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UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK OF GALATIANS

In an attempt to do away with the law of God, the Worldwide Church of God has used especially the Book of Galatians. In this book Paul supposedly explains that all the laws of the Old Covenant, including the ten commandments, are done away "as a package". This is not true.

Towards the end of 1970 or early in 1971 Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong gave a sermon at Ambassador College in Bricket Wood, England. The ministry there had requested Mr. Armstrong to explain the Book of Galatians, because they themselves were unsure as to its exact meaning. One of our lecturers instructed us in advance of the sermon to prepare a summary of Mr. Armstrong's sermon and to hand it in to him as one of our assignments.

Ever since listening to that sermon by Mr. Armstrong I have not had any difficulty understanding what the Book of Galatians is all about. To me Mr. Armstrong's explanation was clear, logical and easy to follow. It made sense; and the more I have studied the Book of Galatians, the more sense Mr. Armstrong's explanation has made. Almost 25 years have not in any way changed the correctness of what Mr. Armstrong explained.

A major key to correctly understanding this book is to understand what Paul means when he speaks about "the law".

UNDERSTANDING THE LAW OF GOD

The word "law" simply refers to "the rules of conduct". They (these rules) may be "required", they may be only "desirable" or they may be "inexorable", depending on the context in which we talk about "laws".

Now "the law of God" is nothing other than an expression of the mind of God. The law of God expresses the rules of conduct by which God Himself governs His existence. We are told that "God is love", because love is an expression of the mind of God. The law of God is a way of translating that frame of mind of true love into the rules of conduct for a multitude of individual beings.

Paul tells us very plainly that ...

Wherefore THE LAW [IS] HOLY, AND THE COMMANDMENT HOLY, AND JUST, AND GOOD.
(Romans 7:12)

The law of God is "holy" because it embodies the very nature of God. And it is Satan who would claim that it is impossible to please God when you try to obey all of the laws that are an expression of the very mind of God.

God's very purpose for us is to see if we will come to think the way He thinks. The law of God embodies how God thinks. God wants to know if we will willingly come to think the same way. If we do so, then our thinking will be expressed in total and whole-hearted obedience to God's

laws.

If we really want to please God, then we will try with our whole being to obey all of God's laws completely. In fact, we will not only try to meet the minimum requirements God's laws set for us; we will joyfully and gladly go above and beyond the call of duty in obedience and seek to do more than is required of us in every area of our lives.

None of God's true servants have at any time repudiated or negated the law of God. It is Satan who wants to do those things. Whenever you see a statement that says that Paul "repudiated" or rejected the law of God in certain instances, you can know that you are reading the words of someone who does not really understand the mind of God.

THE FOUNDATION FOR UNDERSTANDING PAUL'S LETTERS

People have twisted the words of Paul for centuries. They already did so in Paul's lifetime (see 2 Peter 3:16). This refers to the people who don't have the Spirit of God and who desire to read their own meanings into the words of Paul. As Peter explained, such people twist the words of Paul in the same way as they also twist "the other Scriptures". They are the people who will twist ANY Scriptures that don't suit them.

There is a way to clearly understand Paul. Here are some of the steps involved:

- 1) The plain, clear words of Jesus Christ Himself must always be the foundation on which we understand Paul's statements.
- 2) Paul does not contradict himself. Therefore always first look at plain, clear statements by Paul himself in other letters or passages. For example, it is absurd to claim that Paul sometimes affirms the law and at other times negates it.
- 3) Don't just accept what other people tell you Paul was trying to say. Check the context of Paul's statements out yourself, to establish Paul's real purpose for his statements.

So now let's look first at the words of Jesus Christ. Whatever authority we may attach to the words of Paul, Christ's authority is higher. Do you agree?

We want God to give us the gift of eternal life, right? So what did Christ say to the man who asked Him how he might receive eternal life? You know the answer.

And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? [there is] none good but one, [that is], God:
BUT IF THOU WILT ENTER INTO LIFE, KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS. (Matthew 19:17)

How may we have eternal life? By keeping the law of God!

Now ask yourself this question: did Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, the One who had spoken to Moses and to Israel, ever at any time in any way "REPUDIATE" or "NEGATE" the law of God? Did Jesus Christ EVER, in any way, have a negative approach to the law of God (as commentators claim Paul has in certain places)?

Would Paul have had the same attitude about the law of God as the author of Psalm 119 or not?

O HOW LOVE I THY LAW! it [is] my meditation all the day. (Psalm 119:97)

Did Paul also love the law of God or not? Yes, he did! Would Paul have dared to be in any way negative towards the law of God? No, he would not have dared to do so and he didn't. It was the furthest thing from Paul's mind. We have already seen Romans 7:12.

THE GREEK WORD FOR "LAW"

In the Book of Galatians the word "law" appears 32 times in 25 different verses. This means that the word "law" is used on average in every fifth verse of this book. That is a very high ratio for the word "law".

It is always the one same Greek word in the original text. That word is "nomos". In the whole New Testament this word is used 197 times and it is always translated as "law". These 197 places where this word is used illustrate that it is used in a variety of contexts.

Let's notice how this word is defined in Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament:

nomos: (from nemo, to divide, distribute, apportion)

- anything established, anything received by usage, a custom, usage, a law, a command;
- of any law whatsoever
- a law or rule producing a state approved of God
- by the observance of which is approved of God
- a precept or injunction
- the rule of action prescribed by reason
- of the Mosaic law
- the Christian religion: the law demanding faith, the moral instruction given by Christ
- the name of the more important part (the Pentateuch), is put for the entire collection of the books of the Old Testament

The definitions in this Lexicon take into account the 197 different places where this word is used. It is the context in which this word "nomos" is used that determines exactly WHICH LAWS are being referred to in any specific reference.

The word "nomos" by itself and without a specific context does not in any way imply "the law OF GOD". It is a very general word, that had many different applications in biblical Greek.

Thus: in the New Testament the word "law" can refer to civil laws of the Roman Empire, to laws by other rulers, to the first 5 books of the Old Testament, to the whole Old Testament, to the spiritual law of God as embodied in the 10 commandments, to the sacrificial and ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, to the ritualistic laws of the Old Testament, to the oral laws that Judaism had developed (the "halakhah), and to the moral laws Jesus Christ expounded.

It is always THE CONTEXT which reveals exactly what is meant by the word "law".

With this wide a range of applications, we need to check very carefully which meaning is intended in each context. It should be clear that the word "law" in the N.T. by no means always means "the law of God". THE CONTEXT in which the word is used is very important. Also, the expectations of the readers, those to whom the various letters were addressed, are important to keep in mind.

THE EXPRESSION "THE LAW OF GOD"

In spite of the word "law" being used nearly 200 times, the expression "law of God" is used only three times in the whole New Testament ... all three occurrences being within an eleven-verse context in Romans. Let's look at all three of these places ...

For I delight in THE LAW OF GOD after the inward man: (Romans 7:22)

I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve THE LAW OF GOD; but with the flesh the law of sin. (Romans 7:25)

Because the carnal mind [is] enmity against God: for it is not subject to THE LAW OF GOD, neither indeed can be. (Romans 8:7)

These three verses very clearly spell out the attitude the Apostle Paul had to "the law of God". Firstly, the law of God is something Paul delighted in ... he loved the law of God! Next, we see that Paul tried his best, with his whole mind, to SERVE the law of God. He knew that in so doing he would be pleasing God. And then Paul showed that it is the CARNAL mind that thinks and speaks negatively of the law of God and is not subject to it.

These statements by Paul are 100% compatible with the words of Jesus Christ about the law of God. There is no conflict in any way. There is also no doubt whatsoever that in this context Paul is speaking about "the law of God". That is easy to see.

So we have here some clear, unambiguous statements by Paul about the law of God. These are references to the law of God, as expounded by all ten of the ten commandments.

Now we are ready to look at the Book of Galatians.

THE BACKGROUND IN GALATIA

The province of Galatia consisted of a fairly large area in Asia Minor. Paul had travelled through the area and some people had come into the Church as a result of his preaching. The people were scattered throughout a number of the towns there. The members in each town made up a local congregation. Very likely the congregations were all quite small and not on the same scale as the congregations in Ephesus and in Corinth, for example.

When Paul on his travels came to a new town or city, he always made a point of first going to the Jewish synagogue in that town. It provided an opportunity for him to speak and to present his message to Jews and proselytes. From there he usually looked for opportunities to then make contact with other people, who might also be receptive to the truth of God. This pattern is recorded for us in the Book of Acts.

This should help us to understand the composition of the small congregations that were raised up by Paul. Even in non-Jewish areas there were often a few Jewish converts in the congregation, because

Paul's first preaching in the area had begun at the local synagogue. In most areas it would be safe to assume that the congregations were made up of mainly non-Jewish members. This was in keeping with Paul's responsibility for "the gospel of the uncircumcision".

So very likely there were a number of small scattered groups in this territory. The means of transport and of communication of that time meant that even short distances of perhaps 20 miles or so prevented regular contact and fellowshiping between these groups. In some of these small congregations there may have been a strong Jewish influence (if two or three Jewish families had come into the Church as a result of Paul's preaching), while in other congregations the membership was totally non-Jewish in composition. The only thing that tied them together is that they were all in the same general geographic area.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN THE CHURCHES IN GALATIA

Paul had received a report that false teachers were influencing these new converts in these congregations in Galatia. Paul is not specific in addressing who these false teachers were. He may or may not have had specific details. It is quite possible that there was a falling away from the truth taking place in all of these congregations.

In some congregations with a strong Jewish presence that falling away may have involved an emphasis or insistence on Old Testament rituals or on Jewish traditions. In other congregations where there simply were no Jewish members, it might have been a pressure to go back to the pagan traditions of their fathers. Any attack on the true Church of God is always orchestrated by Satan. Satan would use whatever approach would be most effective in each area. With Satan it is not the means that are important but the end result ... confusion and a falling away. Church members were falling prey to various different false teachings.

So Paul wrote a letter to stop this falling away and to help the people in the Church to understand the situation correctly.

