13. The Letter to the Galatians

IN PAUL'S LETTER to the Galatians we find the apostle at his most difficult and exhilarating. In the face of opposition and rejection, he pushes the scandalous implications of the gospel to their limits, leaving Christianity its "charter of freedom." Here he moves beyond an apparently narrow parochial problem to the deepest questions concerning life before God. In the process, he allows his own and the community's personal religious experience to reshape their shared symbolic world in a radical way.

The interpretation of the letter is difficult not only because of the density of Paul's arguments but also because the circumstances to which he was responding are not entirely clear. We have only the information of the letter itself, and are reminded again just how helpful Acts is in other cases. Paul is writing to a group of churches (Gal. 1:2) whose members he can call Galatians (3:1). They could either be descendants of Celtic tribes who inhabited the territory of northern Asia Minor and whose major city was Ancyra, or people who lived in the southern part known as the Roman province of Galatia. The cities of Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, evangelized by Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:1-21), were in that province, though Luke does not identify it by its proper name. When he does speak of Galatia, he joins it with Phrygia. He has Paul make a short trip through this territory, without mentioning the foundation of any churches (Acts 16:6). Later, Paul swings through both territories again to visit churches there (Acts 18:23; cf. 20:4). Thus, Acts just does not provide enough information on this point. And it is doubtful we would be much helped even if we could decide where the addressees of Paul's letter lived, since the specific historical and cultural context would still be difficult to ascertain.

The dating of the letter is equally uncertain. Paul says the troubles there began "so quickly" (Gal. 1:6) and he recalls his first visit to them (4:13-14; cf. 1 Thess. 2:1-16); these might be indications of an early date. Some, however, place Galatians later because of its thematic resemblance to Romans. In the end, it could have been written any time during Paul's active career.

The tone of the letter is distinctive. Its rhetoric is emotional and polemical from its beginning, "Paul an apostle not from men but from God" (1:1), to its end, "Henceforth let no man bother me, for I bear on my body the marks of Christ" (6:17). Paul drops his characteristic thanksgiving section, and replaces it with "I am astonished! [*thaumazō*]" (1:6). Against those who are causing trouble he twice levels a curse

(*anathema*; 1:8, 9). He accuses the congregation of stupidity (3:1) and is anguished by its fickleness: "I am afraid I have labored over you in vain" (4:11); "You were running so well, who has hindered you from obeying the truth?" (5:7). He is openly hostile toward the troublemakers: "I wish those who upset you would castrate themselves" (5:12). Equally sharp is the opposition Paul establishes in this letter between slavery and freedom, between spirit and flesh, between law and faith, and between death and life. The theological vocabulary that in Romans is placed within the frame of a magisterial statement is here forged in combat and is all the sharper because of it. Yet this letter is by no means simply an outpouring of raw emotion. Its polemic is not random but carefully aimed, and the largest part of Galatians is a carefully constructed argument. Both the polemic and the thought of Galatians can best be appreciated when, within the limits of the text itself, we try to reconstruct the situation Paul addressed.

The Occasion and the Issues

In spite of a physical weakness, Paul had founded these churches: "You know that it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first; and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus" (4:13-14). The term "angel of God" may also be rendered "messenger from God" and shows us again how Paul appropriated the sort of self-designation Hellenistic philosophers also used (see Epictetus *Diss.* III.22.49, 63, 72). There may be implied in this term as well a contrast to other messengers (see 1:8; 3:19). When the Galatians received him "as Christ Jesus," they recognized an intimate, even mystical, identity between the Messiah and his emissary. Paul's mystical bonding with Jesus is distinctive in this letter (see 1:16; 2:20; 6:14, 17), though not unique to it (cf. 2 Cor. 5:16-21).

