with his own hands proves the authenticity of the letter, like in our modern world a letter written on the computer must be printed and then approved by a signature.

**The conclusion of the letter**, especially the blessings are very short. The blessing of peace identifies those in Galatia who remained faithful to him and his gospel. It is remarkable how he wrote "**the new people of God**". For Paul only the Christian people are the true people of Israel (Gal. 3,29/ Rom. 9,6-8). The Christians are the true descendants of „Abraham" and the „sons of God" (Phil. 3,3). All who believe in Christ are now the true Israel. The „God of Israel" cannot be separated and will forever be with Christ.

The closing exhortation (Gal. 6,17) was written in a sharp tone and serves Paul for self-defense. At the same time the sharp tone is also a threat to his opponents. Paul did not greet anyone personally. There is also no phrase of praise or thanksgiving. This unusual conclusion reveals that Paul did not write to the Galatians to primarily teach them about other important aspects such as righteousness, faith, or the holy spirit, but rather the cross of Christ.

### **Who do the Judaistic preachers want to impress?**

According to Paul the Judaistic preachers were trying to make a good impression by requiring circumcision and the adherence to the Jewish regulations and commands. But why? Were they trying to impress God in order to have the right standing with Him on judgment day? **Or do they want to escape persecution?**

Jesus Christ and God will never persecute someone for the proclamation of the cross. The persecution was effected by people, by the Jews, who **considered the followers of the Crucified followers of a cursed man** (Deut. 21,23). Also Roman authorities who considered Christians political agitators (2.Cor. 11,25). Also among the Gentile nations people of foreign faith were persecuted because they were a threat of the dominating cult of the community or even threatened the economical wealth of the area (Acts 7,54-60/ 14,8-20/ 19,23-40).

Circumcision is most likely to impress the Jews and Roman authorities who considered Judaism the rightful religion of the Roman Empire. Those can be referred to as persecutors. This would explain why the cross of Christ (Gal. 3,1-5,12), the justification by faith and redemption of Jewish traditions are the matter of this letter. It can be assumed that Paul was right to blame the Judaistic preachers for their denial of the justification by faith and the deliverance from the religious law because they were cowards and were trying to act in their own interest – also to escape the persecution of the Jews and the Romans themselves.

### **Or were they just trying to boast?**

The idle boasting of the „flesh“ of the circumcised is considered unacceptable self-praise, which he denied. Only the rightful boasting in the "cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" can be accepted (1.Cor. 1,31/ 2.Cor. 10,17).

The cross is the symbol of God's love and the representative, reconciling, sacrificial death of Jesus. Only this could effect the justification of a sinner on judgment day at the end of time. The trust in human wisdom or own works, to which belongs the strict adherence to regulations and commands of the Hebrew bible (= OT) is in vain.

It is not possible to boast in circumcision because in the sight of God and justification before him it is meaningless. What matters is „the new creation“ - the „new man"! Both terms are correct. "New creation" refers to the spiritual and moral renewal – a new way of living, whereas the "new man" refers to an individual change of personality – a new standard of demeanor characterizes your life.

**The terminology "peace and mercy" in Gal. 6,16** is based on the Old Testament promise of Israel's restoration in Is. 54,10 and the theme of the „new creation“ in Is. 32-66. The church of Jesus, consisting of Jewish and Gentile Christians started to accept the inheritance of the people of God / the people of Israel „according to the flesh“. Gal. 6,16 is the only proof that Paul mentions which contests the position of the „people of God“.

This verse is definitely situation-related. Basically the Gentiles as „second choice“ have access to the promise of the Father and the future inheritance through Jesus but they would not become identical with Israel, the „first choice“. Paul is not speaking of disenheriting Israel. He only says that all Gentile and Jewish Christians belong to the **"God of Israel"** - this is another dimension. They did not have to become Jews in order to be partakers with the people of Israel.

**In Gal. 6,17 Paul says that he is already carrying the marks** of Jesus on his body. This is something special to him. It automatically reminds of the five stiches in hands, feet and the side of His body when Jesus was crucified. In addition Jesus had to suffer further physical torments. This is how Paul reflects his discipleship of Jesus Christ. However, he was not crucified in the sense of Jesus, but rather in a metaphorical way. In the course of his missions he had to suffer a multitude of torments and physical punishment which he recounts in 2.Cor. 11,23-29. The „stigmata“ he speaks of must be referring to those scars.

Paul only values his physical suffering because they prove his determined discipleship of Christ – facing real threat of his own life and body. Other than his opponents he is not trying to escape persecution and therefore proved to be a true apostle of the Lord. Therefore no one should bother him in the future.

**The apostle closes his letter the way he started it:** with the utmost desire that the grace of God would be with them (Gal. 1,3). In all of Paul's letter it is exceptional how he kindly remembers them of his love with the use of the simple terminology „dear brethren“. Consciously the apostle Paul closes by calling them brothers. It means that he is holding on to the fellowship with his threatened church.

He is pointing to the actual theme of his letter – and this would be a call to repentance unto the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what the Galatians needed. Christ had to enlighten their minds in order for them not to fall for temptation. 'That „**Amen**“ was therefore more than just a closing word. For it referred to the trusting assurance of the apostle. His „**Amen**“ was usually the answer of the church to the apostolic blessing, for it meant „Yes, so it shall be!“

**One question was still not answered,** which is: What did the Galatians do? Were they able to resist the convincing and loving appeal that the apostle Paul expressed in this letter?

### **Test questions**

1. Why was Paul so upset about the Galatians?
2. Why did Paul not want to accept the Mosaic law anymore?
3. How did Paul defend his office as an apostle?
4. What was the law supposed to do?
5. What about those who still lived under the law?
6. How and through what was the liberty of the spirit proven?
7. What did Paul blame the Judaistic preachers for?
8. Why did Peter draw back?
9. Why did Paul rebuke Peter?
10. What was Peter and Paul's agreement?
11. Why does Paul reject the circumcision?
12. When do the believers receive the sonship of God?
13. Did the other apostles acknowledge the ministry of Paul – and how?
14. Why are the law and the promises two opposite systems?
15. Why can the Christians claim the blessings of Abraham?
16. Does the law have a healing function, (can it redeem us)?
17. How do we produce the fruit of the spirit?
18. What did Paul mean by „works of the flesh“?
19. Why did Paul give so much attention to physical suffering?
20. In what kind of environment does a Christian live?

**Please send the answers** to pastor@matutis.de

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