The situation may very likely have been more or less as follows:

1) Some of these small congregations had a prominent Jewish element in them and they were being pressured to accept all the Jewish rituals that the Jewish community down the road (where these Jewish Christians themselves had been members until very recently) accepted. This meant basically the religious customs that were taught by the Pharisees. Acceptance of these Jewish customs would have brought approval from the local Jewish community and therefore a larger group of people to fellowship with and to identify with.

2) Other small congregations very likely had no Jews in their midst. They would not have had any pressure to accept Jewish customs. But, being small and isolated, they probably faced considerable pressure from their neighbours and their unconverted relatives in the world to at least "go along with" some of the local religious customs. Now think: WHEN is it that friends and relatives usually put the greatest pressure on us to "accommodate" their ways at least a little bit? It is when the religious festivals come around ... Christmas, Easter, etc., right? It was the same back then. And the smaller a congregation was, the greater the pressure. Isolated members always face the greatest pressures in this regard.

3) Paul understood that the members were being deceived; but those who were instrumental in leading the members away from God's truth were doing so in deliberate and calculated ways. That is why Paul was so angry and pronounced a double curse on these unnamed false teachers right at the start of his letter.

Notice that Paul was writing to a group of congregations.

And all the brethren which are with me, UNTO THE CHURCHES OF GALATIA: (Galatians 1:2)

Even today we can find radically different attitudes and different problems in neighbouring congregations of the Church of God. It was no different 1900 years ago.

THE EPISTLE OF GALATIANS

Paul goes onto the attack immediately after the briefest of openings. He was angry! Now there is something we need to keep in mind about a person who is angry: an angry person does not speak in ambiguous terms! Angry people are always the most explicit ones in spelling out exactly what they mean. Let's try to understand Paul's frame of mind when he wrote this letter. Paul was trying to spell out exactly what he meant in the clearest and plainest terms that he could ... that's what we do when we are angry.

After pronouncing the double curse on the false teachers who were influencing some of the Galatian Christians, Paul spends the rest of chapter one spelling out his own calling and credentials. Important to note are the two references he makes to "THE JEWS' RELIGION" in verses 13-14. In verse 14 he says ...

And profited IN THE JEWS' RELIGION above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of THE TRADITIONS OF MY FATHERS. (Galatians 1:14)

Now understand this:

"The Jews' religion" is NOT the same as the religion that God gave to Moses to give to Israel! The term "the Jews' religion" is NOT identical with "the whole Old Testament". Not at all!

The "Jews' religion" INCLUDED the Old Testament, much like the so-called "Christian churches" today INCLUDE the Bible in their system of things. But the "Jews' religion" also included A WHOLE LOT OF THINGS THAT HAD ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO DO WITH THE BIBLE!

Most people today do not understand this. It is almost like why most Muslims today would not understand why the Church of God claims to be a "Christian" Church, yet does not observe Christmas or Easter. Surely every "Christian" church accepts those days?

The key statement Paul gives us is that he was zealous of "THE TRADITIONS of his fathers". Notice this statement! It is important.

How important are the words of Jesus Christ Himself in this regard? Do the words of Christ provide enough authority for us to draw specific conclusions?

Notice what Jesus Christ had to say ...

Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples ACCORDING TO THE TRADITION OF THE ELDERS, but eat bread with unwashen hands? (Mark 7:5)

These are a part of the traditions that Paul had been extremely zealous for. Now notice how Jesus Christ

responds to this matter of "the traditions".

He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of YOU HYPOCRITES, as it is written, This people honoureth me with [their] lips, but their heart is far from me. (Mark 7:6)

Do you understand Christ's response? The "traditions of the elders" were nothing more than a form of hypocrisy! Can you see this?! And hypocrisy is something God rejects. So ...

Howbeit IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, teaching [for] doctrines THE COMMANDMENTS OF MEN. (Mark 7:7)

Do you understand? The traditions that the Jews had already established at the time of Christ were nothing more than "the commandments of men" and amounted to worshipping God "in vain".

In the next verse Jesus Christ focused in on the ritualistic nature of these traditions ...

For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, [as] THE WASHING of pots and cups: AND MANY OTHER SUCH LIKE THINGS ye do. (Mark 7:8)

They had all kinds of rituals. And it is not just that these things amounted to "worshipping God in vain"; they actually went one step further. They actually amounted to A REJECTION (note this term!) of the commandments of God.

And he said unto them, FULL WELL YE REJECT THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD, THAT YE MAY KEEP YOUR OWN TRADITION (Mark 7:9)

These are the words of Jesus Christ! Are they clear enough? Are they STRONG ENOUGH? Remember, I said that the clear, plain words of Jesus Christ must always be the foundation on which we understand the writings of Paul.

So now back to Galatians chapter one.

When Paul tells us that he "profited in the Jews' (not in God's!) religion" and that he was "more exceedingly zealous of the tradition of my fathers", what is he telling us? He is telling us that he had been involved in worshipping God in vain and that he had practised some "traditions" in his life that in actual fact amounted to rejecting the commandments of God.

And that is precisely why he no longer did those things ... because they are not the laws that God has given us to live by!

Notice that Paul is CONTRASTING his own religious conduct before his calling (verses 13-14) with his religious conduct after his calling (verses 15-17). After his conversion he dropped the "traditions of his fathers".

Now the traditions of the fathers INCLUDED the sacrifices and customs that are recorded in the Old Testament. And some of those we see Paul still having a limited contact with even after his conversion. There was nothing wrong with them. But the traditions of the fathers also included over 500 other laws and customs, that had absolutely nothing to do with God's way of life. They were a whole ritualistic

system, designed to regulate every facet of Jewish life. Many violated various principles expressed in the laws of God. And that is why Christ had said: in order to keep your own traditions you reject the commandments of God; for you the traditions have a higher priority. That is a form of hypocrisy in God's eyes.

Now back to Paul again.

Paul is angry with the false heretical teachers. So WHY does he tell the Galatian Christians these details about his previous religious zeal? Why didn't he mention this to the Ephesians or to the Romans or to the Philippians? Why mention it in this context of anger at heretical teachings?

The reason should be obvious. Paul is saying: "Look, some of you are being led back into the very customs and traditions that I myself came OUT of when God called me! Can't you understand that that is not the way of life God has called us to?"

Notice that nowhere in this letter does Paul use the expression "the law of God", as he does in Romans. In fact, he doesn't even use the word "law" until Gal. 2:16; and then he uses it 32 times in the remaining 110 verses.

THE WORDS "JUSTIFIED" AND "MADE RIGHTEOUS"

Biblical Greek has a very small vocabulary. There are only about 5600 different Greek words in the New Testament. This number includes all the proper names. But even when those words are deducted, the number is still somewhat inflated. The number of actual root words is quite small. But the strength and the power of the biblical Greek language lie in the use of its 18 prepositions. These are used as prefixes to transform many words. They give a tremendous amount of scope to the language. Through the use of these prefixes some root words are transformed into ten or even more other words.

The English language, by comparison, has a far, far greater vocabulary ... having absorbed words and terms from many other languages. With this large vocabulary we can be more precise in pinpointing many specific meanings. But we lack the flexibility that is afforded to biblical Greek through its prepositions. So both forms have certain advantages. The Greek language can express many more things with fewer words than the English language.

It is this inherently smaller vocabulary of biblical Greek that results in many Greek words having a scope of different meanings in English. Typically, when you read New Testament Greek or look up a word in your dictionary, you will find that the word has a whole range of possible English meanings.

Probably the best-known example of this to people in God's Church is the verb "gennao". This word covers the whole process or any part thereof from conception (or begettal) right through to the birth of a new person. But in the English language we may use the words "to beget" or "to conceive" in reference to the starting of this process; we may use the words "to gestate" to refer to the development of the process; and we may use the words "to bear" or "to deliver" or "to be born" or "to give birth to" when we refer to the conclusion of the process. The Greek verb "gennao" covers all this.

With this in mind, let's look at the Greek verb "dikaioo", which is translated as "justified". Here are the definitions from Thayer's Lexicon:

dikaioo:

1) to render righteous or such as he ought to be (Vul. justifico)

2) to show, exhibit, evince, one to be righteous, such as he is and wishes himself to be considered

3) to declare, pronounce, one to be just, righteous, or such as he ought to be

Now the point of this verb is this: it covers the past tense, the present tense and the future tense. In biblical Greek this is all covered by the same verb. But in English we usually differentiate between the past tense and the future.

THIS IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND!

This is something Mr. Armstrong explained to us in Bricket Wood nearly 25 years ago. Mr. Armstrong referred to the Ferrar Fenton translation to make this point. I don't have that translation, but we should be able to understand this just by looking at this verb very carefully.

In the English language:

When we refer to the past tense, we talk about being "JUSTIFIED";

but when we talk about the future, we talk about being "MADE RIGHTEOUS". These meanings are borne out by the definitions in Thayer's Lexicon.

In this regard the past tense and the future tense do NOT refer to the same thing ... even though in the New Testament the same Greek verb is used.

To make this plain:

The English word "justified" refers to having our past guilt removed". We are justified by faith "IN" (the sacrifice of) Christ.

The English expression "made righteous" refers to future conduct. It has nothing to do with removing past guilt. We are made righteous by the faith "OF" Christ.

THERE IS A VAST DIFFERENCE IN THESE TWO SITUATIONS!

THE COMMENTARIES ARE WRONG

Almost to a man the commentators will tell you that in Galatians "justification" is the point of Paul's argument.

But that is simply not true! They are all wrong ... and Mr. Armstrong explained this quite clearly already 25 years ago! This shouldn't be a surprise to anyone who understands and believes 1. Corinthians 2:11.

For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? EVEN SO THE THINGS OF GOD KNOWETH NO MAN, BUT THE SPIRIT OF GOD. (1 Corinthians 2:11)

Let's just back up a little bit.

What is God, who was using the Apostle Paul, really concerned about ... that people would have some correct academic head-knowledge? Is God really so greatly concerned about people having every little technicality correct in their minds, never mind whether that technicality ever makes a single iota of

difference in how they live or not?