In order to grasp the problem and Paul's response, it is crucial to understand that the Galatians were converted directly from paganism (2:8, 14; 3:8, 14; 4:8-9; 6:13). They probably first heard of Torah through Paul's preaching; certainly they had not lived by it (3:2; 4:21; 5:4). When Paul preached a crucified Messiah to them (3:1) and they accepted this message as "good news" in faith, they received a palpable outpouring of the Holy Spirit, manifested in wondrous deeds (3:2-5). They had thereby come "to know God, or rather to be known by God" (4:9). Their "life in the Spirit" (5:25) had come about precisely through the preaching of the cross (3:1). The community, however, did not have a mature grasp of this identity "in Christ," and events in the churches since their conversion and his departure have made Paul anxious: "My little children, with whom I am again in travail, until Christ be formed in you! I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you" (4:19-20). What has happened to make these churches, which formerly would "pluck out their eyes" for Paul (4:15), now doubt both him and his message?

Paul is not at all certain who is responsible for their "turning to another gospel" (1:6). He asks them, "Who has bewitched you?" (3:1), and "Who hindered you from obeying the truth?" (5:7). He is certain that at stake is the "truth of the gospel" (2:5, 14; 4:16; 5:7). Since Paul is vague, and perhaps even ignorant, concerning the trouble-makers' identity, we have no definite knowledge of them either. The methodological problems of identifying the rivals in Corinth face us here as well. There are real people whom Paul opposes, but we do not know *their* understanding, only Paul's perception of it. Many suggestions about the opponents in Galatia have been made. Were they representatives of the "James party" from Jerusalem (2:12), or "Gnostics" (4:9)?

The problem is made more complex because the real difficulty seems to lie within the community. A stimulus may have come from the outside ("They make much of you," 4:17), but individuals within the church are promoting a different version of the gospel ("those being circumcised," 5:3). Although Paul is against those who "compel you to be circumcised" (6:12-13), he may himself not know whether they are insiders or outsiders. Consequently his energy is directed at those likely to be seduced, the "foolish Galatians" themselves. From ancient times, the deviance Paul struggles to correct has been called "Judaizing" (from "to live like a Jew," 2:14), a term appropriate not for Jews but for Gentiles who wish to imitate them. It indicates in broad terms the question agitating the young gentile communities: Did they need Torah as well as Christ?

The agitators have two interrelated complaints. First, like the rivals in Corinth, they question Paul's apostolic credentials. Paul is not one of the original apostles but is dependent on Jerusalem. He is inconsistent in his teaching and practice, trying to please people rather than God; indeed, he has even circumcised one of his closest delegates, Titus (2:3). But second, just as Paul's apostolic credentials are deficient, so is his "good news." He has preached only of God's work in the crucified Messiah. He therefore delivers to the Galatians an incomplete, inadequate form of Christianity. In order to be truly righteous—to be in a proper covenantal relationship with God—it is necessary as well to observe the commandments of Torah.

The Messiah is, after all (we can hear them say), a Jewish savior. Being "in the Messiah" therefore demands becoming part of the historic people, the "Israel of God" (6:16) as well. Circumcision is the ritual symbol for "taking on the yoke of Torah" (see 5:1), which initiates one into this people. Paul deceived the Galatians by foisting on them merely the ritual washing of baptism. Like commitment to Christ, it is a beginning, but more is required for full maturity. Obedience to the gospel without obedience to Torah's commandments is, according to Paul's opponents, a superficial and distorted version of Judaism. The ultimate norm for God's righteousness, and therefore for human righteousness, is now—as always—Torah. If they are circumcised, the Galatians signal their willingness to advance to this more mature position within the people of God (5:2). Such an argument would have made excellent sense to those who converted directly from paganism, for multiple initiations signaling stages of

introduction into a mystery were a standard feature of Greco-Roman religions (see Apuleius, *Golden Ass* XI), and even Philo can speak in terms of being initiated into the "holy mysteries" of Moses (*On the Cherubim* 42, 48–49).

