

# The Crystallization

## Rescued from Religion to Become Christ's Bride

Galatians begins with Christ, referring to Jesus Christ as the One through whom Paul was made an apostle and from whom flow grace and peace, and concludes with Christ, referring to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. The primacy of Christ Himself over justification in Galatians is indicated by the fact that in this Epistle the words *justify* and *justified* are mentioned a mere seven times, whereas *Christ* is mentioned thirty-six times. By the principle that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, it is clear that Paul's primary burden in writing Galatians was not to simply convince his audience of the truth concerning justification by faith rather than by works but to usher them into the full revelation and experience of the untraceably rich Christ as the abounding grace, who replaces the law.

The central thought of Galatians should be understood in light of Paul's realization of Christ's primacy over everything, even justification by faith, in God's economy. Even justification is but one of the rich aspects of the experience of Christ in Galatians: Christ is the sphere of justification—we are justified in Christ—and Christ is the means of justification—we are justified through faith in Jesus Christ and out of faith in Christ. Moreover, in this Epistle Paul unveils that justification serves an organic end—that is, it is for the impartation of Christ as life into the believers. By declaring that the righteous one, a believer justified by God, shall have life, Paul implies that justification is not the goal but the procedure that qualifies the believers to receive the life-giving Spirit, the unique blessing in the New Testament.

Under this lens it is clear that the principal antithesis presented in Galatians is not that between justification by faith and justification by works but that between Christ, the center of God's New Testament economy, and the law, the basis of God's Old Testament economy. Furthermore, the Christ whom Galatians presents as the replacement of the law is not only the objective Savior but also the subjective Savior—not only the Savior on the cross but also the Savior who indwells us in resurrection. Objectively, as a man in the flesh, Christ became a curse on our behalf and redeemed us out

of the curse of the law through His vicarious death for our sins that we may be justified by God; subjectively, in our experience, Christ as the Spirit is revealed in us, lives in us, and is formed in us to fulfill the righteous requirement of the law and to make us the righteousness of God in Christ. As the indwelling Spirit, He enables us to live a life that is justified, approved, by God for the constitution of the church as God's corporate new creation, the one new man.

In harmony with this emphasis on Christ as the Spirit replacing the Old Testament law, Galatians consistently places Christ as the Spirit in opposition to the Jewish religion with its observance of the law, which depends on the flesh. Indeed, the contrast between flesh and Spirit, which is prevalent in the latter half of the Epistle, is the experiential mirror of that between the law and Christ in the first half. This Epistle was written against the dark background of the Galatian believers' desertion of the grace of Christ for the antiquated and fleshly observance of the law taught by the Judaizers. The Galatians had been called in the grace of Christ through the apostle Paul's ministry to receive the gospel of Christ and the Spirit of God's Son, but they had fallen under the pernicious influence of the Judaizers, who perverted the gospel of Christ and distracted the Galatians from the enjoyment of Christ as grace to the adherence to Judaism with its law and traditions.

After contrasting Christ as the crucified Redeemer with Judaism as the present evil age, Paul sets up a further contrast between Christ as God's Son and Judaism as man's religion. In Galatians 1:13-14 Paul recounts his former life: "You have heard of my manner of life formerly in Judaism, that I persecuted the church of God excessively and ravaged it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many contemporaries in my race, being more abundantly a zealot for the traditions of my fathers." Paul, as Saul of Tarsus, had been trained at the feet of Gamaliel, according to the strictness of the law, being zealous for God. He had not only acquired a great deal of knowledge of the law but had also attained a high degree of righteousness in his living, because of which