Or is God concerned about how people would actually live their lives before Him? How people would conduct themselves towards their neighbours and towards society in general? What did Jesus Christ, whom Paul followed diligently, emphasize? Was Christ more concerned about academically correct head-knowledge or about right living in a practical context?

The answer should be obvious! God is concerned first and foremost that we DO what is right. Only then does it become important to also have correct intellectual understanding. Right living is what God is looking for first in people. Micah 6:8 sums this up:

He hath shewed thee, O man, what [is] good; and WHAT DOTH THE LORD REQUIRE OF THEE, but TO DO JUSTLY, and TO LOVE MERCY, and TO WALK HUMBLY with thy God?
(Micah 6:8)

None of these things that are priorities to God have to do with correctly understanding concepts like "justification", etc.. It is right living, from a right motivation, that God is looking for.

But let's go even one step further. What would Satan want you (and all of humanity) to believe that Paul was talking about ... some technical theologically correct doctrinal detail, or how we should live our lives before God from here on out into the future? Again, the answer to this question should also be obvious. Satan would want to get all of us side-tracked into focusing on theological discussions. Anything to distract our focus away from Micah 6:8.

To put it in vernacular terms: when it comes to what Paul is speaking about in the Book of Galatians ...

YOU'VE BEEN HAD!

Jesus Christ tells us that "THE TRUTH" shall make us free. Mr. Armstrong gave us the true explanation for the Book of Galatians already almost 25 years ago. It is still true today. Are you ready for the truth? If you are, the truth can set your mind free from the confusion with which Satan has surrounded the Book of Galatians.

THE REAL PROBLEMS IN GALATIA

Picture the situation realistically. The Church had started in Jerusalem. Then it spread out. Prominent cities in the eastern part of the Mediterranean included Corinth, Ephesus, Pergamos, Antioch, etc.. By contrast, most of the area of Galatia would have been considered to be a "cultural backwater". It was somewhat mountainous and not nearly as accessible as the coastal centres and those near the coast.

Commentators try to convince us that the problems in Galatia centred around "judaizing teachers" who came into the area. But that does not really make sense!

The Christians in Galatia were scattered over a large territory. Each group by itself was very likely only very small and the composition of each group differed from the next. Galatia was the last place that anyone who was actually seeking to draw away followers from the fledgling Christian community would go to.

Heretical teachers, who were deliberately looking for converts, would have focused their attention on the larger and more readily accessible congregations of the Church. If you did not already have some

personal contacts to the area of Galatia, then there was nothing there to encourage you to undertake the arduous journey into the area. The tiny Church of God congregations did not hold out much prospect for false teachers.

The real problems were these:

The members of the Church were scattered and few. None were long-standing members. None were solidly grounded in the truth. There were few, if any, ministers available to feed these scattered Christians. After Paul had left them, they faced the world around them on their own.

It was their own familiar environment which provided the stumbling blocks.

Let's learn from Mr. Armstrong's experiences. In his Autobiography Mr. Armstrong explained how he raised up small congregations in various areas during the late 1930's and in the early 1940's. And it was always the same thing that happened: very soon after Mr. Armstrong departed from these areas to go back to his home-base in Oregon, the groups would break up and disintegrate. The people he had baptized just let go of the things he had taught them and they went back into the world and to their former ways of life. It was this situation that prompted Mr. Armstrong to start Ambassador College.

This is the situation Jesus Christ addressed in the parable of the sower. Without faithful and dedicated ministers to lead and to guide them, new converts almost always start off receiving "the seed of the word" into stony ground or amongst thorns. They have no "root in themselves" (see Matthew 13:19-22). It is with the help and assistance of dedicated teachers that the good and fertile soil is created in their minds ... an environment in which God's truth can grow and develop and bear fruit.

Today the Church of God is in the process of being scattered. Many of us are coming to see that it can be a very lonely job to be a true Christian on our own. We go to great lengths to seek out people of like mind, those we can fellowship with. The pressure to let go of obedience to God on those who don't find a group to associate with becomes very great. The prospect of keeping the Feast of Tabernacles without a group of people to associate with becomes almost unbearable for some.

Yet we today have something that the Christians in Galatia did not have. In most cases we have a background of many years, even several decades, in the fellowship of God's true Church. That is something none of the people in Galatia had to support them in their scattered isolation.

People who write biblical commentaries have not experienced these things. They have never felt the stress of the Feast of Tabernacles rapidly approaching and no feast site to go to. They just don't understand.

But we should be able to understand. There is nothing mysterious or "difficult" to grasp about what was happening in the area of Galatia.

By the way, the fact that this letter is addressed to "THE CHURCHES" of Galatia shows that there was not a sufficiently large congregation in any one of the towns there to merit the name of that congregation being attached to this letter (like Ephesus, Rome, Corinth and Philippi). Even the congregation at Colossae (which seems to have been quite small) merited an epistle specifically addressed to it. So the scattered groups in Galatia were very likely quite small.

When Paul left the area of Galatia, these new converts were on their own. They were like the congregations that Mr. Armstrong raised up before he moved down to Pasadena. As the weeks passed, the pressure on them to "belong" and to "be a part of" a larger group became very great. Their former

environment was still intact and before them. The desire to want to be accepted by all of those around us is often very strong. It was the same for them. And their former religious and social environment was beckoning to them.

In any small groups that included some Jews who had come into the Church, these Jews would automatically have been looked upon as leaders; they were already familiar with God's laws and with the "Holy Scriptures" (Romans 1:2; 2 Timothy 3:15). So the non-Jewish converts would have looked up to these Jews for guidance.

How easy is it to convince people that Jewish "TRADITIONS" are in fact exactly what the Old Testament teaches? Very easy! How many people in the Church today have gullibly accepted that "Jewish TRADITIONS surrounding the Passover observance", for example, are a correct reflection of what God instructed Israel to do in the Old Testament? Quite a number have accepted this. The simplistic reasoning is always: well, it's THEIR book, written in THEIR language and therefore THEY ought to know best. And somehow the words of Jesus Christ in Mark 7:5-9, about knowingly rejecting the commandments of God in favour of human traditions, are forgotten.

In the small groups of people in Galatia which had some Jewish members, it was the most natural thing in the world for these Jews, now on their own and without a minister to guide them, to want to still be accepted by the local Jewish community. If even the Apostle Peter, after years as a top leader in the Church, had difficulty shaking off these Jewish "traditions" (in this case the tradition of avoiding social contact with non-Israelites), how much more pressure would new Jewish converts in the area of Galatia have had to hold fast to these traditions? And if the Jewish members accepted these Jewish customs, this would inevitably rub off on the new non-Jewish converts, who didn't know the Old Testament.

Perhaps this pressure to accept the Jewish customs and traditions even came from some Jews who had heard Paul's preaching, but who had not come into the Church!? They may have set themselves the goal to win back any of their relatives who had joined this new "Christian" religion.

In groups (i.e. small "churches") where there were no Jewish members, it was less likely for members of the Church to be drawn into Jewish traditions. For Jewish traditions to have an appeal, there has to be someone in the congregation who is agitating for the acceptance of these things. But such small groups would have faced no less pressure to seek the acceptance and the approval of the community in which they lived. A little bit of acceptance of the pagan customs (in which they had previously fully participated) would have gone a long way towards making life easier for them. That is the pressure they faced.

THE JEWS' RELIGION

The expression "the Jews' religion" is a translation of the one noun "ioudaismos". This noun is used only twice in the whole N.T., in Galatians 1:13,14. It is formed from the verb "ioudaizo", which means "to live as do the Jews". This verb is only used once in the N.T., in Galatians 2:14.

The expression "the traditions of (my) fathers" is also only used once in the N.T., in Galatians 1:14. This is the only place where the adjective "patrikos" (of fathers) is used in the N.T..

Now understand this: nowhere outside of the Book of Galatians do we find the verb "to live as do the Jews"; nowhere outside of Galatians do we find the noun "the Jews' religion"; and nowhere outside of Galatians do we find any reference to "the traditions of my fathers".

THAT IS THE MAIN ISSUE IN THIS LETTER!

The Jews' religion amounted to living according to the traditions of the fathers, which traditions amounted

to a rejection of the commandments of God! To compel non-Jewish church members "to live as do the Jews" amounted to forcing them to accept these Jewish traditions of the fathers. These traditions were actually "hypocrisy" according to Jesus Christ. And so Paul also uses the word "hypocrisy" to describe this form of conduct.

In Galatians 2:13 Paul mentioned that Barnabas also withdrew himself together with the other Jews ...

And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with THEIR DISSIMULATION. (Galatians 2:13)

The Greek word here translated as "dissimulation" is "hupokrisis" and it is more commonly translated as "hypocrisy". Observance of these traditions amounted to hypocrisy; that's what Paul is pointing out.

THE REAL ISSUE PAUL ADDRESSES IN GALATIANS

Let's go back to the explanation that Mr. Armstrong gave almost 25 years ago. The issue in Galatians is not about some intellectual understanding about the question of justification.

The question Paul addressed in this letter is this:

We have come into God's Church through repentance and faith IN the sacrifice of Christ. What is of concern now is NOT how we got here, but rather: HOW DOES GOD EXPECT US TO LIVE FROM HERE ON OUT?

This is what Mr. Armstrong explained very clearly. I mention Mr. Armstrong not to imply that his teaching of this point makes it so; the proof that this is correct is found in the Book of Galatians itself. Rather, I mention Mr. Armstrong because this understanding has been available for about 25 years!

The verb "dikaioo" is important to understand. It is used 40 times in the N.T. and usually translated as "to justify" (i.e. 37 times). But there is one passage where the translators could clearly see that "justify" is not the meaning intended and there they translated this word as "let him be RIGHTEOUS". This is in Revelation 22:11 ...

He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, LET HIM BE RIGHTEOUS STILL: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. (Revelation 22:11)

This Scripture shows, in addition to Thayer's Lexicon, that this verb not only refers to the past process of justification, but also to the lifestyle we follow beyond our initial repentance and conversion. And that is precisely what this verse has reference to ... HOW WE LIVE after we have come into God's truth.