This much of their argument seems clear. Some details are hard to pin down, because we do not know whether they or Paul injected them into the debate. Did they, for example, make a point of the angels' role in the giving of Torah, or did Paul (3:19)? Did they advocate obeisance to angelic forces, the "elements of the universe," or did Paul draw that polemical equation (4:3, 9)? Did they or he make the connection between the observance of "days and months and seasons and years" and the observance of Torah (4:10)?

In any case, the religious issues raised by this dispute over circumcision go far beyond proper ritual procedure. They touch on the adequacy of the experience of God in Jesus, and on whether Torah or "the law of Christ" is the ultimate norm for Christian existence. These questions lead in turn to the relationship between God and humans: Is it established by human effort or always by God's gift? Is God constrained by human ways of measuring his consistency, or must humans measure themselves by the ways God shows himself to be consistent?

Paul perceives such questions as implicit within the seemingly innocuous Gentile desire for "something more" than Christ. By their desire for more, the Gentiles will lose what they already have (5:2-4). Paul's defense of his apostolic office is intimately connected to his defense of the adequacy of his gospel; the "truth" of the Galatians' experience of God rests on both.

Much in Paul's response is difficult to understand, not only because we hear only one side of the conversation but also because the symbols presupposed by both parties, and their modes of argumentation, are sometimes obscure. But Paul's basic theological method is clear. He begins with his personal experience (1:1, 4, 11-12, 15; 2:11-20; 4:12; 6:14, 17) and the personal experience of the Galatian Christians (1:4; 3:1-5; 4:12-15; 5:24-25). Then, in the light of these mutually confirming experiences, he reinterprets the very Torah that is the point of disputation (3:6—4:31). In Paul's manner of presentation, therefore, the basic question is already answered: the experience of God in Jesus Messiah is the ultimate norm for life before God; even Torah itself must henceforth be understood in the light of this new experience of God.

Apostolic Apologia

Against insinuations that his apostleship is derived and dependent, Paul insists that it came about by a direct call (1:1) and election (1:15) from God, who, in a revelation of Jesus Messiah (1:12), turned Paul's life around. He was not then and is not now dependent on the leaders of the Jerusalem community. He did not confer with them after his call (1:16). His only meeting was a private one three years after the start of his ministry

(1:18-20). When he had a full meeting with the "pillars" of that church fourteen years later, he was recognized by them as their full equal. They agreed to divide the mission between him and Peter (2:9); Titus was not required to be circumcised (2:2-3); and their only request concerned a matter he had already begun in his collection: the care for the poor (2:10). All this took place despite the "false brethren" who had tried to "spy out our freedom" (2:4). Paul wants the Galatians to grasp this analogy to their present situation. He had not then submitted to the false brethren, "so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you" (2:5). So now, he wants them to resist any threat to their freedom.

The final evidence for both Paul's independence and the consistency of his preaching is his confrontation with Cephas. When even Paul's partner Barnabas (see 2:1) had capitulated to the pressure exerted by "certain men from James" (2:12) and stopped eating with Gentiles in Antioch, Paul opposed Cephas to his face (2:11), because Cephas, Barnabas, and all the Jews had not been "straightforward about the truth of the gospel" (2:14). Paul's consistency is also shown by the opposition he had to face in the past and continues to face: "If I were still pleasing men, I would not be a slave of Christ" (1:10). The sign of the servant is suffering and rejection: "But if I, brethren, still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted?" (5:11); "I bear on my body the marks of Jesus" (6:17).

Paul turns the charge of insincerity back on his opponents (2:13). Those upsetting the Galatians are like the "false brethren" who had bothered him in both Jerusalem and Antioch (2:4, 12). They are deceivers: "They make much of you, but for no good purpose; they want to shut you out, so that you may make much of them" (4:17). In a pointed statement, Paul suggests in 6:12-13 that their real motivation is not only to gain prestige but to avoid persecution from the Jews:

> It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that would compel you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For even those who receive circumcision do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh.