he attested that he had become blameless with respect to the standard of righteousness in the law. However, when he was shown mercy by the Lord and received His grace, Saul experienced a vanquishing conversion from the law to Christ—from God’s Old Testament economy to His New Testament economy. This glorious transfer took place not by man’s persuasion but by God’s own revelation of His Son in Saul: “But when it pleased God, who set me apart from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me that I might announce Him as the gospel among the Gentiles, immediately I did not confer with flesh and blood” (Gal. 1:15-16). What pleases God is to reveal not the law but Christ His beloved Son, His unique delight. The Son of God pleases God because the Son as the second of the Trinity is the embodiment and expression of God the Father and is realized as the life-giving Spirit. As the effulgence of God’s glory and the impress of His substance (Heb. 1:2-3), the Son declares the invisible God, bearing the image of God and manifesting God. God so loved the Son that, before the foundation of the world, God, according to the good pleasure of His will, predestinated us unto sonship, for us to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers. In other words, God’s good pleasure is to reproduce His beloved Son in many human beings in order to make Him the firstborn Son and to make them His many brothers as the many sons of God for an enlarged embodiment and expression of Himself in the Son. Truly, God’s good pleasure is uniquely focused on His Son and not the law.

The Greek word for *religion*, θρησκεία—having the sense of ceremonial service and worship to God—appears in four New Testament verses and is used by both Paul and James. Paul, in his defense to King Agrippa in Acts 26:5, uses this term to describe how he lived as a Pharisee: “According to the strictest sect of our religion.” Here Paul was using this word in a general sense to make the case that prior to his conversion to Christ, he was a zealous worshipper of God. Paul uses the same word negatively in Colossians 2:18, in reference to the worship of angels. James uses this term positively to refer to “pure and undefiled religion” (James 1:27). However, James prefaces this in verse 26 by noting the risk that one’s religion can be vain if he “thinks himself to be religious” but “does not bridle his tongue.” Thus, for James, religion has both an inward, attitudinal aspect and an outward, observable component of practical perfection.

In James’s letter to the twelve tribes in the dispersion the title *Christ* is used only twice, without elaboration.

James refers to the Holy Spirit at most only once, and then in a negative context. Furthermore, what James does not mention is perhaps as significant as what he chooses to present in support of his thesis and burden. Surprisingly, James makes no mention of the cross of Christ and only once of the divine life—“the crown of life” (1:12). These can be considered lacks in this Epistle. By way of contrast, John in his writings refers to the divine life (*zoe*) over forty times.

Logically speaking, James should have known the Lord most intimately. According to the flesh, he was one of the half-brothers of Jesus; he surely observed and saw Jesus in His secret, daily human living and should have had some impression of the Lord’s uniqueness. Instead, James and the Lord’s other half-brothers did not believe in the Lord during His earthly ministry; it was not until after the resurrection, when Christ specifically appeared to James, that he believed. It seems that even as a Christian believer, James was unable to fully cast off the influence of his Judaic religious background.

In contrast, both Paul and John exemplify an enthusiastic lover, seeker, follower, and pursuer of Christ. Paul is a notable positive and encouraging pattern to us. When the Lord appeared to him, Saul was temporarily blinded, as a sign that his religion was preventing him from seeing and knowing the Lord Jesus. However, the obscuring religious scales on Saul’s eyes fell off, and he became a positive pursuer of Christ. Even while in prison in Rome at an advanced age, Paul verbalizes this as his continuing aspiration: “To know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Phil. 3:10). Paul then describes his active cooperation to experience more of Christ: “I pursue, if even I may lay hold. . . I pursue toward the goal for the prize to which God in Christ Jesus has called me upward” (vv. 12, 14). We should imitate Paul’s indefatigable Christ-pursuing attitude, particularly emphasizing knowing Him not according to the flesh but according to His invisible presence as the Spirit: “Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him so no longer” (2 Cor. 5:16).

In *Christ versus Religion*, Witness Lee describes “five steps toward a new religion.” In the book of Revelation we can see many things concerning Christ versus religion. In this book we have religion, but this religion differs from the religion in the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles. In all these books the religion was the old religion, the Jewish religion. But here in the last book of the New Testament, religion takes on a new garb. It is no more the Jewish religion but the Christian

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religion, the religion of Christianity. Thus, in the book of Revelation Christ is different, and religion also is different.