Where this word is used in the Book of Galatians, it is almost always translated as "justified", though there are exceptions to this. Translating "dikaioo" as "justified" in this epistle amounts to reading preconceived ideas into this epistle.

In this letter the word "dikaioo" should really be translated as "MADE RIGHTEOUS", even as it is in Revelation 22:11.

And there are translators who recognized this! For example, Rotherham translates these verses in Galatians as follows:

“ Knowing, however, that a man is NOT DECLARED RIGHTEOUS by works of law, *nor at all* save through faith in Christ Jesus; even we, on Christ Jesus, believed, that we might be declared righteous—by faith in Christ, and not by works of law; because, by works of law, shall no flesh be declared righteous.” (Galatians 2:16 Rotherham)

"Now, if in seeking TO BE DECLARED RIGHTEOUS in Christ we, ourselves also, were found sinners, —is Christ, therefore, a minister, of sin? Far be it!" (Galatians 2:17 Rotherham)

“ And, the scripture, foreseeing, that, by faith, God would DECLARE THE NATIONS RIGHTEOUS, fore-announced the good news unto Abraham, saying, All the nations shall be blessed in thee.” (Galatians 3:8 Rotherham)

“Moreover, that, in law, no one, is DECLARED RIGHTEOUS with God, *is evident*, —because, The righteous one, by faith, shall live;” (Galatians 3:11 Rotherham)

"So that, the law, hath proved, our tutor, training us, for Christ, in order that, by faith, we MIGHT BE DECLARED RIGHTEOUS;” (Galatians 3:24 Rotherham)

“Ye have been set aside from Christ, ye who, by law, are TO BE DECLARED RIGHTEOUS, —out of his favour, ye have fallen;” (Galatians 5:4 Rotherham)

Young's Literal Translation of 1898 also translates these verses as "to be declared righteous", rather than as "justified". I have not been able to get hold of a Ferrar Fenton translation, but Mr. Armstrong stated that Ferrar Fenton also translated these verses as "declared righteous".

The point is that there are some translators who realized that this letter does not deal with how our past sins are to be removed, but rather with how God expects us to conduct our lives from here on out into the future.

The situation in Galatia was not a matter of some heretical teachers coming along, ferreting out the isolated Christians and wanting to desperately convince them to reject faith in the sacrifice of Christ. That scenario is absurd! How often have people ever come along and tried to do that to you? That's just not the way it goes. Even heretics at times love to talk about "faith". People weren't hiking all over the backwoods of Galatia to convince hard to find Christians that they should accept some different thoughts regarding salvation into their minds.

The situation was that people were cut off from the Apostle who had taught them; they were very isolated as far as any ministerial guidance is concerned; and their isolation compounded the pressure to go back into the ways of life they had come out of. The Jewish traditions of the fathers were more difficult to spot as wrong; after all, didn't all these traditions come out of the Old Testament? No, they didn't! But many people had no way of knowing this.

The pagan customs were easier to identify as wrong. But even then, they probably exerted a certain pull on some of the members of the Church. And you have to give it to the pagans: they often have a way of making their customs very appealing and desirable.

GALATIANS 2:16

This is probably the key verse in this book. In this verse the words "law" (nomos) and "justify" (dikaioo) are both mentioned for the first time in this book, and they are mentioned three times each.

The preceding verses set the stage. The Apostle Peter had come to Antioch and given in to the pressure to stay with the hypocritical traditions of the fathers ... he had withdrawn from all contact with the non-Jewish Christians. Peter was doing EXACTLY what Paul himself had done years before, when he was still involved "in the Jews' religion". This hypocritical conduct even swayed Barnabas to also side with those who adhered to these traditions.

Before we proceed further, we need to understand that there are TWO types of faith. You may have thought that there is only one, but there are actually two.

First, there is "faith IN Christ". This faith is NOT a gift of God! It is the faith we are required to have when we come to God in repentance and desire to have our guilty past blotted out. We are required to have the faith that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ will indeed blot out all our sins. We have no outward, physical evidence that this really takes place. God requires us to accept ON FAITH His Word in this regard. There is nothing supernatural about this kind of faith. We naturally have faith in very many things ... in bank notes, in an employer, in a pilot or a driver, in a doctor or a lawyer, etc.. This is our initial contribution to starting the process of our salvation. It is only "a contribution", but it is one that God insists on. This is not a godly faith, but a human faith. If we don't have this, then the process of salvation never gets started.

Second, there is "the faith OF Christ". This is a godly faith. This is not something that any human being can generate himself or in some way work up. This kind of faith is a gift of God. It is given to us in the form of the Holy Spirit, which God requires us to put to use in our lives. In so doing one of the fruits it will produce is godly faith. Even though we have a part in this, because the Holy Spirit is a totally undeserved free gift from God, therefore whatever is produced in our lives when we actually utilize this gift, is still a gift from God.

In analogy: if someone gives you a gift of \$1,000,000.00 and you use some of that money to buy a Cadillac, then in practical terms the Cadillac is a gift to you from that person. The fact that you took the money he gave you to a dealer and exchanged it for a fancy car does not detract from the gift-status of that car. You simply converted the gift given to you into another form.

It is this second category of faith that is required for salvation, the faith OF Jesus Christ. Understand that faith IN Christ is not sufficient for salvation; it is only sufficient to start the process of salvation. But it takes the faith OF Christ to continue and to complete the process.

These two types of faith Mr. Armstrong explained in Bricket Wood 25 years ago.

So now back to the context of Galatians 2:16. Paul has just explained that at one time in Antioch many Jewish Christians, including prominent people like Peter and Barnabas, had given in to the temptation to require adherence to the Jewish "traditions".

The context is dealing with people who ALREADY were true Christians. The question of how we come into a right relationship with God was NOT the issue! Peter and Barnabas and the other Jews involved were quite clear on this question. They had all come into the Church through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Paul knew this and did not question them in this regard. What the real issue with Peter and with Barnabas and the others at this time was, is this: NOW THAT WE ARE ALREADY A PART OF THE CHURCH OF GOD, how does God expect us to live on a daily basis? Now that we are true Christians, does God require us to live by the traditions of the fathers, which made up the Jews' religion? Those who withdrew themselves from the non-Jewish members in effect answered "Yes!" to this question. But Paul

said "No"!

So now Paul explains ...

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. (Galatians 2:16)

Let's break this verse down into relevant parts:

- 1) "Knowing that ..." -- this is something we understand.
 - 2) "a man is not justified by ..." -- this is NOT a reference to how our past sins were forgiven when we came into God's Church (i.e. the meaning of 'justified'); it really should read "a man is not made righteous by ...", in reference to the type of conduct God requires from us after we have come into the Church.
 - 3) "the works of the law ..." -- this is not in any way a reference to the ten commandments or to the law of God. There never were any "works" (as the word is used here) attached to the law of God. A lifestyle of obedience to God's laws produces "good works", but that is not what Paul is speaking about in this verse. The whole context is about Jewish Christians who were swayed to adhere to the ritualistic and ceremonial and traditional beliefs and customs of their people. And it is these "works" that Paul is referring to. With this statement Paul is negating the conduct of the other Jews, which he had just described ... adherence to traditional ceremonial customs.
 - 4) "but by the faith OF Jesus Christ ..." -- this expression refers to how God expects us to live, NOT how our past guilt is blotted out. It is speaking about the faith that is a gift of God, the faith that is required for salvation, the faith without which it is impossible to please God ...
- But without faith [it is] impossible to please [him]: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and [that] he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)
- 5) "even we ..." -- this is a limiting expression. Paul here makes clear that he is speaking about people who have already accepted the sacrifice of Christ for their past sins and who are already in the Church.
 - 6) "have believed (i.e. have faith) IN Jesus Christ ..." -- this identifies those Paul is speaking about as members of God's Church who have already, in the past, expressed faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This is the starting point of the process of salvation, the faith God expects us to have.
 - 7) "that we might be justified ..." -- this is clearly a reference to the future. But "justification" is something that refers to the past. So again, the correct translation here should read "that we might be made righteous". This is a reference to how God expects us to live the Christian life, how we are to conduct ourselves after repentance and conversion.
 - 8) "by the faith OF Christ ..." -- as we saw above, this refers to the faith that is a result of putting the Holy Spirit to use in our lives. It is the gift of God. This is the faith God expects us to exercise all our lives, till we die or are changed into spirit beings.
 - 9) "and not by the works of the law ..." -- this is again a reference to Peter's wrong conduct in adhering to Jewish customs and traditions. This has absolutely nothing to do with the results produced by living by

the holy, just and good commandments of God. This has nothing to do with the law of God that Paul loved and delighted in. Understand that this expression refers to how we are to live the Christian life ... and the ritualistic customs and traditions (even if some of them are found in the Old Testament, though many are not!) of the Jews' religion have no place in this. Those Christians in Galatia who were being drawn into the Jews' religion knew exactly what Paul was talking about.

10) "for by the works of the law ..." -- same comment as above. This is a reference to the more than 500 additional laws and customs, and the "works" that these additional laws enjoined on people. They were a burden and many were hypocritical. The reason the Jews lived by all these rules is because they thought this was how God EXPECTED people, who wanted to be righteous, to live.

11) "shall no flesh be justified" -- adherence to all these traditions and rituals and customs is not what makes us "righteous" before God. Rather than the observance of traditional customs, what produces righteousness is obedience from the heart to all of God's commandments (Psalm 119:172). Here again the verb should be translated as "shall no flesh be made righteous".

That concludes Galatians 2:16.

OTHER VERSES IN CHAPTER 2

Let's look at the next verse ...

But if, WHILE WE SEEK TO BE JUSTIFIED BY CHRIST, we ourselves also are found sinners, [is] therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. (Galatians 2:17)

Again this should be quite clear. Once we are a part of God's Church, we are no longer seeking "justification". That occurred when God accepted our repentance and blotted out our guilty past. What we are still seeking, after we have received God's Spirit, is "TO BE MADE RIGHTEOUS". The whole question is about how to live after baptism. It is through obedience to God's laws that we approach God.