What stake did community members have in circumcision? According to Paul, it made them appear to be normal members of Israel rather than candidates for persecution and martyrdom, a persecution that was brought about precisely because the crucified Messiah was a stumbling block to those who saw Torah as the ultimate norm of righteousness (3:13)—a point illustrated by Paul's own past experience (1:13-14). While it may be difficult to contextualize these statements in the life of the Galatian church—since we know so little about their experience—it is clear that, in Paul's eyes, the choice of circumcision was both cowardly and a rejection of the experience of God through the preaching of the crucified Messiah (3:1). Paul himself utterly rejects that choice (6:14):

> But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

The Galatians outrage and puzzle (4:15) Paul all the more because of their willingness to deny their own experience, something he refuses to do. In their hearing of the gospel, they had already experienced the Holy Spirit powerfully (3:2-5). In their baptism, they had already been joined to the Messiah as children of God and heirs of the kingdom (3:26-27), calling God "Father" (4:6-7). To seek now another form of initiation is to denigrate the first. To seek righteousness by the norm of Torah means denying the righteousness they received from the faith of the Messiah. The Galatians resemble healthily breathing people who are told the only way to breathe is by means of an artificial respirator. No one can deny the efficiency of a respirator for those who cannot breathe for themselves. But if the Galatians are now breathing by the life of the Spirit, to choose a respirator is to choose slavery.

The Gospel in Outline

Paul's defense of the gospel is so dense and elliptical that it is helpful to review some of his presuppositions, such as we are able to pick out from his argument here as well as from the fuller exposition in Romans.

A person is established in a right relationship with God not by external observance of commandments but by a fundamental response of faith (2:16; 3:11). Such faith means a turning away from idolatry, a position that negates God's claim on human existence in exchange for the acceptance of lesser and more easily managed powers (4:8-9). God calls all human beings to this form of righteousness. In whatever circumstances God becomes manifest, the human being must respond. In Torah, Paul finds the primordial pattern of this dialogue: God promised a blessing to Abraham and his descendants, which elicited faith (3:8, 16-18), and that promise has come to fulfillment in Jesus (3:16b, 22, 26, 29).

But whose faith is now at work? There is great dispute over Paul's view here because of the ambiguity of his language, particularly in the cryptic expression *pistis christou*. The expression can be translated either "faith *in* Christ" or "faith *of* Christ" (i.e., Christ's own faith). What makes the case difficult is that Paul seems to mean both at different times. He can speak clearly about the Christians' "faith in Christ" (cf. Col. 1:4). This kind of faith is confessional: those who have faith in Christ acknowledge that God has manifested himself in Jesus the Messiah, and commit themselves to that revelation. But Paul also uses faith language with God as the object, as in "Abraham believed God" (3:6). The difficult question is whether he speaks of Jesus' responding in this way to God—whether he speaks of the "faith *of* Christ"—and if so, what the significance of that response is. In almost all contemporary translations and commen-

taries, there is a clear bias toward only one understanding, that of "faith *in* Christ." If this is correct, then Paul sets in juxtaposition two principles of salvation: that which seeks to win God's favor by observance of Torah, and that which responds to God by "faith in Christ."

I am convinced, however, that in this case the majority opinion is incorrect: Paul frequently uses the expression *pistis christou* to refer to the human response of the man Jesus to God: the "faith of the Messiah." This response of Jesus, furthermore, is part of the salvific act. What Paul means by it is the faithful *obedience* that Jesus showed to the Father in his life and death (see Phil. 2:6-11; Rom. 5:18-19). The "faith of Jesus" is Jesus' human response to God, which enables others to "have faith" and to "be made righteous by faith." In other words, God established the fundamental gift of righteousness through Jesus' obedience on the cross; humans appropriate that gift by trusting and obeying it the same way Jesus did.

