



# Introduction to Galatians

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- *Jerusalem with Barnabus and Titus:* Agabus gave a prophetic word that famine was coming. The church at Antioch took up an offering and sent Paul, Barnabus, and Titus to deliver it in Jerusalem. This is when Paul met with the leaders, James, John, and Peter, and submitted his gospel to them (Acts 11:27-30; Gal. 2:1-10).
- *Antioch:* Paul went back to Antioch.
- *1<sup>st</sup> Missionary Journey:* The Holy Spirit spoke to the leaders and told them to send out Paul and Barnabus on a missionary journey (Acts 13-14). John Mark, Barnabus' cousin, also went with them. Many believe John Mark recorded Peter's account of Jesus in the gospel of Mark. This mission trip took place between 47-48 A.D.
- *Plants 4 Galatian Churches:* Paul planted four churches in Galatia: 1) Pisidian-Antioch; 2) Iconium; 3) Lystra; and 4) Derbe.
- *Antioch:* Paul went back to Antioch after the missionary journey.
- *Peter Visited Antioch:* Peter went to Antioch to visit the church. Peter was the most famous person of the first-century church. He was the water-walker and miracle-worker. Peter brought the gospel to the Gentiles in Acts 9-10. He initially accepted the Gentiles and had table fellowship with them.
- *The Judaizers Visited Antioch:* Judaizers were Jews who converted to Christianity but still believed they had to obey the Law of Moses. They also believed that Gentiles who converted to Christianity had to be circumcised and obey the Law of Moses (Acts 15:1). Some Judaizers, supposedly with a letter from James, went to Antioch and persuaded Peter and Barnabas to stop eating with the Gentile converts because this was defiling them. As a result, all the Jews in Antioch stopped eating with the Gentiles. When Paul finds out about this, he was furious. He rebuked Peter in front of everyone and told the Jews and Gentiles to eat together.
- *Judaizers Visited Galatia:* Most likely, when these Judaizers were at Antioch, they heard about the churches Paul planted in Galatia. They didn't like Paul's gospel of grace apart from the works of the Law. They felt like it was a watered-down message that was leading people away from God. So, led by one main Judaizer, a group of Judaizers traveled to Galatia. As Paul said, they disturbed the Galatians and even bewitched them, convincing them that they must obey the Law of Moses and receive circumcision. The Judaizers preached faith in Jesus Christ plus full obedience to the 613 commandments in the Law of Moses. The Judaizers claimed this is how people are both justified (made right with God) and sanctified (made holy).
- *Paul Wrote Galatians:* Paul wrote Galatians to help the confused Galatian church. The Galatians were close to abandoning Christ to come under the Law. Paul wrote Galatians in 49 A.D. Many scholars believe Galatians was the first piece of Christian literature ever penned. When Paul wrote Galatians, he was sick (Gal. 4:13-15). Some scholars believe he had some type of eye condition because the Galatians would have plucked out their eye for him if that would have helped (Gal. 4:15). Most of the Gentile converts in Galatia are full-blown heathens. They worship false gods, practice sexual immorality, witchcraft, and are superstitious. They have no Old Testament knowledge and most are illiterate.
- *The Jerusalem Council:* After Paul's experience with the Judaizers and the Galatian church, Paul met with the 12 in Jerusalem in 50 A.D. (Acts 15). This was the first church council in history. At this historic meeting, the church decided that Gentile Christians did not need to be circumcised and obey the Law of Moses to be saved.

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## The Judaizers Accusations

- In the words of F.F. Bruce, the late British scholar, when reading the New Testament letters, “We are in a position of people listening to one end of a telephone conversation; we have to infer what is being said at the other end in order to reconstruct the situation for ourselves.”
- Known as *mirror-reading*, this interpretative method of reading the Bible makes the New Testament epistles come alive. It adds much depth to our understanding of what is taking place.
- Using *mirror-reading*, we can deduct some of the Judaizers accusations against Paul. Here’s some of what they were saying:
  - Paul is an illegitimate minister since he’s not part of the 12 and is not part of the Jerusalem church (1:1).
  - Paul is a man-pleaser (1:10). He changes his message to please his audience. To Jews, he preached the Law. But not to Gentiles.
  - Paul was only a disciple of the 12. He did not have legitimate authority since he did not receive direct revelation.