Nobody is saying that we try to "EARN" salvation. Mr. Armstrong NEVER taught that, not even remotely! We have always taught that, no matter how faithfully we obey God, salvation is still a gift, because we have all sinned and still do sin. But at the same time God REQUIRES us to obey His laws. God's laws have not in any way been "done away" with. And such obedience is certainly pleasing to God. It is obviously understood that such obedience must be from the heart, in sincerity and in truth, motivated by a genuine desire to please God and to think the way He does.

THE PURPOSE of all this talk by so many people about "you can't earn salvation by obedience to God's laws" is to downplay the importance of obedience. Yes, the statement that we cannot "earn" salvation is correct ... but THE ATTITUDE behind that statement by so many people IS WRONG! It is the attitude of Romans 8:7.

In Galatians 2:20 Paul states his focus very clearly. Notice ...

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and THE LIFE WHICH I NOW LIVE IN THE FLESH I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

What is Paul talking about? Is it justification at the time of repentance and baptism? NO! Paul is talking about ... "the life which I NOW live in the flesh"! He is talking about the Christian life-experience. This is

also made clear in the next verse.

I do not frustrate the grace of God: for IF RIGHTEOUSNESS [COME] BY THE LAW, then Christ is dead in vain. (Galatians 2:21)

Again, Paul's whole subject is not justification, but righteousness. Paul's wording here ("if righteousness come by the law") obviously IMPLIES "by the WORKS of the law", something he had just stated three times in verse 16. The statement in this verse that righteousness does not come by the law is intended to be a rephrasing of the statement in verse 16 that we are not "made righteous" by the "WORKS of the law".

It is the life which we now live, as a part of God's Church, that Paul is expounding on in this letter. And it is in regard to the life they were NOW LIVING that the Christians in Galatia were being pressured to compromise.

WHICH "LAW" IS PAUL TALKING ABOUT IN GALATIANS?

We have already seen that the Greek word for "law" has a very wide application in the New Testament. By no means does the word automatically refer to "the law of God" or to "the ten commandments". The word literally refers to "anything established" or "anything received by usage" or "a custom", etc..

This means that the specific application of this word "law" is ALWAYS established by the context in which it is used, and not by any inherent meaning in the word itself. A careful examination of all of the 197 times this word is used in the New Testament substantiates this point. I will not belabour that here.

Next, the fact that Paul used this word 32 times in about 110 verses (i.e. from Gal. 2:16 - 6:13) should also tell us VERY CLEARLY that Paul is using this word "nomos" with DIFFERENT MEANINGS IN DIFFERENT PLACES! Given the scope that this word has throughout the rest of the New Testament, it is clearly ridiculous to try to limit all 32 occurrences in Galatians to one very specific and limited meaning. It would be even more ridiculous if we then went one step further and attempted to assign that same one specific meaning to all 197 occurrences in the New Testament.

Understand this very clearly: it is NOT that Paul assigned different meanings to the word "nomos". Rather, the word "nomos" already had different meanings before Paul ever wrote Galatians! Before Paul ever wrote Galatians, the word "nomos" already meant: the ten commandments, OR the whole Old Testament, OR the sacrificial and ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, OR the oral (and unbiblical!) laws of Judaism, i.e. "the Jews' religion", OR the secular laws of the Empire.

Therefore: when Paul wanted to refer to different groups of laws in this list, he always had to use the same word, "nomos". And that's what Paul did.

Recall again that Paul was writing in anger and indignation at the false teachers. Paul wrote in a way that he felt his readers would know EXACTLY what he was speaking about. They were "living" the situation that Paul addressed. They did not have to guess at what Paul was referring to.

So we need to understand that different references of the word "nomos" refer to different groups of "laws". It is precisely because his audience knew exactly what he was speaking about, that Paul did not bother to use further qualifying terms. He could have in places said "the law OF GOD", as he did in Romans; but he chose not to do this.

He did however, use one qualifying expression, which his readers understood very clearly. This identified

the specific group of laws Paul was speaking about in those specific contexts, though not necessarily in every other place.

"THE WORKS" OF THE LAW

In the New Testament this expression "the works of the law" is only used in Galatians and in Romans. Paul is the only writer in the New Testament who used this expression. That is something to take note of!

Why did Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, James, Peter and Jude never use this expression? There is a reason. The reason is that this is a technical term which has a very specific and limited meaning. It is Paul, with his pharisaical background in the Scriptures, who uses this expression. It is Paul, with his zealous background in "the Jews' religion" who uses this term. It is Paul, who was combatting the infiltration of pharisaical traditions and customs into the Church, who uses this term.

"The works of the law" are directly and specifically linked to the thinking of the Pharisees. They have to do with the observance of sacrifices and rituals and ceremonies. "The works of the law" have nothing at all to do with the ten commandments ... nothing at all! Further, the expression never featured during Christ's entire ministry.

The use of this expression "the works of the law" told Paul's readers that Paul was specifically talking about the sacrificial and ceremonial laws, AS WELL AS the over 500 laws contained in the traditions of the fathers! It is "THE WORKS" that were associated with the observance of the rituals, the sacrifices, the ceremonies and with the traditions of the fathers that are identified and specified by this expression.

Now THE REASON Paul uses this expression here in Galatians is because that was one of the specific problems the Galatian Christians experienced. They were being pressured to accept all of these "works" as being required of us by God. The Galatian readers of this letter knew precisely what Paul was talking about. They didn't for one moment think that Paul was talking about observance of the ten commandments.

Let's look at this expression in Greek. In Galatians this expression is used six times in four different verses in the space of 16 verses (from Gal. 2:16 - 3:10).

The wording in all six instances is identical. It is always:

"ex ergon nomou".

- "Ex" is the form of the preposition "ek" that is used before a vowel. This preposition "ek" takes the genitive case and means "OUT OF" or "OUT FROM".

- "Ergon" is the genitive plural and means "OF (PHYSICAL) WORKS".

- "Nomou" is the genitive singular and means "OF LAW".

We should note that the definite article is NOT used in any of these expressions. Now before someone tells you that when you translate the Greek into English, you should automatically add the definite article, here are the facts:

The genitive singular "nomou" is used 68 times in 59 different verses of the New Testament. In 31 of those occurrences it is WITH the definite article (i.e. "tou nomou"), and in the other 37 occurrences it is WITHOUT the definite article. [These statistics apply to the Received Text. The figures may vary slightly

for other textbases.]

This tells us: when the definite article is not supplied in the original text, we should not necessarily add it in the English translation.

Next, in five of the six occurrences in Galatians the translators provided the preposition "BY". These five places are Galatians 2:16 (3 times); 3:2; and 3:5. In one of the six cases they provided the preposition "OF" ... in Gal.3:10. Remember that in the Greek text this expression is always the same one in every respect. In Gal. 3:10 is it translated as "OF the works of the law"; in all the other places it is rendered as "BY the works of the law". The Greek expression literally means

"OUT OF physical works of law" or "OUT FROM physical works of law".

To convey the intended meaning in English we would have to add the word "doing". Thus to convey the meaning of "ex ergon nomou" we would say in English: "out of DOING works of law" or "out from DOING works of law".

As we saw, the expression is most commonly rendered as "BY works of law". In this context the word "BY" is used to mean: "THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF". In other words, "by works of law" is used to mean "through the medium of works of law". And that probably conveys the meaning reasonably accurately.

Here in Galatians, neither one of the two nouns has the definite article. Therefore these articles should also be omitted in English. Translators added them to lend additional force to their own interpretations of these verses.

Now we are ready to look at every occurrence of this expression in Galatians. We have already thoroughly examined Gal. 2:16. Let's now apply this additional understanding. Here is this verse:

Knowing that a man is not made righteous BY PHYSICAL WORKS OF LAW, but through (the) faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be made righteous by (the) faith of Christ, and not BY PHYSICAL WORKS OF LAW: for BY PHYSICAL WORKS OF LAW shall no flesh be made righteous. (Galatians 2:16, corrections included)

Here is the next verse with this expression:

This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit BY PHYSICAL WORKS OF LAW, or by the hearing of faith? (Galatians 3:2)

And the next occurrence:

He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, [doeth he it] BY PHYSICAL WORKS OF LAW, or by the hearing of faith? (Galatians 3:5)

And here is the last occurrence of this expression:

For as many as are OF PHYSICAL WORKS OF LAW are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed [is] every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to

do them. (Galatians 3:10)

As you look at all of these verses, keep these points in mind:

- A) Paul is not speaking about "justification", but about "the life which I now live", i.e. about right living.
- B) Paul is not speaking about "THE law", but only about "law". The Greek word is used for ALL categories of laws, but the context shows which category is intended, the ritual laws and the laws added by "the traditions of the fathers".
- C) The expression "physical works of law" has nothing to do with obedience to the ten commandments. It has to do with adhering to traditions.
- D) The expression "physical works of law" identifies exactly which laws Paul has in mind. This expression refers to all the laws that required physical works, starting with the sacrificial and ceremonial laws, and including the over 500 oral laws and customs, which made up "the traditions of the fathers".
- E) Of all of these, the "sacrificial laws" were only applied at the Temple in Jerusalem. They were not practised in other areas, such as in Galatia.
- F) This left the ceremonial or ritualistic laws and "the traditions of the fathers", both of which were observed by Jewish communities throughout the Roman Empire, as the groups of laws that had "physical works" associated with them. It is specifically to these two groups of laws that the expression "works of law" referred. This has been substantiated by recently published archaeological evidence.

Not surprisingly other writers of the first century don't use this expression "works of law". They were not involved in commenting on specific Jewish customs. However, the sect responsible for producing the Dead Sea Scrolls (very likely the Essenes) was characterized by religious zeal and fanaticism.

Recently a section of the Dead Sea Scrolls was released, which also contains this expression "works of law". This is reported by Martin Abegg in the Biblical Archaeological Review of November/December 1994. In this article Dead Sea Scroll researcher Martin Abegg writes:

"The works of the law that the Qumran text refers to are obviously typified by the 20 or so religious precepts (halakhot) detailed in the body of the text."