That is the sense in which Paul speaks of faith in 2:20 (against the RSV): "I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." Throughout this letter, he emphasizes that in accordance with the will of God (1:4) Jesus is active in the bestowal of this gift of faith to humans. If this faith of Jesus establishes righteousness, those who accept the gospel accept such righteousness in obedience and trust, receiving as a result the Holy Spirit (3:2, 5; 4:6, 29; 5:5). In this, the promise to Abraham is fulfilled for both Jews and Gentiles (3:8, 28).

Since this Spirit is the very life and power of God, it brings freedom from death, slavery, flesh, and the law (4:1-7, 31; 5:1, 13). The source of life determines the shape of life. If persons live by the Spirit of God, then their existence is given its norm by the same Spirit. Both power and norm, the Spirit relativizes the ultimacy of Torah as the measure of life before God (5:16-18, 25; 6:8). Nor is the work of the Spirit random. It replicates in individual human lives the pattern of life for others that is found in Jesus. This pattern is "the law of the Messiah" (6:2; cf. 2:20; 4:6-7, 19; 5:24; 6:14). God's life has come to the Galatians entirely unmediated by Torah.

What, then, is the status of Torah? It is both *annulled* and *fulfilled* by the Messiah. It is annulled as an absolute norm for God's activity and human righteousness. If the only measure of righteousness is Torah, then Jesus cannot be the source of God's life. This is because Jesus is unrighteous according to that norm: He is a "sinner," one "cursed by God" because he "hangs on a tree" (Deut. 21:23). The cross is therefore pivotal, for Torah rejects a crucified messiah. But if the Galatians have come to know, or be known by, God through Jesus, something has to give: Torah can no longer be ultimate.

The necessary choice between Jesus and Torah as the *ultimate* norm for life shows why Paul calls the desire for circumcision apostasy from Christ (5:4) and an attempt to avoid persecution for the cross (6:12). When Paul declares that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (3:13), the corollary is that Torah's power is annulled. Jesus cannot be their righteousness and cursed by God at

the same time. But Paul goes further: those baptized into the Messiah have also "died to the law" (2:19) since their life comes from the spirit of the resurrected Jesus. Paul therefore can conclude: "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose" (2:21).

Because it was always more than law—being God's revelation and wisdom—Torah is also fulfilled in the Messiah. Paul cannot even speak of righteousness without using Torah's narratives and prophecies. Only in Romans does he more fully state Torah's function as witness to the Messiah (see Rom. 3:21), but even here, we see that the problem is less with Torah than with the claim that it is a source of life (Gal. 3:12). Torah as the definitive norm of God's work is superseded. God did something new in Jesus' death: he revealed righteousness outside the norm of Torah. This calls for a new response of faith, which shows that Torah as the bearer of promise is also fulfilled. Before Jesus, one could think of Torah as ultimate, as Paul himself did when he persecuted the church of God (1:13). But it never gave life (3:21). Paul cannot understand Jesus without the symbols of Torah; but neither can he rightly understand the symbols of Torah without Jesus.

Before the Messiah, Torah had two functions. It helped reveal the slavery to sin under which all humans labored before the heir came (3:19). It also functioned as a pedagogue, holding humans under the restraint of minimal moral observance until faith was revealed (3:23). But in the light of God's revelation in the cross and resurrection of Jesus, "circumcision means nothing, uncircumcision means nothing, but [there is] a new creation" (6:15).

The Argument of Gal. 2:15—4:31

Some observations can now be made on the stages of Paul's argument. Paul's use of midrash in the heart of this letter is technical and complex. His Pharisaic teachers would applaud his methods, although they would be appalled by his conclusions. His argument is not convincing unless one agrees with his starting point, the experience of God's life through Jesus.