## Paul’s Defense

- Paul’s tone in Galatians was one of frustration, perplexion, defense, and even anger. He spent quite a bit of time defending the legitimacy of his ministry.
- Paul defended his apostolic ministry, saying he received his gospel by direct revelation (1:11-12). He went through his resume to persuade the Galatians to receive his pure gospel (1:13-17). The Judaizers attacked the messenger to undermine the message. Paul had to undo this work and build the messenger back up. Paul does this, not because he is puffed up with pride, but so his life-changing gospel message is received.
- Paul told them how he persecuted the church and was advanced in Judaism until his Damascus road experience. He didn’t go to the 12 in Jerusalem until 3 years after his conversion and wilderness experience in Arabia.
- Paul wanted the Galatians to know there was about 14 years before he verified the revelations he received and his gospel message with the 12 apostles (2:1-2). Paul let the Galatians know the 12 agreed with his revelations and his gospel message.
- Building the case for his authority, Paul reiterated that those of reputation (the 12 in Jerusalem) contributed nothing to him. They didn’t give him the gospel. He received it directly from Jesus Christ (2:1-2).

## The Main Themes of Galatians

- Galatians is the greatest defense against legalism in Scripture. It’s not Christ plus something else. It’s not Christ plus obedience. Christ plus Bible reading. Christ plus prayer. We are justified by faith alone by grace alone. It’s not by any works of the Law or any acts of obedience.
- The entire Christian life is summarized in Galatians 2:20: I have been crucified with Christ and now I live by His indwelling life and by His faith.

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- After being justified and having a good beginning, we are to still live by the Spirit. Justification is by grace through faith. So also is sanctification.
- If you walk by the Spirit, meaning you are led by the Spirit, you will bear the fruit of the Spirit, will overcome the flesh, and will not be subject to any Law.

## Galatians References the Law Frequently

- The word *Law* is used 32 times in 25 verses in Galatians. This means about 17% of the verses have the word *Law*. Therefore, almost every chapter in Galatians alludes to the Law of Moses.
- This being the case, we need a foundational understanding of the Law to understand Galatians.
- For us Gentile Christians who have mainly studied the New Testament, the Law is more of a mystery to us. Yes, we have all read the Ten Commandments and know some of the “you must” and “thou shall not” commands. But our understanding of the Law is very limited.
- I know reading about the Law can be a little boring. But I want to encourage you to take the time to read the next five pages about the Law. This will help lay a solid foundation as you seek to understand the book of Galatians. Having said that, the following five pages are not intended to give a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies of the Law, for that would take an entire book. But hopefully it will help you begin to understand the Law in a deeper way.

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## A Summary of the Law

- The Law was the main document of Israel's national covenant from God. Therefore, the Law can be viewed as the constitution for the ancient nation of Israel. As Israel's national constitution, the Law contains instructions for Israel's socio-judicial system as well as personal moral issues. Great prominence was also given to the religious temple system, the most prominent features being priesthood and the sacrifices.
- In summary, the Law both reflects God's universal and eternal moral standards and relates specifically to Israel's calling as a nation and its identity.
- The easiest way to understand the intricacies and complexities of the Law, which has 613 commandments, is to break it down into the following four categories:
  1. The moral law;
  2. The civil law;
  3. The ceremonial law;
  4. The dietary law.

Even though the Scriptures do not explicitly segment the Law in this way, scholars have used this type of categorization to help simplify the learning process. This makes it easier for those who are uneducated in the intricacies of the Law to understand it at a high level.

## The Moral Law

- The moral law is summarized by the Ten Commandments, which can be categorized as follows:

<b>Commandment</b>	<b>Category</b>
First and Second	Idolatry
Third	Blasphemy
Fifth	Honor
Sixth	Murder
Seventh	Sexual Immorality
Eighth	Stealing
Ninth	Honesty
Tenth	Coveting

- Please note the Sabbath will be dealt with as part of the ceremonial law.

## The Ten Commandments Are Central

- The Ten Commandments are the hub of the Law. Without a central moral law, the civil and ceremonial law become meaningless. For example, how can the civil law state how transgressions should be punished if there is no central moral law identifying sins? Or how can the bloody animal sacrifices described in the ceremonial law cover sins if there is no central moral law to define sins?

