



# bb-TBC-56 The Epistle to the Galatians

📅 Due Date	@May 26, 2022
Σ days to go	0
☰ Status	Headings Ready!! Scheduled
☰ Working Title	
↗ Project Home	
☰ Priority	
☰ Context	Bible Study Deliverable NLR Preaching
☑ DELIVERED	<input type="checkbox"/>
📅 Date Received	
☑ DONE!	<input type="checkbox"/>
Σ Day	Thu
☰ Notes	
📅 Last Contact	
☰ with...	
☰ Files sent to hosts	
☰ Property	

## bb-TBC-56 The Epistle to the Galatians

[Introduction](#)

[Calling the Witnesses](#)

[Paul](#)

[The Galatians churches](#)

[Abraham](#)

[Then, why the Law?](#)

Paul's Later Epistles

Philippians

Colossians

The Circumcision of Christ

Two Kinds of Old Covenant Circumcision

Summary

## Introduction

Last time... we followed the events that threatened the nature of the early New Covenant community; was this just another branch of Judaism or something quite different? If it was part of Judaism then entrance into Judaism must include circumcision but if not...

and I said that, God willing, next time when we met together on Biblebase's Broken Bread Bible studies we would remind ourselves of Paul's letter to the churches of Galatia. Let me try to keep my promise...

The account of Paul's confrontation with Peter is part of a letter that was written to a group of churches in the Roman province of Galatia.

(There is a whole series of Broken Bread studies on the letter to the Galatians on [biblebase.com](http://biblebase.com) and on [newliferadio.co.uk](http://newliferadio.co.uk) - so we will just remind ourselves of the issues that caused Paul to write this letter and his answer to the issue that was threatening to divide the new covenant people into two distinct groups.)

It was written before the Jerusalem Conference recorded in Acts 15 and so shows us Paul's thinking in greater detail. Paul has to make it plain to these churches that entrance into what we are calling the New Covenant community was not through the gate of Judaism.

Judaism had a great provenance stretching back to the time of Moses but Paul overleaps it and begins with Abraham himself. He makes some remarkable statements.

## Calling the Witnesses

In his letter to the churches of Galatia he brings his witnesses to the debate.

## Paul

The first witness is Paul himself and his experience. In spite of his adherence to the Law of Moses, in a way that outstripped his contemporaries, his own righteousness did not gain him entrance into this family. It was through a personal encounter with the risen Christ and complete reliance on his finished work of redemption.

## The Galatians churches

His second witness is the Galatian churches themselves. He asks by what route they came into the kingdom;

▼ Gal 3:2-3 (c48 AD or a little earlier)

This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Gal 3:2-3 NKJV.

It is important to note how Paul appeals to their own experience here. He marks the beginning of their experience as the time they received the Spirit; this was their beginning, in the Spirit.

## Abraham

And finally he calls Abraham to the witness stand... ie He shows that Abraham's favour with God was not the result of a faithful keeping of the Law. In fact, as he points out later, the Law came 430 years after Abraham's crisis of faith in God. It is clear then that Abraham could not have been right with God on the basis of keeping the Sinai Law.

Some of these thoughts are reproduced in his epistle to the Romans where he asks a telling question. He has shown in both letters that Abraham was 'justified by faith' and that 'God's righteousness was credited to Abraham's account as a result of Abraham's faith.

▼ Rom 4:9-10

Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or

uncircumcised?

Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. Rom 4:9-10 NKJV.

This is the knock-out blow. Abraham himself was uncircumcised when God declared him to be 'justified'. If Abraham had not been circumcised how could the Judaizers insist on circumcision as a necessary precondition to being 'saved' or 'right with God'?

Circumcision then was NOT a precondition to salvation but a consequence of true faith and acceptance with God.

▼ Rom 4:11

Abraham received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, Rom 4:11 NKJV.

But if those promises were given to Abraham and his 'seed' how can the Gentiles qualify? The promise was given to Abraham and his 'seed' and the word 'seed', as we see in Chapter 4, is singular pointing to one person. The one person, says Paul, is Christ himself who was 'the' descendant/seed of Abraham to whom the promise was made.

▼ Gal 3:13-14

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Gal 3:13-14 NKJV.

That is how the blessing will get to the Gentiles. The route is not Moses and the Sinai Covenant but is 'from' Abraham 'via' Christ and 'through' faith. The route to entrance into the New Covenant community completely bypasses Sinai and arrives safely at its destination - direct.

## Then, why the Law?

Let's revisit this key theme. If this is true what was the purpose of the Law? That's the obvious question but, as usual, Paul is ahead of his readers;

▼ Gal 3:19

What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; Gal 3:19 NKJV.

1. The purpose of the law was not to make the achieving of righteousness possible but was to identify the nature and degree of sin.
2. And it had always been a temporary expedient.
3. It had been 'added' and only 'until the Seed should come'.
4. It served, as we have seen earlier as a kind of personal policeman to escort the reluctant pupil into the presence of his tutor.
5. The Law fulfilled this role and once it has brought the Sinai Covenant child to Christ the Law is redundant.

The Law, says Paul, belongs to the childhood of God's people.

The Judaizers who said that a genuine beginning and genuine progress in faith could only come as a result of becoming full proselytes and submitting to circumcision were completely wrong. There is now no longer any need for a preliminary period of 'childhood', now both Jew and Gentile begin as full-grown sons, and the proof is that God's Spirit who has taken up residence in the heart has recognised its true family provoking our cry; Abba, Father.

Abba is the Aramaic word for 'father' and is followed by the Greek word for 'father.' Both Jew and Gentile instinctively lift their hearts to recognise their true spiritual genealogy. There is then, now, no longer, any distinction within the New Covenant community;

▼ Gal 3:26-29

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. **There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.** And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. Gal 3:26-29 NKJV.