The argument comes directly and without transition on the heels of his apologetic narration. He begins with a series of dialectical assertions much like those of 5:2-6, which recapitulate the argument. Paul insists on the opposition between the faith that comes through the Messiah and observance of the law as principles of righteousness (2:15-16). This does not mean, however, that the one who chooses faith is a sinner (2:17-18), because Paul and other Christians are mystically united to the Messiah and live through him (2:19-21). This is not yet explained, though we later learn that baptism is an initiation into the Messiah's life (3:27). At this stage, Paul stresses the connection between the present life of Christians, its origin in God, and its mediation through the cross of Jesus.

The appeal to experience (3:1-5) is critical to his argument—if the Galatians agree, then his argument is cogent; if they disagree, they deny their own experience. The experience is that they have been given life through the Holy Spirit, mediated through the preaching of the cross and received in faith. Thus, life did not come to them through observance of the law.

If the experience is granted, then Paul can begin to reinterpret Torah in the light of it. His first appeal to Scripture takes the form of a balanced series of propositions. He uses two statements about Abraham in Genesis: that all nations would be blessed in him (Gen. 12:3) and that his righteousness came by faith (Gen. 15:6). On this basis, Paul can conclude that all nations (that is, Gentiles) who have faith are also children of Abraham, sharing in his blessing (Gal. 3:6-9). The value of Torah as a witness is implicitly asserted here, but its meaning is only unlocked by the present experience mediated through the Spirit; in the narrative of the promise the Galatians find the beginning of their own story.

Paul's second appeal to Scripture (3:10-14) forms a well-constructed midrash on Torah. Paul uses the midrashic rule that when two texts of Scripture contradict each other, a third text can resolve them. Here, we see that the prophet Habakkuk says that life comes from the righteousness of faith (Hab. 2:4). But Leviticus 18:5 claims that life comes by observing the commands of law. Paul sharpens the contradiction by citing in favor of Leviticus the text of Deut. 27:26, which levies a curse (the opposite of life) on those who do not keep the commandments. But then he says that this curse was redeemed by Jesus. This happens in two stages. First, his death was one accursed—according to Deut. 21:23—since he was left hanging on a tree. Second, however, Jesus' crucifixion did not lead to a curse but to a blessing, did not end in death but led to life: Jesus above all *lives*! It follows, therefore, that in this conflict between texts, the one stands that says, "The righteous one will live by *his* faith" (Hab. 2:4), and it is fulfilled first in the faithful death and resurrection of Jesus Messiah. This is a midrash on Torah that operates out of explicitly Christian assumptions and experiences.

Paul's third appeal to Scripture (3:16-18) is a midrash on the promise to Abraham in Gen. 12:3-7. It is complicated and depends on the technique of reading a collective noun (*sperma*, "seed" or "offspring") as a singular, referring not to all of Abraham's descendants but to a single individual—the Messiah (see also 2 Sam. 7:14)—and then subsequently moving out to those who belong to him. Paul has thereby shown that the Messiah is the ratification of the essential covenant (*diathēkē*, also "will") between God and humans, thus sidestepping the Mosaic covenant as though it were only a digression in God's larger plan.

But was the Mosaic covenant simply a mistake? Only in its claims, not in its purposes. Torah was not eternal but only a temporary agreement; it was not given directly by God but only through the mediation of Moses, and angels; it did not, above all, lead to life (3:21). It could reveal transgression and teach morality, but it could not empower or transform. The law did not contradict, but neither did it fulfill the

promise (3:21-22). Only in the Messiah's faith is the promise fulfilled (3:22). And Christians are joined to the Messiah by the response of faith and by the ritual of baptism; they become thereby "one in Christ Jesus . . . heirs according to the promise" (3:28-29).

Paul now moves to the contrast between slavery and freedom. Both Jews and Gentiles were like slaves before the coming of the Messiah. As children under the guardianship of the law, the Jews were no better off than the pagans who were subject to cosmic forces (4:1-4, 8-9). Only the Son can give them both a "share in the inheritance" that is his by nature and that will enable them to enjoy the freedom of the children of God (4:6-7):

> And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his son into our hearts crying, Abba, Father! So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir.