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- While the Ten Commandments summarize the moral law, the entire moral law is interspersed throughout Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The other moral laws and instructions in these books are expansions and additions to the basic ordinances listed in the Ten Commandments.
- For example, while the second commandment summarizes the prohibition against idolatry (Exod. 20:4), the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy describe in explicit detail all that God considers idolatry, such as the commandments against consulting mediums (Lev. 19:31), deriving any type of benefit from idols (Deut. 7:25; 13:16-18), prophesying in the name of idols or listening to one who prophesies in the name of idols (Deut. 18:20; 13:2-3), divination, soothsaying, enchanting, sorcery, charming, consulting ghosts or familiar spirits, and communicating with the spirits of the dead (Lev. 19:26; Deut. 18:10-11).
- Another example is the seventh commandment, which summarizes the sexual sins in the moral law by the statement, "You shall not commit adultery" (Exod. 20:14). Adultery, as we know, is sex between a married person and a partner other than their lawful spouse. But the moral law does not just limit sexual immorality to adultery. The moral law also forbids homosexuality (Lev. 18:22), incest (Lev. 18:7-18), bestiality (Lev. 18:23), intimate physical contact with someone other than your spouse (Lev. 18:6), prostitution (Deut. 23:17-18), and sexual relations while your wife is menstruating (Lev. 18:19).
- The same type of summary and expansion pattern could easily be applied to the remaining Ten Commandments, such as keeping the Sabbath, showing honor, murder, stealing, bearing false witness, and coveting.

## The Moral Law Is Universal and Eternal

- The moral Law, which represents God's righteous character and holy nature, reveals God's universal, unchanging, and eternal moral standards. Therefore, the moral law is binding for everyone everywhere for all time.
- Even though the moral law was part of God's covenant with Israel, the moral law was also a detailed revelation of God's righteous standard for everyone. A great example of this is found in Leviticus 18, where God details what He considers as sexual immorality. As we have seen, He prohibits such things as adultery, homosexuality, incest, and bestiality. But if you read this passage closely, this righteous standard of morality was not only for Israel; it was for every nation, for the Lord said, "Do not defile yourselves by any of these things [the sexual sins mentioned]; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled" (Lev. 18:24-25, emphasis mine).
- The Lord was telling Israel that the inhabitants of Canaan would be spewed out of their land for defiling it. How did they defile the land? By living in constant violation of God's eternal, universal moral law. As a result of these abominable practices, the land would spew out its inhabitants through God's righteous judgment (Lev. 18:25). This same pattern is repeated throughout the Bible (Gen. 6:5-7; Gen. 18:20-19:29; Jon. 1-4; Amos 1:3-2:3; Isa. 24:4-5).
- In summary, even though the moral law was part of Israel's covenant and national constitution, it reveals God's eternal, universal righteous standard of morality. The moral law is therefore binding for everyone everywhere for all time.

## The Civil Law

- The civil law contained the criminal code outlining the procedures and punishments for violations of the moral law, social laws related to property, inheritance, family, marriage, and divorce, a means for the redistribution of wealth, honesty in business, and instructions of how to care for the poor, needy, orphan, widow, stranger, and slave.

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- While the moral law is God's righteous standard for everyone at a personal level, the civil law, which only related to the ancient nation of Israel, detailed the procedures and punishments for breaking the moral law. For example, the moral law states, "You shall not make for yourself an idol" (Exod. 20:4-6). Idolatry is an issue of morality and holiness for everyone everywhere for all time but it only applies to us at a personal level. The civil law, on the other hand, described how ancient Israel was to punish individuals who committed idolatry or enticed others to commit idolatry. For instance, if an Israelite persuaded someone to worship an idol, the civil law stated, "But you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. So you shall stone him to death because he has sought to seduce you from the Lord" (Deut. 13:6-10).
- Obviously, the civil law only applied to ancient Israel. Can you imagine if a Jew living in twenty-first century America stoned a Muslim because he tried to convert him to Islam? Standing before a judge, this American Jew could not argue that the Law of Moses commands me to stone an idolater. This person would be guilty of murder under the civil laws of the United States because the U.S. Court system does not follow the civil law detailed in Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Numbers.
- The civil law, therefore, as part of ancient Israel's national covenant with God and constitution, was a set of specific laws given for the culture and people of Israel thousands of years ago and no longer applies to believers nor to the modern-day nation of Israel, which is built upon secular laws. In 135 A.D., when the Roman Emperor Hadrian banned the Jews from Jerusalem and turned the Holy Land into a pagan shrine, the civil law vanished into the sands of time.