Here we have the writings of Jewish religious extremists, and they knew exactly what "works of law" means ... the strict observance of the oral traditions. This strict observance of oral traditions was also a part of Paul's pharisaical background (Gal. 1:13-14). It was something that Paul had "COME OUT OF"! And he saw Christians in Galatia being led back "INTO IT"!

Already 25 years ago Mr. Armstrong told us in Bricket Wood that this expression "the works of the law" refers to the observance of religious customs and traditions and ceremonial laws ... and now this is being substantiated by archaeological findings.

Once we are clear about this expression "works of law", then we are ready to examine the next problematic expression.

"THE CURSE OF THE LAW"

This expression is only found one single time in the New Testament, in Galatians 3:13. It has often been

taken out of context and misrepresented. Let's examine this more closely.

We have just looked at all six references to "works of law". Paul only used this expression in a short 16-verse section. In chapter 3 it is used in verses 2, 5 and 10. It is in this last reference (verse 10) that Paul introduces the thought of "A CURSE". Notice again ...

For as many as are of (the) works of (the) law are UNDER THE CURSE: FOR IT IS WRITTEN, Cursed [is] every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. (Galatians 3:10)

Keep clearly in mind that Paul is speaking NOT about obedience to God's laws, but about people who adhered to the religious "traditions of the fathers", the same traditions that Jesus Christ had denounced as amounting to a rejection of the law of God.

In this verse Paul says that those who live by these traditions of the fathers (which included the ceremonial laws of the O.T. but added many, many more unbiblical instructions as well) are under a curse. WHY does Paul say this?

His answer is: "for it is written ...". Paul's reason for this statement is an instruction in the Old Testament. He quotes from Deuteronomy 27:26, which says ...

Cursed [be] he that confirmeth not [all] the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen. (Deuteronomy 27:26)

So notice:

Does Paul say that those who keep the ten commandments are under a curse because they will never be able to keep them perfectly?

NO!

Paul is saying that those who live by the unbiblical customs based on the traditions of the fathers (which reject God's commandments!) are under a curse! Paul is not in any way referring to the ten commandments.

Certainly, those who base their lives on these ceremonial traditions are under a curse! What else can we expect? That is nothing out of the ordinary! This is speaking to precisely the same people whom Jesus Christ addressed with: "full well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition" (Mark 7:9). What is so unusual about saying that those who reject the commandment of God are under a curse?

I repeat: ALWAYS examine the writings of Paul on the foundation of what Jesus Christ, the Son of God, said and taught.

We need to also understand this: in Galatians 3:10 the Apostle Paul uses the word "law" to refer to two different sets of laws. He makes this very clear by the way he qualifies each use of this word "law". Let's look at the Greek text of this verse.

hosoi gar EX ERGON NOMOU eisin hupo kataran eisin gegraptai gar epikataratos pas hos ouk emmenei en pasin tois gegrammenois EN TO BIBLIO TOU NOMOU tou poiesai auta (Galatians 3:10, my emphasis)

In the first instance he refers to "WORKS of law" (no definite articles), to show he is speaking about the ceremonial and ritualistic laws which included the unbiblical traditions of the fathers.

In the second instance he uses the definite article twice and refers to "IN THE BOOK of the law" ("en to biblio tou nomou"). Here it is "THE LAW". The expression "THE BOOK OF ..." identified that this is a reference to a part of the Old Testament. Paul is quoting from Deuteronomy chapter 27.

It is the qualifying words that go with the word "law" which show exactly what Paul means. Put in very simple terms, Paul says in this verse:

"those who live by the laws of human traditions will end up being punished (i.e. "cursed") because in the Book of Deuteronomy (a part of "the Book of the law") God pronounced a penalty for disobedience to HIS laws."

Now let's look at the next verse:

But that no man is justified (made righteous) by the law in the sight of God, [it is] evident: for, The just shall live by faith. (Galatians 3:11)

Is Paul all of a sudden trying to say that "no man is made righteous by keeping the law of God"?

NO!

Don't be misled by a statement that is technically correct! Yes, it is correct to say that no man is justified by keeping even the very law of God. But that is not what Paul is talking about! Don't be misled!

The way to righteous living is through obedience to all of God's commandments (Psalm 119:172). Yes, righteousness is imputed to us by grace. We don't deserve it and we can never earn it. Our guilty past can be forgiven through the sacrifice of Christ. And even after our initial repentance and conversion, we all OBVIOUSLY AND REPEATEDLY fall short and need further forgiveness from God.

In the previous verse Paul had talked about the people who believed that the way of righteous living was through "works of law", i.e. through adherence to the human customs and traditions. In this verse Paul now says: "you should understand that no man is made righteous by these WORKS of law in the sight of God. God is not impressed by all these human traditions. I should know because I myself used to live that way in the past."

Those who are just "shall live by faith". Notice this statement. The focus is again on HOW TO LIVE FROM HERE ONWARDS! It is not talking about "justification" at all. The focus is on how to live: either by faith in obedience to all of God's commandments ... or by placing faith in the ritualistic observance of human traditions and their associated "works of law". This is the contrast Paul is making.

Let's now notice the Scripture Paul was quoting in verse 10.

Cursed [be] he that confirmeth not [all] the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall

say, Amen. (Deuteronomy 27:26)

This concluding statement in Deuteronomy 27 sums up the preceding section. In verse 14 the Levites were instructed to make certain pronouncements to the whole nation. From verse 15 onwards they were to pronounce a curse exactly 12 times (verses 15-26). These pronouncements were against those who BREAK the ten commandments and their amplification.

Briefly, verse 15 covered the first 3 commandments; verse 16 covered the 5th commandment; verses 17-18 covered the 8th commandment; verse 19 covered the 9th commandment; verses 20-23 covered the 7th commandment and verses 24-25 covered the 6th commandment. The curse in verse 26 summarized and covered everything else not specifically listed in the previous verses. This means that verse 26 covered the 4th and also the 10th commandment.

Now what exactly is meant here by "cursed"?

What is meant by this is that there is A PENALTY for breaking any of the laws of God! "To be cursed" simply meant that the person would be PUNISHED for disobedience. That's all it meant! And Paul understood this.

When Paul quoted this verse, he was saying:

"all of you who want to rely on your strict adherence to the rituals and traditions should understand that God says, that all those who do not continue to live by everything that is written in the book of THE law, in God's law and not in the laws of human traditions which you are observing, is going to be punished. Your physical works of law (observance of traditions, etc.) are not going to impress God, because those traditions actually lead you into conflict with the real laws of God. You are living by the wrong laws."

At the end of verse 11 Paul focused on how God wants us to live ... by faith in obedience to all of God's laws. Verse 12 starts with the word "and", linking it to the previous thought. Notice:

And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. (Galatians 3:12)

People easily misunderstand this statement. What is Paul talking about? He is discussing HOW God wants us to live. Now is Paul trying to diminish the law of God? NO!

This verse is not a statement about the law of God at all! When Paul wrote this, he still very much believed that the law of God is holy and just and good! Galatians 3:12 is not intended to take away from this view of the law of God.

Understand the context! About 17 verses earlier he had used the expression "works of law" THREE TIMES IN ONE SENTENCE! That is a lot of repetition. Then he used the expression again in chapter 3 in verses 2, 5 and 10. He is not going to keep on repeating it. He assumes that his readers will know that this is understood.

Understand also that the law of God is simply not under discussion. Paul is not making any statements about the law of God here; he is only making statements about those who LIVE BY "WORKS OF LAW".

In this verse Paul is not contradicting the clear statements found in other parts of the New Testament. For example, James wrote ...

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. (James 2:17)

There simply MUST be "works" when we talk about living by faith. Those works must be expressions of obedience to the laws of God and to God's commandments. John wrote ...

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. (1 John 2:3)

To really come to "know" God and His mind, it is absolutely vital that we keep the commandments of God. These are statements that Paul totally agreed with. We know his statements in Romans 7.

In Galatians 3:12 he is speaking specifically about people who meticulously sought to live by the customs, ceremonies and traditions of "the Jews' religion".

What Paul means in this verse is:

"THE WORKS OF the law are not of faith. They are mere rituals and ceremonies. If you are going to put your trust into living by all the ritual and ceremonial laws (plus the traditions), then you had better do it exactly and faithfully. But it won't give you what you are looking for ... release from the penalties you have already incurred (the next verse)."

So now let's look at this verse which talks about "the curse of the law".

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed [is] every one that hangeth on a tree: (Galatians 3:13)

Here is the Greek text for this verse:

Christos hemas exegorasen ek tes kataras tou nomou genomenos huper hemon katara gegraptai gar epikataratos pas ho kremamenos epi xulou (Galatians 3:13)

The Greek word for "curse" here is "katara". This is formed from the two words "kata" (down) + "ara" (curse). Paul had introduced the concept of "a curse" in verse 10, where he quoted Deut. 27:26. It is interesting that the Hebrew word for "cursed" in Deuteronomy 27 is very similar to the Greek word. The original Hebrew word is "arar". Greek "ara" and Hebrew "arar". It is just one more way of pointing back to Deuteronomy 27.

Christ has redeemed us away from or out from (Greek "ek") the curse of the law. Paul does not say or even imply that "the law" was a curse. Deuteronomy 27 itself also makes this very clear. The law was to be spoken by the Levites, and A CURSE was imposed for those who transgressed the law. The curse was the penalty for breaking each law. This penalty was attached to each of the laws the Levites were to announce. The curse would come upon those who broke these laws. The curse was an automatic penalty.

In practical terms, the curses that were spelled out in Deut. 27 for breaking these laws were all the same ... this was always the death penalty. No other lesser penalty is referred to in that chapter.