The same contrast between slavery and freedom provides the perspective for Paul's fourth appeal to Scripture, addressed by way of a rebuke to those who "wish to be under the law" (4:21-31). In an allegorical interpretation worthy of his contemporary Philo Judaeus, Paul reads Genesis 16 and 21, together with Isaiah 54, out of the conviction that Christians as the "children of Abraham" enjoy the freedom of children, whereas the Jews are still enslaved. As Isaac was formerly persecuted by Ishmael, so are the present children of the free woman being persecuted by the Jews (4:29). In a very bold move, Paul says (4:30; cf. Gen. 21:10):

> But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave and her son; for the son of a slave shall not inherit with the son of the free woman."

Jews persecuted Christians because of the cross. But the cross brought the Christians life and freedom, making them children of the promise. They can therefore "cast out" those in their midst who advocate a flight from the cross to circumcision. In an intriguing series of reversals, Paul switches the position of Jews and Christians, thereby ousting from the Christian community those who would be as Jews.

In Gal. 5:2-6, Paul presents a summation of the argument. Those who seek circumcision deny their experience of God and turn away from Christ. Within the community of the Messiah, distinctions between Jew and Gentile are meaningless, "for in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love" (5:6).

One should not lose sight of the fact that in all of this Paul has been addressing gentile converts from paganism. That is to say, Paul's statements should be placed in this context: the specific arguments serve the purpose of keeping the Galatian gentile Christians from circumcising. These arguments should not be construed as Paul's declaration on Judaism as such.

Life According to the Spirit

The Spirit is both the power and the norm for life before God (5:25). Rejection of Torah as an ultimate norm for righteousness does not entail its rejection as a moral guide, much less an opening to antinomianism. Self-aggrandizement—"living according to the flesh"—is always part of the human predicament before God's rule is finally established (5:21). The impulse of the flesh, based on rivalry and competition, leads to boasting in one's own accomplishments and contempt of others. Such an attitude is not foreign to those wishing to impose Torah observance and circumcision as a measurement of righteousness: "If you bite and devour one another, take heed that you are not consumed by each other" (5:15). But those who are given the Spirit are called to conform their behavior to *its* impulses rather than to the impulses that arise from self-seeking.

Like the Corinthian elitists, the Judaizers must be reminded of the community context of their lives. The gift of God's Spirit enables them to live by the "law of the Messiah," which requires a life lived for others rather than oneself: "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ" (6:2). Although each person must answer to God individually (6:4-5), care and compassion are demanded collectively (6:1). Christians are to "do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (6:10).

The flesh leads to rivalry, dissension, and factionalism; it wages war against the Spirit (5:19-21). The Spirit's work, in contrast, is manifested in attitudes that promote the building up of community, beginning with love (*agapē*): "Against these, there is no law" (5:23). The Galatians, by God's gift, have been freed from the power of the flesh even as they continue to resist it (5:13). And they are enabled by the Spirit to have the disposition to overcome it: "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (5:24).

The full meaning of Torah, then, is found only in Jesus. Torah never ceases to provide a norm for Christian existence. But it does so only as interpreted through the pattern of Jesus' life for others: "Through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (5:13-14; cf. Lev. 19:18). Those who "walk by this norm" are the true "Israel of God," and upon them—by the gift of the Spirit—comes peace (6:16).

Study Questions

1. Why is the term "the Torah" better than "the Law" in a discussion of first-century Judaism?

2. What is the deeper significance of the battle over circumcision?

3. Who was advocating the conformity to the Mosaic regulations in Paul's churches?

4. What strategies does Paul use in Galatians to defend his role as apostle?

5. How is Paul's experience and that of the Galatians critical to Paul's argument?

Bibliographical Note

Valuable historical, cultural, social, and religious information on the region of Galatia—including a discussion of Paul's letter itself—can be found in S. Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor*, 2 vols. (New York: Clarendon Press, 1993).

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