## The Ceremonial Law

- The ceremonial law includes purity laws, ordinances about the yearly feasts and weekly Sabbath, statutes regarding the priesthood, sacrifices, and offerings, and instructions about tabernacle and temple worship.
- The purity laws, as part of the ceremonial law, were instructions on how to deal with such things as menstruation, seminal emission, skin disease, and mildew.
- The ceremonial law, specifically found in Leviticus 23, outlines the ordinances for celebrating the feasts of Israel, such as the spring feasts of Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and Pentecost and the fall feasts of Trumpets and Tabernacles. The ceremonial law also outlines the specific instructions for keeping the weekly Sabbath, describing in detail the type of work that is outlawed and how that day should be set apart exclusively for God.
- In addition, the ceremonial law gave instructions on how the sacrifices and offerings should be administered, including the sin offering, burnt offering, whole offering, heave offering, Passover sacrifice, meal offering, wave offering, peace offering, drink offering, thank offering, dough offering, incense offering, red heifer, scapegoat, and first fruits. The ceremonial law also detailed the requirements for the priesthood and high priest and instructed ancient Israel how the tabernacle furniture should be constructed and administered.
- With all of this in mind, let's answer the question of what, if any, part of the ceremonial law still applies to born-again believers. Let's begin by answering the easy part first.
- Hebrews 8:13, which in the context of discussing the priesthood, sacrificial system, and temple worship under the Mosaic Covenant, states, "He has made the first obsolete [the Mosaic Covenant]. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear" (emphasis mine). From this verse and after reading the book of Hebrews, it is obvious that Jesus is the perfect sacrifice, the high priest of the New Covenant, and that He inaugurated a new method of worship in spirit and truth. Therefore, all of the statutes pertaining to the priesthood, sacrificial system, and temple in the ceremonial law have been

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replaced by Jesus and the finished work of the cross. The purity laws would also fall into the category of being superseded by what Jesus accomplished on the cross.

## Are Christians Required to Keep the Sabbath?

- Now let's talk about the Sabbath. This topic is a hotly debated subject in some circles. At issue is not whether believers should take a day of rest, but whether they should rest on Saturday. Most Gentile Christians love the idea of worshiping God at church on a Sunday morning and then taking the rest of the day to relax, take a nap, and spend time with the family. The issue is not whether we should take a day of rest, but whether our day of rest should be on a Saturday. After all, the Sabbath is part of the Ten Commandments, which contains God's righteous and eternal moral standards. So, are born-again believers required to take a day of rest every Saturday?

- A great answer on this topic comes from Messianic Jew, Dan Juster. In his book *Jewish Roots*, he writes,

It has been thought strange by some that God would place the Sabbath at the center of His lofty commands which deal with the highest dimensions of morality. How is it that there is then this intrusion of a ritual command? . . . Unfortunately, the whole debate has lost sight of a contextual understanding of the Sabbath command. . . . Sabbath, however, is an integral part of God's treaty between Himself and Israel. Although there may be marvelous applications from a humanitarian and religious point of view for Christians, we need first to understand the covenant context. The Sabbath is called a sign "between me and the people of Israel." In the ancient covenants the center of the treaty would bear a symbol or sign of the king . . . which might have been related to his chief god. However, no representation of God could be made in ancient Israel. Therefore, the representation would not be a symbol, a picture, or an idol, but a unique cycle of life. Only Israel had a seven-day cycle of weeks. . . . This seven-day cycle—with rest and worship on the last day—was a unique testimony to the covenant relationship between God and Israel. Hence, the whole of the commands are part of a covenant with Israel, and although we can discern the universal principles of this treaty which apply to all peoples (as Paul's quoting "Honor your mother and father" to the Ephesians), the treaty is an indivisible whole as given to Israel; Sabbath-keeping is just as much a part of this treaty as "Thou shalt not kill." To spurn the Sabbath as a covenant sign was to spurn the covenant and the special relationship between God and the nation Israel.

- In summary, taking a day of rest, whether on a Saturday or Sunday, is a good and even healthy thing to do. However, the Sabbath, though included in the Ten Commandments, is part of the covenant between God and Israel. It is not part of the moral law, which is universal and eternal. Therefore, born-again believers are not obligated to keep the Sabbath. This argument is strengthened when you analyze the New Testament. The Sabbath command was the only commandment of the Ten Commandments not carried over into the New Testament.

