



Born to Win

Christian Origins #63 - Ephesians & Galatians

by Ronald L. Dart

Forty years ago there were *over 400* different Christian denominations and sects. They could actually be cataloged and described. Someone did that; there was a book published with all of them in there, and what they believed and what they did. Now? Well, there are probably over 4000, and I'm sure no one really cares enough to catalog them all any longer. It's easy to understand why, generations ago, a lot of churchmen were opposed to publishing the Bible in the English language. Some people assumed, of course, it was because they were afraid someone would find them out; but I don't think so. I think they may have feared some *hard questions* out of the Bible, but what they were *really* afraid of was what has come to pass. If you want to find a new niche in Christianity where no one has gone before, you're going to have a hard job. If you want to start a new sect, a new cult, and nobody can already hang a name on you that says, "Oh no, this is what you're believing", I don't know if you can find it any longer. Every imaginable interpretation of the Bible has spawned every imaginable sect and cult. I'm probably overstating it, because I'm sure somewhere, somehow, someone will find something new.

Don't get me wrong; I'm all in favor of people reading the Bible in their own language. I just realize that that has consequences. It's in the nature of man to divide, and you know I'm not altogether sure that's bad. I remember years ago...I lived in England, I taught at college there, and when I would walk to work in the morning I would walk past lovely gardens with a couple of large lakes there, and we had on one of those lakes a pair of swans—beautiful creatures, lovely. One day I noticed that that they had a couple of little swans with them. This was a new thing, and I was excited by this. I thought, "Hey, this is terrific! We're gonna have *four* swans now on our little lake system here instead of two." Well, I was wrong; because as the younger swans matured, the older male began to bristle, began to intimidate them, began to drive them away. Finally, one of them was driven away completely and disappeared. The other one, while *trying* to leave, hit a power line, broke his wing, and he was forevermore isolated to a corner of those little lakes down there; because he could never go near the other swans, because the old guy wouldn't let him come close. I asked the gardener about this, and he said, "Oh no", in his inimitable Welsh accent, "that's the way God made them"—that they're designed in that way to keep from filling up this lake with swans and over-eating it, over-grazing it. It's his way of spreading them all over the landscape. And I thought about it a while, and I thought, "I guess it makes sense. It moves them on out."

So it's in the nature of creatures, as it were, to establish territories, drive other creatures out of their territories. And then I learned that something like that also exists in the nature of man. At the age of two, then again in the early teen years, it's almost as if a switch was flipped in the mind and children have to begin asserting their independence. They've got to decide, "Well, I am not my parents. I'm somebody different. I'm *apart* from them." And they want to have a separate existence. And so they move away from their parents. Both these periods—at age 2 and age (what shall we say?) 13—are dangerous in their own way, and they require some pretty careful managing on the part of parents.

Now, in the same way, there is something in man that leads him to want to move beyond the canned, corporate worship of the church and find his own personal relationship with God. This, too, is not all bad. We're probably made that way. But this, too, is dangerous. There are *a lot* of ways we can mess up our lives, and God is not amused by some of the shenanigans of *some* religious people.

When Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesian church in the early 60s, things hadn't developed that far. There was *one singular point* of division that persisted in the early church, and it clouds Paul's letters and leads a lot of people to wrong conclusions about what Paul was driving at. The one singular division in the New Testament church was the division between Jew and Gentile, but even in saying it that way I'm giving you an oversimplification.

From the very earliest times, there was an element in the church (which was, by the way, at the earliest time exclusively composed of Jewish people)...there was an element in that church that wanted nothing to do with Gentiles. They wouldn't eat with them. They wouldn't enter their homes. They wouldn't allow the Gentiles into their homes. They would not socialize with Gentiles *in any way*. There's a revealing passage in Galatians that tells you a little bit about how it worked and about how it was still at that late date (that late date probably some *20 years* after the ascension of Christ)...this is what was happening. In Galatians, chapter 2 and verse 1, Paul says:

Galatians 2

AKJV

¹ Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also.

² And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, [...]

What had happened is: some people had shown up in Antioch and had come up with the idea that, unless you circumcise these people and have them keeping all the law, they can't be saved. Well, Paul didn't buy that at all; but he went up to Jerusalem and said, "I've got to communicate the gospel; I'm preaching among the Gentiles." He says:

Galatians 2

AKJV

² [...I did it] privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.