This is what Paul was explaining in Galatians 3:13. To paraphrase Paul's statement:

Christ has redeemed us from the death penalty (the curse that was the automatic consequence of

breaking these laws) by dying in our stead. He was crucified or "hanged on a tree". At this point Paul introduces another concept, which is found earlier in Deuteronomy. This concept is that anyone who is hanged is cursed of God (see Deuteronomy 21:23). In this regard Christ became a curse on our behalf, by the nature of the death He was willing to endure for us.

Put another way, the penalty for breaking God's laws is death by hanging. This penalty is referred to as "a curse". When someone suffered this penalty (i.e. was hanged), then that individual was "cursed". Since Christ took our death penalty upon Himself, therefore He became a curse for us.

That is what verse 13 tells us. But at no stage up to this point has the law of God itself been under discussion. The law of God is not the topic. Thus far Paul has not discussed what the law itself can or cannot do. And at no point in this epistle is Paul actually expounding on the subject of "justification". It is the life which we now live in the flesh that is Paul's subject.

THE ADDED LAW

Keep in mind what Paul is trying to do. His goal is to show that those who insisted on the rituals and ceremonies of the Old Testament, around which an elaborate system of traditions had been developed, were wrong. Therefore, if he could show that the sacrificial and ceremonial laws were no longer binding, then the entire superstructure of oral traditions and "laws", that was built upon the foundation of these ceremonial laws, would also collapse.

If you keep this picture in mind, then you can see where he is heading in this next section of his letter.

In Galatians 3:17 Paul tells us about the covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis chapter 17. This is also often misunderstood. What did that covenant require Abraham to do?

And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I [am] the Almighty God; WALK BEFORE ME, AND BE THOU PERFECT. (Genesis 17:1)

What was it God required of Abraham? Circumcision? NO!

What God required was for Abraham to "walk before God towards perfection". To "walk" refers to "living". The way towards perfection is through obedience to the law of God.

The translators have unfortunately created some confusion here. They have made a wrong division in the verses. The actual description of the covenant concludes with the first half of verse 10.

This [is] my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee ... (Genesis 17:10)

The second half of verse 10 really belongs with verse 11. Verse 11 starts with "and ...", linking it to the last half of verse 10. It should read ...

Every man child among you shall be circumcised. AND ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and IT SHALL BE A TOKEN OF THE COVENANT betwixt me and you. (Genesis 17:11)

Simply put: the covenant God made with Abraham required Abraham to "walk before God and strive towards perfection". As an outward sign of Abraham's commitment to do this, God added THE TOKEN

of circumcision to this covenant. The Jews have consistently misunderstood this, instead viewing circumcision itself as the covenant requirement. In doing this they can avoid focusing on the real conditions of this covenant ... obedience to all of God's laws.

Later God told Isaac that Abraham had indeed fulfilled his part of this covenant. He had walked the long road towards perfection, though never reaching the final destination. As God told Isaac:

Because that Abraham obeyed MY VOICE, and kept MY CHARGE, MY COMMANDMENTS, MY STATUTES, and MY LAWS. (Genesis 26:5)

Now consider: God's laws and commandments for mankind have always been the same. When Moses wrote this verse here, he knew EXACTLY what was meant by God's "COMMANDMENTS"; Moses also knew exactly what was meant by God's "LAWS".

So Abraham obeyed the law of God! He obeyed the ten commandments. Abraham, who walked and talked with God, knew on which day of the week God had rested. Abraham, who was looking forward to the New Jerusalem even beyond the millennial rule of Christ (see Hebrews 11:10), also understood that God had recreated the surface of this Earth and our present life-forms on it in 6 days and had then rested on the seventh day.

Abraham kept God's laws and God's commandments. Abraham also observed the Sabbath. Anyone who understands that God will create a super-city somewhere out in space and then bring it down to this Earth; anyone who understands that it is our potential destiny to live with God for all future eternity in that city, must obviously also understand the most basic and elementary knowledge about creation ... with 6 days of re-creation and 1 day of rest. Abraham is called "the Friend of God" (James 2:23) ... it is inconceivable that Abraham would not have had such elementary knowledge as the fact that God rested on the seventh day. Abraham measured time and had a calendar ... the years of his life are recorded for us. The seven-day cycle was at the heart of that calendar.

So we see that God gave "A PROMISE" to Abraham; but that promise was CONDITIONAL on obedience to God's laws and commandments. That is very clear! Genesis 26:5 starts with "BECAUSE ...". It was "because" Abraham obeyed God, that God blessed him.

Now back to the Book of Galatians.

Paul is going to show that the sacrificial and ceremonial laws were only imposed for a very limited time.

Let's notice Galatians 3:17 ...

And this I say, [that] the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, THE LAW, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. (Galatians 3:17)

What "law" is Paul talking about in this verse? The answer to this question becomes clearer when we look at verse 19 ...

Wherefore then [serveth] THE LAW? IT WAS ADDED BECAUSE OF TRANSGRESSIONS, TILL the seed should come to whom the promise was made; [and it was] ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. (Galatians 3:19)

What "law" does Paul have in mind here? It is a set of laws that was ADDED to something already in existence. WHY was it "added"? It was added because "SOMETHING" (?) had been "TRANSGRESSED". For HOW LONG was it "added"? It was added WITH A TIME-LIMIT! Specifically, it was added "till" Christ would come. HOW was this law given to Israel? It was ordained "BY ANGELS" and this was done through Moses as a mediator.

So what "law" is Paul talking about? What set of "laws" is the one that the people who believed in "works of law" were concerned about? Were the ten commandments an issue for these people with their traditions and rituals? Which laws were these people concerned about? Which laws were they insisting on?

It should be very easy to understand.

Abraham had already obeyed God's laws and God's commandments ... that is what God Himself told Isaac. The ten commandments were in existence before Abraham was born. Further, the ten commandments were not given "because of transgressions". Also, they were not "ordained by angels"; God in the person of Jesus Christ spoke these commandments Himself.

Let's start to put the pieces together: The "law" that is the subject of Galatians was "added" to God's law, which is summarized by the ten commandments. God's law existed before Abraham, and Abraham obeyed all of it. The giving of the ten commandments had nothing to do with "transgressions". The ten commandments were never given "with a time-limit".

In the Book of Jeremiah God gives us another clue. We read ...

For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning BURNT OFFERINGS OR SACRIFICES: (Jeremiah 7:22)

So when God brought Israel out of Egypt, "the burnt offerings or sacrifices" were not a part of what God had lined up for Israel. What God at that time had in mind for Israel is ...

But this thing commanded I them, saying, OBEY MY VOICE, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. (Jeremiah 7:23)

"Obey my voice" ... that's what Abraham did in the process of walking before God towards perfection. So God's initial intention for Israel involved exactly the same conditions that God had set before Abraham.

So, since the sacrificial laws were not what God had in mind for Israel when He brought them out of Egypt, it follows that these sacrificial laws must have been "ADDED" to the plan at some stage later. And that is correct. A careful study of the Old Testament shows that these sacrificial and ceremonial laws were added one year after the exodus from Egypt.

Next, we saw that what was "added" was only added for a limited period of time ... "till the Seed should come". In the Book of Hebrews Paul showed exactly what it was that was added for only a limited time. Notice ...

[Which stood] only in MEATS and DRINKS, and DIVERS WASHINGS, and CARNAL ORDINANCES, imposed [on them] UNTIL the time of reformation. (Hebrews 9:10)

This is speaking about the Tabernacle (later replaced by the Temple). The expression "until the time of reformation" refer to "until the time of Christ's first coming". In this verse Paul spells out four things that were "IMPOSED" (or added later!) with the specific intention that they would be phased out at Christ's first coming. The first two refer to the sacrificial system and the next two cover all of the ceremonial rituals. These four categories of things are:

- "meats", i.e. meat offerings, sacrifices;
- "drinks", i.e. drink offerings, offerings of oil and wine;
- "different washings", i.e. the ceremonial cleansing laws;
- "carnal ordinances", i.e. physical laws affecting the body, including circumcision.

Now consider the following points:

A) In Hebrews 9:10 Paul says these four categories of laws were "imposed" with a time limit, until Christ's ministry.

B) In Galatians 3:19 Paul speaks about a set of "laws" that was "added" only till Christ's ministry.

C) In Jeremiah 7:22-23 God tells us that these very laws were not a part of His original intentions for Israel.

D) These are precisely the laws which produced "works of law" and upon which the Jews had built up a whole system of traditions. This is what "the Jews' religion" was all about!

E) From Exodus 40:17 we know that the sacrificial laws and the ceremonial and ritualistic laws (i.e. the above four categories) did not come into force until about a year after the exodus from Egypt ... until a priesthood was established to administer all these laws.

It should be quite apparent by now that the laws that were added (Galatians 3:19) are the same laws that are referred to in Hebrews 9:10. There is no way around this.

Paul's whole point is this: these sacrificial and ceremonial laws were only given by God because of "transgressions" by Israel. But even then God only intended them to be in force for a limited period of time.

Now if the sacrificial and ceremonial laws are no longer in force after Christ's ministry, THEN the gigantic structure of traditions, which is nothing more than an elaborate system of ceremonies and rituals, is also automatically redundant. It simply would not make sense to do away with the rituals God gave at the time of Moses, while at the same time endorsing a whole set of NEW rituals which do not have any biblical basis.

If the sacrificial and ceremonial laws are no longer in force, then all of the "traditions of the fathers" are also without any validity. Therefore Paul does not have to prove the "traditions" null and void. He simply proves that the whole support structure for these traditions is null and void.

WHICH LAW WAS THE "SCHOOLMASTER"?

In Galatians 3:24 Paul wrote:

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster [to bring us] unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. (Galatians 3:24)

The word here translated as "schoolmaster" did not mean someone we today call "a teacher". The Greek word "paidagogos" is a composite word, made up of the words "pais" (a boy) and "ago (to lead). The position of "paidagogos" involved mainly training and providing discipline for the boy or the student, rather than teaching knowledge.

Now which "law" is Paul speaking about in this verse ... the one Abraham already obeyed, or the one that was "added" about a year after the exodus from Egypt? Is he speaking about God's spiritual law which is holy, or about the sacrificial and ceremonial laws which were added because of transgressions?