## Are Christians Required to Keep the Feasts?

- The third question to answer is whether Gentile believers are obligated to celebrate the feasts. Does God require Gentile Christians to observe Passover, Pentecost, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Trumpets, or the Feast of Tabernacles? Before answering this, we have to understand that these festivals are "a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ" (Col. 2:16-17).
- Christ is the fulfillment of every one of the feasts. For instance, Jesus is the Passover Lamb who takes away the sins of the world and He fulfilled the Feast of First-Fruits by His resurrection from the dead. Christ also fulfilled Pentecost when He sent the Spirit to baptize His people with power and to write the Law on our hearts. And when Jesus came the first time to tabernacle among men (John 1:14), it was a partial fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles. When Jesus returns the second time as the reigning King, He will completely fulfill this festival as "all the nations . . . go up from year to year to worship the King,



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the Lord of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths [the Feast of Tabernacles]" (Zech. 14:16, emphasis mine). So, Christ is the substance and fulfillment of every one of the feasts.

- The feasts did not pass away in the New Covenant and will even be celebrated in the Millennial Kingdom when Jesus returns (Zech. 14:16). Nevertheless, when the Jewish elders met in Jerusalem to discuss the requirements for Gentile believers, they did not make celebrating the feasts an obligation (Acts 15). Their basic declaration was that Gentiles should not be forced to become Jews. Therefore, Gentile believers are not required to celebrate the feasts, but neither are we forbidden from participating. For the many Gentile believers who do celebrate the feasts, they have found rich meaning in celebrating Jesus as the Passover Lamb and the first fruits of the resurrection. They have found great joy commemorating Pentecost and rejoicing in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And they celebrate the fall festivals of Trumpets and Tabernacles with great anticipation for the soon return of Jesus. So, Gentiles are not required to keep the feasts, but the feasts can add a deeper dimension to our walk with God.

## The Dietary Law

- Many Gentile believers are somewhat familiar with the dietary laws listed in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14:3-21. We know that orthodox Jews who are still under the Law cannot eat pig, shrimp, or lobster. Others, who are friends with kosher Jews, know that eating meat and dairy products together is prohibited. No matter what we know about the dietary laws, the main thing to realize is that it consumed their entire way of life, developing an attitude of obedience to God deep within their heart.
- The dietary laws involved much more than just abstaining from pork, shrimp, or lobster. These laws dictated the way food should be stored, cooked, and consumed. As a result of these stringent requirements, the dietary laws separated the Israelites from their polytheistic neighbors and became a distinguishing mark of their national identity.
- Stop for a moment and think of how many activities take place around a meal—family time, meeting with friends, building relationships, strategizing about business or ministry. Now imagine the challenge of eating with someone because of these strict restrictions. This would produce separation and isolation, which was one of the purposes of the dietary laws. In fact, when the Jews were dispersed into the nations, these dietary laws erected a high barrier against assimilation into various cultures and helped the Jews maintain their racial identity. So, the dietary laws were an essential part of Israel's special calling to be God's unique and holy possession.
- For those of us who love BBQ and seafood, we get a little nervous that these dietary laws might somehow apply to us. Please don't tell me that I can no longer go to Bucky's BBQ or the all-you-can-eat seafood buffet! For all who feel a little nervous, you can relax. Jesus made it crystal clear that food does not make us holy or unholy (Mark 7:18-23).
- Because the Law placed such a strong emphasis on ritual purity alongside moral purity, Jewish people naturally thought eating forbidden food or eating with unwashed hands resulted in the same defilement as moral impurity. But Jesus made it clear that real defilement is related to the condition of the heart, not what we eat. Since Jesus "declared all foods clean," the debate is over. You can eat as much lobster, shrimp, bacon, ham, sausage, and BBQ pork as you want and still be clean (of course, as long as you don't become gluttonous!).
- Though believers do not have to follow the dietary laws, some Messianic Jews choose a kosher diet in order to maintain their Jewish identity and heritage. Other Messianic Jews follow the dietary laws as a method of evangelism, to connect with their fellow Jew who has not been born again and to demonstrate that you can still be Jewish and a follower of Jesus.