³ But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised:

⁴ And that because of false brothers unawares brought in, who came in privately to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage [*Bondage?*]:

⁵ To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour [*Why?*]; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

What was at stake was whether or not there *could even be* Gentiles in the church. Paul was not very impressed by this. He says:

Galatians 2

AKJV

⁶ But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatever they were, it makes no matter to me: God accepts no man's person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me:

⁷ But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision [*that is, to the Gentiles*] was committed to me, as the gospel of the circumcision [*that is, the Jews*] was to Peter; [...]

"When they saw all of this"...

Galatians 2

AKJV

⁹ [...] they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go to the heathen, and they to the circumcision.

¹⁰ Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward [*anxious*] to do.

But then after all this had been sorted out and settled, something strange happened. (We're in Galatians 2, verse 11.)

Galatians 2

AKJV

¹¹ But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.

¹² For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: [...]

Now, get the picture: They're in Antioch. Peter is there. Things are normal. Everything is *fine*. Peter is socializing routinely with Gentiles—eating at table with them, sharing feasts with them. There is no problem. Then a group come up from James from Jerusalem...

Galatians 2

AKJV

¹² [...] but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself [*Note those words.*], fearing them which were of the circumcision.

You know, it's a little hard to figure Peter (what we *know* about Peter) being a guy who was easily intimidated, but he was. And then he said:

Galatians 2

AKJV

¹³ And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; so that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.

¹⁴ But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, If you, being a Jew, live after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews [...]

What's he talking about? He's talking about the entire structure of Jewish culture, which included the oral law and the traditions of the fathers—pretty complicated way of worshiping God that they had developed over the years. Now Paul says, "Why are you doing this?"

Galatians 2

AKJV

¹⁴ [...] If you, being a Jew, live after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compel you the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?

Then he said something very fascinating. He said:

Galatians 2

AKJV

¹⁵ We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,

I think there's a little sarcasm in Paul here.

Galatians 2

AKJV

¹⁶ Knowing that a man [...]

Not just some kinds of men, but “a man”.

Galatians 2

AKJV

¹⁶ Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, [...]

Now, this is pretty important to understand: that throughout the church all those people who were Jews *already knew* that it was not works of law which justified them, it was *the faith of Christ*.

Galatians 2

AKJV

¹⁶ [...] 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.

I don't know how clear you've got to be. There's something really important here, though, that is all but overlooked by most Christian teachers—at least, most Christian students don't get it: There was not a different means of salvation in the Old Testament from the New Testament. I think some Bible students think that in the Old Testament men were justified by works of the law, but in the New Testament we're justified by the grace of Christ. *Wrong*. Paul says it as plain as it can be said:

Galatians 2

AKJV

¹⁶ [...] by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

That was true before Christ, and it's just as true today. Now here's another thing that does not seem to be widely known: There is not *a word* in the law of Moses that creates a barrier between Jew and Gentile—rather, the contrary. There's not a word back there that says a Jew can't eat with a Gentile. There's not a word back there that says the Jews have to separate themselves from Gentiles—that Peter had to get up and walk across the room, and sit down with Jews, and not eat with Gentiles anymore. There is not a word in the Old Testament that says that.

So what does the Old Testament say about the relationship between the Jew and the Gentile? Actually, you can look this up for yourself. If you're using a King James Bible, you can look up the word “stranger” [*ger*, גֵר, Strong's H1616]. If you're using NIV, I think you can look up the word “alien”. (They treat it slightly differently.) But what does it say? Well, here's one passage—Leviticus 19 and verse 33:

Leviticus 19

AKJV

³³ And if a stranger sojourn with you in your land, you shall not vex him.

³⁴ But the stranger that dwells with you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

Now where in the world would you get out of that...when the Bible tells you to that, tells the Israelite, tells the Jew, “You shall love him (that is, the stranger) as yourself; because, after all boys, *you* were strangers in the land of Egypt. And you know how it feels, don’t you? You of *all people* should treat the stranger kindly.” Does that mean then that you freeze him out? Don’t allow him into society? Don’t eat with him? Don’t have anything to do with him? Give me a break. Leviticus 24, verse 22:

Leviticus 24

AKJV

²² You shall have one manner of law, as well for the stranger, as for one of your own country: for I am the LORD your God.