Clearly, Paul is still talking about the ceremonial and sacrificial laws that were added later. It is because of disobedience that Israel needed a set of laws "to discipline" them.

THE OBSERVING OF "TIMES"

As I mentioned earlier, the members of the Church were scattered through a large territory in the area of Galatia. While some of these small groups included converts from Judaism, there were very likely also some groups which did not include any Jewish Christians at all. For such Christians the temptation to embrace the ceremonial traditions of Judaism would not have been very great. But the pulls of pagan traditions, in which these Christians had participated until quite recently, would have been the main threat.

Applied to today's conditions: picture yourself as the only member of God's Church in an isolated small town somewhere in Canada. The nearest Church of God is over 500 miles away. There are no magazines or broadcasts or TV programs to keep you in touch with the Church. You last saw a minister two years ago. Most of your family is not a part of God's Church. As Christmas approaches, you are constantly invited to parties or functions connected with Christmas. There is pressure from your boss and your fellow-workers; there is pressure from your own parents or your in-laws to acknowledge and go along with their celebrations. There are special Christmas foods and special carol services.

As an isolated member of God's Church you could face a considerable amount of pressure. In many cases you depend on the favour and good-will of some of the people who want you to show some acceptance of Christmas.

Remember Naaman the leper who was healed by Elisha? After being healed he said to Elisha: "now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15). But Naaman was very prominent in society ... he was the chief of the army of the king of Syria. Even though he now realized his own king only worshipped dumb idols, yet Naaman knew in advance that he would have to show at least some compromise towards his own king. And so Naaman said:

IN THIS THING THE LORD PARDON THY SERVANT, [that] when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: WHEN I BOW DOWN MYSELF IN THE HOUSE OF RIMMON, the LORD pardon thy servant in this thing. (2 Kings 5:18)

Naaman figured that it would be hard to stand up for his own understanding. He knew in advance that it would be wrong to bow down in the temple of the idol, yet he felt he had to do it.

Church members face the kind of pressure Naaman anticipated all the time. The pressure a few new

members in parts of Galatia faced would have been very similar to what Naaman anticipated.

And so it seems that Paul felt some of the members in Galatia were being drawn back into the society they had come from. Their situation would have been fairly similar to many people who were baptized in the late 1930's as a result of Mr. Armstrong's preaching in their area. Once Mr. Armstrong left, there were no ministers to encourage them and they went back into the society they had come out of.

In Galatians chapter 4 Paul specifically addresses non-Jewish converts. He says in verse 8 ...

Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.
(Galatians 4:8)

This is addressed to non-Jews who had been involved in paganism. Notice the next verse:

But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, HOW TURN YE AGAIN TO THE WEAK AND BEGGARLY ELEMENTS, whereunto YE DESIRE AGAIN TO BE IN BONDAGE? (Galatians 4:9)

These people were turning back to something they had been involved with previously. Paul's use of the expression "weak and beggarly elements" is a reference to the pagan customs they had been involved with. This expression is not how Paul referred to the customs of Judaism.

Notice the next verse:

Ye observe DAYS, and MONTHS, and TIMES, and YEARS. (Galatians 4:10)

The pagan religions had numerous days set apart as being specially significant as days of worship or celebration. While the Jews also had specific "days" and "months", the one that identifies this list as referring to PAGAN observances is the listing of "TIMES".

The Old Testament makes clear that the observing of "times" was always a pagan custom, against which God warned His people. For example:

Ye shall not eat [any thing] with the blood: neither shall ye use enchantment, NOR OBSERVE TIMES. (Leviticus 19:26)

There shall not be found among you [any one] that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, [or] that useth divination, [OR] AN OBSERVER OF TIMES, or an enchanter, or a witch, (Deuteronomy 18:10)

THESE NATIONS, which thou shalt possess, HEARKENED UNTO OBSERVERS OF TIMES, and unto diviners: but as for thee, the LORD thy God hath not suffered thee so [to do].
(Deuteronomy 18:14)

In this section of chapter 4 Paul was concerned that some of the new Christians in the area of Galatia were being drawn back into pagan customs. Paul deals with this issue fairly quickly. This seems to indicate that it was the lesser of the two problems the new converts in Galatia were facing.

Let's now examine one more "difficult" expression in this Book of Galatians.

UNDER THE LAW

In five verses in this book we have the expression "UNDER the law". In all of these five cases the expression is the accusative case "hupo nomon", without the definite article.

"Hupo" is a common Greek preposition. In the New Testament it is used with either the genitive case or with the accusative case. When it is used with the genitive case, it is frequently translated as "OF", though it doesn't really refer to possession.

This preposition is used 230 times in the New Testament. Of these occurrences, it is translated in the KJV as:

- OF = 116x - UNDER = 48x - BY = 42x - WITH = 14x

Now when "hupo" is used with the accusative case in a metaphorical way, Thayer's Lexicon explains that it often refers to: "being subject to the power of a person or thing." With the accusative case "hupo" typically denotes moral or legal subjection.

And this is basically the way to understand this word when it is used together with "law". Let's look at the verses where this expression is used:

But before faith came, we were kept UNDER (THE) LAW, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. (Galatians 3:23)

Until we in faith accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we were "subject to the penalty which the breaking of God's law imposes". And we (i.e. the Jews) were until then under a moral and legal obligation to adhere to the ritualistic and ceremonial laws.

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made UNDER (THE) LAW, (Galatians 4:4)

For our sake Jesus Christ was subject to the penalty which the law demands when it is broken. Christ was born when those ritualistic laws were still very much in force and required.

To redeem them that were UNDER (THE) LAW, that we might receive the adoption of sons. (Galatians 4:5)

Without Christ's sacrifice the Jews would STILL be under those sacrificial and ceremonial laws. They could not have been abolished without Christ giving His life as a sacrifice. Christ redeemed us from the death penalty that we deserved for breaking God's laws. The removal of that penalty opened up the way for us to become begotten sons of God.

Tell me, ye that desire to be UNDER (THE) LAW, do ye not hear the law? (Galatians 4:21)

THIS IS A KEY VERSE!

What exactly were the people Paul was speaking to "desiring" as a part of their lives? Understanding this

clears up "which law" Paul is speaking about? These people were not desiring to be under the ten commandments, but under the traditional and ritualistic laws of Judaism.

Note that there is no definite article in the first phrase ("under law"), but there is the definite article in the second phrase ("do you not hear THE law"). Remember the main thing Paul was trying to do in this letter. He was fighting against those who were encouraging members of the Church to accept the sacrificial and ceremonial laws of the Old Testament as binding on God's Church, as well as all the traditional laws of Judaism.

In this instance Paul uses "under law" to refer to placing oneself "under" these sacrificial and ceremonial laws; i.e. accepting these laws as binding on us. With the second use of the word "law" Paul refers to the whole Old Testament (in this case specifically the Book of Genesis). That is why he refers to it as "THE law".

We should be able to see that Paul is using the word "law" in this verse to create a contrasting situation. He contrasts the ceremonial and traditional laws which they were insisting were binding with another part of the Word of God ("the law") which was equally binding; and which, when properly understood, indicates that the ceremonial laws would in due time be "cast out" (Gal. 4:30).

But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not UNDER (THE) LAW. (Galatians 5:18)

If we are led by God's Spirit, THEN the ceremonial laws and all the traditional laws of "the Jews' religion" (Galatians 1:13) are not in any way binding on us. They have no hold on us.

It is taken for granted that those who are led by God's Spirit have repented and have faith in Christ's sacrifice. That is true for all who are being "led" by God's Spirit. And if we have God's Spirit leading and guiding us, it means God has accepted our repentance and our guilt before Him has been blotted out. And traditions and rituals don't apply to us.

Well, that about covers the main areas with which people often have difficulties in this Book of Galatians. There are always more questions that can be addressed. But you should now have most of the tools to be able to do so on your own.

CONCLUSION

As you study this book, keep the following points in mind:

- 1) The main problem was that people were being drawn into the ceremonial and ritualistic aspects of the traditions of Judaism, out of which Paul himself had come.
- 2) The issue Paul addresses is not justification, but "the life which we NOW live". Take note of the verb "dikaioo", which means both, justified and made righteous.
- 3) The question was: for our ongoing continued Christian existence, does God expect us to be subject to all the ceremonial laws and all the oral traditions? Paul answers emphatically "NO!"
- 4) The Greek word for "law" has a very wide application. Take note of where the definite article is used and where it is omitted. Also take note of qualifying words and of the context to establish which set of laws Paul means in any given passage.
- 5) Keep in mind that Paul NEVER contradicts the clear words of Jesus Christ. Also, Paul never

contradicts himself! It is a lack of understanding to claim that Paul sometimes "repudiates" the law of God.

6) Understand WHY Paul tells the Galatians about his own personal experiences in "the Jews' religion" and his experiences with "the traditions of my fathers".

7) Understand the difference in the two types of faith: faith IN Jesus Christ and the faith OF Jesus Christ. Both are essential for the process of salvation.

8) Examine each so-called "difficult" verse in its own context. Always ask yourself: what is Paul trying to achieve with this statement?

9) Understand what is meant by "the works of the law". The Dead Sea Scrolls also illustrate the correct meaning.

10) Understand what is meant by "the curse of the law".

11) Understand that Abraham already obeyed God's laws and God's commandments. This point all by itself means that it is ridiculous to claim that the Old Covenant brought the ten commandments into existence. It is equally ridiculous to claim that, when the Old Covenant is done away, then the commandments Abraham already kept are also done away.

12) Understand exactly which set of laws was "added" and why this was done.

13) Understand what is meant by the law having been "our schoolmaster".

14) Understand that a secondary problem Paul briefly addresses is that some of the non-Jewish Christians in Galatia were being drawn back into keeping their previously-held pagan customs ... like observing "times".

15) Examine the expression "UNDER the law".

These points will hopefully assist you as you study this book. And, as a matter of interest, this explanation is also in agreement with the way Mr. Armstrong already explained this book 25 years ago.

Frank W. Nelte