▼ Romans 3:20–26

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus

Christ, to all and on all who believe. **For there is no difference**; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:20–26 NKJV)

▼ Romans 10:12

For **there is no distinction between Jew and Greek**, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. (Romans 10:12 NKJV)

The same Greek word being used in both places;

▼ **G1293 distinction**

**διαστολή** diastolē διαστολή (διά, στέλλω) diastolē (dia, stellō) **Noun** fem sing  
nom **order, distinction**  
see also 1 Cor 14:7

## Paul's Later Epistles

In some of his later epistles Paul takes up the idea of circumcision again.

### Philippians

7 or so years later, this issue is still a 'hot topic' throughout the churches.

In a striking contrast between the physical and the spiritual he redefines the covenant community in his epistle to the Philippians. Paul uses a play on words which is shocking even today;

▼ Phil 3:2-3 (c54 AD)

Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!

For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,(Philippians 3:2–3 NKJV)

Men and women of the day were used to distinguishing between 'the circumcised' meaning those who continued allegiance to the Sinai Covenant and the 'uncircumcised'

meaning those who had no such allegiance.

As we said last time, circumcision is the Greek word *peritomē* - cutting around. Mutilation is the Greek word *katatomē* which means a complete removal, an amputation.

The lines are clearly drawn now; there can be neither confusion nor compromise.

The true 'covenant community' are not those with a physical brand in their flesh, but those whose lives reveal plainly whose they are and who they serve. They are the true servants of God who serve in his temple. Their boast is in the achievements of Christ himself. They have no confidence in the flesh. This is the 'true' circumcision.

## Colossians

12 or so years later after the Jerusalem Conference, this issue is still a 'hot topic' throughout the churches.

"Three years after the Epistle to the Romans was written, Paul at last realized his ambitions of seeing Rome. He realized it in a way he could not have foreseen when he authored his Epistle to the Romans. He made his journey to Jerusalem but was then arrested and put under guard until he appealed to Caesar and eventually arrived in Rome and was kept under military guard in house-arrest in AD60. It seems he was allowed to receive visitors and carry on his apostolic mission. During this time he wrote the epistles to the Colossians and Philemon, and to the Ephesians." approx quote from FF Bruce

People, like me, who believe that the Bible is inspired, inerrant and infallible also believe in 'progressive revelation' ie the idea that subsequent revelation does not cancel earlier revelation but that revelation is not static but develops throughout the Bible. The promise of the Spirit included the promise that the Spirit would lead Christ's apostles into all truth. Peter endorsed Paul's apostolic role. We have been discovering the revelation of the 'mystery' that was given to Paul and this finds its expression in his later epistles.

The theme of the Christ and His Church come to the fore in the epistles to Colossae and to Ephesus, and the epistle to the Colossians contains a unique revelation...

▼ Col 2:11-13 (c60-61 AD)

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, *buried with Him in baptism*, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead Col 2:11-13 NKJV.

## The Circumcision of Christ

This is a surprising revelation where the ideas of our union with Christ in Baptism contains a new theme. But this is not a reference to the physical circumcision of Jesus of Nazereth but to the effects of the death of Christ on those who are 'buried with Him in baptism'.

### ▼ Romans 6:1–4 (c57 AD)

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that *as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death*, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

(Romans 6:1–4 NKJV)

We have considered this verse earlier. My own conviction is that this is NOT a reference to water baptism but to The Baptism into Christ himself, into his death, in the receiving of the Spirit. It is The Baptism in the Spirit that unites us with Christ in his death and resurrection. This Baptism is the grave of the Old man and the birth of the New Man.

It is OUR baptism into HIS Calvary Baptism.

It includes a unique revelation that OUR baptism in His baptism includes 'a circumcision not made with hands'. ie not effected by human agency of of a divine agency.

He is speaking of Christ's death as a circumcision and says all true believers share this brand-mark of people in personal relationship with God, 'circumcision made without hands'.

## Two Kinds of Old Covenant Circumcision

There are references to two kinds of circumcision in the Old Covenant Scriptures

1. Physical circumcision, as referenced in Exodus and Leviticus

▼ Exodus 12:44

but every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof. (Exodus 12:44 ASV)

▼ Exodus 12:48

And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to Jehovah, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: but no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. (Exodus 12:48 ASV)

2. Circumcision of the heart, as referenced, 40 years later in Deuteronomy

▼ Deuteronomy 10:16

Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked. (Deuteronomy 10:16 ASV)

▼ Deuteronomy 30:6

And Jehovah thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live. (Deuteronomy 30:6 ASV)

3. The Colossians reference has more of the 'circumcision of the heart' in mind but incorporates it into the rich patterns of the New Covenant.

- a. This is another way of expressing the results of the receiving of OR Baptism in the Spirit.
- b. This ties the language of the Baptism in the Spirit into the themes of an inward change that is manifested in an outward expression.
- c. The Baptism of the Spirit is not just 'the imparting of power to witness' but is the consistent theme of heart cleansing and newness of life.

▼ Acts 1:8

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8 NKJV)

Not and you shall witness ... but you shall be witnesses

You are my witnesses says Jehovah

You will be my witness says the risen Jesus

## Summary

In this session we followed the events that threatened the whole nature of the early New Covenant community; was it just another branch of Judaism or something quite different? If it was part of Judaism that entrance into Judaism must include circumcision but if not...

...and we traced Paul's confrontation with Peter and its follow-up in Jerusalem and in Peter's letters. We saw how Paul redefined circumcision in his letter to the Philippians as 'no confidence in the flesh', and claimed that it is the New Covenant people and not the Old Covenant people who fulfil the requirements to be regarded as God's people.

Bailey, Ron. The Better Covenant (pp. 202-206). Kindle Edition.