I mean, we’re not going to have two sets of laws—two ways of living, two ways of salvation, two ways of anything—one for the Jew and one for the Gentile. God is the God of *all* people, and he treats all people the same, and he has no respect of persons with these people [**Romans 2:11**]. Now, it’s possible...I mean, there is *one* passage in the Bible that does say that for a given service a stranger could not eat of it. It’s the Passover. However, if you look at Exodus 12 and verse 43:

Exodus 12

AKJV

⁴³ And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof:

So there you are. However, in verse 48 it says:

Exodus 12

AKJV

⁴⁸ And when a stranger shall sojourn with you, and will keep the passover to the LORD, 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: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof.

As far as I know, this is the *only* requirement for an ordinance of God where the stranger had to be circumcised. There’s not a hint of it elsewhere. Elsewhere, he has *full rights* under the Israelite constitution. Leviticus 25, verse 35:

Leviticus 25

AKJV

³⁵ And if your brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with you; then you shall relieve him: yes, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with you.

Now, listen to that. Do you realize what that just said? It’s talking about the stranger: that you are to *relieve* him if he lives among you and has fallen into decay, but it also says that *he is your brother*. “If your brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with you; then you shall relieve him: yes, though he be a stranger.” Well, you remember that old story: “He ain’t heavy, he’s my brother.” Well, according to the *Old Testament*, the stranger, the Gentile who lived among them, was their brother; and if he had waxed poor and fallen into decay, they were to *relieve him*. And I’ll bet most of you listening today never knew this either—Numbers 15, and verse 14:

Numbers 15

AKJV

¹⁴ And if a stranger sojourn with you, [...]

“Sojourn” simply means to live temporarily among you.

Numbers 15

AKJV

¹⁴ [...] or whoever be among you in your generations, and will offer an offering made by fire, of a sweet smell to the LORD; [...]

Now, wait a minute; do you mean that in the Old Testament that it was permissible for a *stranger*—for a *Gentile*—to offer a burnt offering in a temple of God? Listen:

Numbers 15

KJ2000

¹⁴ And if a stranger sojourns with you, or whosoever is among you in your generations, and will offer an offering made by fire, of a sweet aroma unto the LORD; as you do, so he shall do.

¹⁵ One ordinance shall be both for you of the congregation, and also for the stranger that sojourns with you, an ordinance forever in your generations: as you are, so shall the stranger be before the LORD.

Heh. A Gentile could offer a burnt offering to God. God’s at a lot of pains back here to make it *clear* that he may be worshiped by Israelite and Gentile, *side by side*. Then there’s Deuteronomy 10, verse 17:

Deuteronomy 10

AKJV

¹⁷ For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regards not persons, nor takes reward:

He doesn’t care whether you’re a Jew or a Gentile.

Deuteronomy 10

AKJV

¹⁸ He does execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loves the stranger, in giving him food and raiment.

So if God loves the stranger, then we ought to love him too.

Deuteronomy 10

AKJV

¹⁹ Love you therefore the stranger: for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Are you with me? Then where did this idea come from that Jews could not eat with Gentiles? It didn’t come from the written law of Moses. It didn’t come from the Old Testament. It came from the oral law, the traditions of Pharisaic Judaism. You may not know this, but the very word “Pharisee” [*Perushim*] in Hebrew *implies* “separation”; that’s what it means. There was, and still is, a pernicious idea that there was one method of salvation for Jews—the law—and another method of salvation for the Gentiles—grace. I’m sorry, *that is not true*. Paul *buried* that idea in his letter to the Galatians. Hear it again:

Galatians 2

AKJV

¹⁶ Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, [...]

“A man”, Jew or Gentile.

Galatians 2

AKJV

¹⁶ [...] 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.

Got it? No flesh ever has been or ever will be justified before God by the works of the law. Now, this idea didn't die easily. It came up again, and Paul had to bury it again, in his letter to the Ephesians: in chapter 2, verse 8—one that might be very familiar to you. It's a charming way of putting it, and the King James translators have done a marvelous job with it. It reads like this.

Ephesians 2

AKJV

⁸ For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Salvation...it comes from faith. It doesn't have to do with what we do. It is an absolute gift of God; and there's not a boast, not a thing we can be proud of, nothing we can pat ourselves on the back for, nothing that we can show that we are different from other people with—nothing at all.

Ephesians 2

AKJV

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.

So what did Paul say? He said, “lest any man should boast.” You know, that *utterly precludes* a different salvation for the Jews.