In the seven epistles of chapters 2 and 3, we get a clear view of the new religion, Christianity. The Christian religion has become a real religion, and it has become so by steps. Here in these seven epistles we see five steps toward this new religion. Only two churches among these seven, Smyrna and Philadelphia, have nothing to do with religion. There are five churches with five steps, which together form the new religion of Christianity.

**T**he first step toward this new religion of Christianity is an abundance of work for Christ without an intimate and personal love to Him. We may labor diligently and accomplish much for the Lord without an intimate and personal love for the Lord Himself. We must work, we must labor for the Lord, but we must be careful that our work is balanced with intimate and personal love for our dear Lord. Our love for Him must be more precious and dearer than the work we do for Him. We need an intimate and personal love for the Lord Jesus, and this love must be the first love, the best love. We must never lose sight of our Lord Jesus as our lovely, precious, and present Bridegroom. To serve Him is secondary; to love Him is primary.

The second step is composed of two main items: the teaching of Balaam and the teaching of the Nicolaitans. What is the teaching of Balaam? Balaam was a prophet who worked for money. Thus, his preaching, his teaching, just became a job. Why? It was due to the excess of labor and work. When the church has an overabundance of labor and work, people surely will be hired to perform it. If any of us ever conceive of hiring someone in the church to accomplish some tasks, we are taking the second step in forming a new religion. Whenever we talk about money, we are well on our way. We care not for the abundance of money or the lack of money. We serve for the love of Jesus—not with dollars but with drops of blood. If we serve with a consideration of money, we can never do the work of love. If we go out without money but prepared to shed our blood for the love of Jesus, we will raise up a church with the first and best love, a church which could never afford anything to form a religion.

Third, in Thyatira we see a woman called Jezebel, a woman who has gathered many teachings and calls herself a prophetess. It was she who brought so many pagan teachings and practices into the church and mixed them with the teachings concerning Christ. The result then was idol worship and fornication. Idol worship is an insult to the person of God,


fornication is a damage to humanity, and division is a mutilation of the Body of Christ.

Sardis was a partial recovery from Thyatira. But according to the word of the Lord, it was only a short time after Sardis appeared that she became a kind of dead religion. What was wrong with Sardis? There was not much wrong; the only problem was that she was dead. The Lord said to her, “You have a name that you are living, and yet you are dead,” and “Establish the things...which were about to die” (3:1-2). Everything we teach, everything we minister, everything we stand for, must be full of life; otherwise, we are perpetuating the history of Sardis. What is the religion of Sardis? It is to hold something so right, so fundamental, and so scriptural, yet without life.

Philadelphia is an improvement upon Sardis, but Laodicea is a degradation from Philadelphia. What is the problem with Laodicea? It is that Laodicea has everything; they are indeed rich yet, in the same principle as Sardis, just in doctrine. They thought that they had everything, they thought that they had need of nothing, but the Lord Jesus said that they were neither cold nor hot. There is a danger in the church life that we too may one day become lukewarm, neither cold nor hot. We may say that we are rich, but we will be rich in doctrine, not in experience.

The Lord promised that if we are on the alert to avoid all kinds of religion, we will be kept continually in the enjoyment of the Lord, we will be given to eat of Him as the tree of life and as the hidden manna, and we will dine with Him and He with us.

**I**n the seven epistles of these two chapters of Revelation, we see that something of religion has been mixed with something of the Lord. Throughout the centuries up to this present time, the Lord has been doing a separating work to divide all that is of Him from anything religious. All the religious things will be gathered together and consummated to the full in the great Babylon of chapters 17 and 18. Babylon the Great is the consummate development of religion. It is the place to which all the steps toward religion in these epistles lead.

The consummate development of all the Lord’s separating work throughout the centuries is the bride, the New Jerusalem. The Lord’s separating work for His bride today is in the local church. The local church is the ultimate part of this separating work to prepare the bride. (Extracts from *Christ versus Religion*, ch. 12, Living Stream Ministry, 1971) 

by the Editors