Put yourself in the position of a Gentile Christian—new to the faith, really learning about Christ for the first time—and you become a part of the Christian church. But in this church there's a two-tier structure; that there are Jewish Christians and then there are non-Jewish Christians, and it's almost as though you're treated with a little bit, well, like a second-class Christian by some of those who consider themselves *first-class* Christians. That kind of nasty little attitude can exist...well, it probably exists in some small ways in your own church even today, but it was tough back then. And here comes this letter from Paul—Ephesians 2, verse 11:

Ephesians 2

KJ2000

¹¹ Therefore remember, that you being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands;

¹² That at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

“That's where you folks were in time past. Yeah, that's true.”

Ephesians 2

AKJV

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who sometimes were far off are made near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For he is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

Now, you should realize that these expressions—“far off”, “made near”—“far off” and “near” are terms that were used in the Hebrew language for Jew and Gentile. The Gentiles are the people who are “away”; the Jews are the people who are “near” or “nigh”. “You who are sometimes far off are made near, not by physical circumcision, but by the blood of Christ; for he is our peace who has made both Jew and Gentile one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition between us.”

The “middle wall” or partition is described by Josephus (who presumably saw it) as...

[...] the balustrade or the railing that separated the court of the Gentiles from the temple proper.

The Expositor's Bible Commentary

Something that the law of God *did not* require. Remember? Jew and Gentile, side by side in the temple, making offering the *same* way according to the *same* law. “As you do”, God said, “so shall he do.” Now, there was an inscription on this wall, this balustrade, that read this—in the temple, in Christ’s time:

No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.

The Soreg Inscription

This law is *purely* a tradition of men—a *dogma* of the Jews. Paul goes on to say the middle wall of partition is *out of the way*...

Ephesians 2

AKJV

¹⁵ Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of two one new man, so making peace;

¹⁶ And that he might reconcile both [*that's both Jew and Gentile*] to God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity [*between Jew and Gentile*] thereby:

Now, do you have any idea how “slaying” the Ten Commandments—abolishing the Ten Commandments—would in any way, shape, or form resolve the differences between Jew and Gentile? Hardly. It has nothing to do with that; but the law of commandments contained in *dogmas* (which is what that word is in Greek)—that is, the commandments of men, the Jewish oral law, that law that put the *barrier* up in the temple and forbade Gentiles from even *approaching* God. *That* law was abolished, and that’s *precisely* what Paul is talking about: the ordinances (dogmas [δόγμασιν, Strong's G1378] in Greek) that have nothing to do with the Ten Commandments, but are solely the dogmas of sectarian Judaism. Christ abolished those dogmas. He...

Ephesians 2

AKJV

¹⁷ [...] came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were near.

To the Gentiles *and* to the Jews.

Ephesians 2

KJ2000

¹⁸ For through him we both [*Jew and Gentile*] have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

¹⁹ Now therefore you are no more strangers and sojourners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

²⁰ And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone;

²¹ In whom all the building fitly framed together grows unto a holy temple in the Lord: [...]

Right along with the Jews—Jews and Gentiles, no difference before God.

Ephesians 2

KJ2000

²¹ [...] for a habitation of God through the Spirit.

Jesus didn't abolish the Ten Commandments; but rather he nullified the Jewish laws that created *enmity* between Jew and Gentiles, so that they could be *built together*.

Now, you may not realize it, but I have just given you the key to understanding, really, the entirety of the epistles of Paul, and the reason why so many people don't understand what Paul is driving at. When you come to those points where you think Paul is arguing against the law, or talking about the law being abolished, or being done away with, understand this: It makes no sense to *do away* with the commandment that says, "Thou shalt do no murder." It makes no sense at all to do away with the commandment that says, "Thou shalt not steal." But it *does* make sense to annul or abolish those commandments and doctrines of *men* that drive wedges between men and keep those men from one another and keep them from God. That little lesson will make all the difference in the reading of Paul.

It's funny, isn't it, how we find our unity in gathering ourselves together and separating ourselves from other people. It's funny, and it's wrong; especially in the view of Paul's words, where he said it's God's purpose to bring...

Ephesians 1

AKJV

¹⁰ [...] together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth[....]

Thanks for listening and, until next time, I'm Ronald Dart, reminding you that you were *born to win*.

Transcript of a *Born to Win*
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