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*“Cast out the law as a criterion for the
 right relationship with God.”*

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The following serves to introduce section 2 of Paul’s letter, the doctrinal section, chapter 2:15-4:31.

GALATIANS 2:15-21

It is time now to dive clean into the deep water of Paul’s doctrinal presentation. It should and will exhilarate, the way a high dive exhilarates the one who takes a deep breath, brings all his misgivings under control, and with a gasp or a giggle, jumps. “That’s easy for you to say,” someone responds. “I have neither training in, nor much fondness for, the kind of half-trance scholarship of the robed and hooded theological practitioners one sees on the front piece of Luther’s, *Treatise On Christian Liberty* or C.F.W. Walther’s, *Law and Gospel*. My mind and my interests run to more practical considerations.” Good enough and good news, too, for you. The practical implications of Paul’s doctrine and theological formulas are about as timely as the latest edition of the New York Times. It might also be suggested, however, that most of us, and that includes the lay students working through this series, are better practitioners of theology and more apt pupils of doctrine than we might suppose.

The church, perhaps particularly the Lutheran Church, has a long history of lay aptness in doctrine and theology. It stems in part from its strong emphasis upon teaching as an appropriate activity of the kingdom of God on earth. The church teaches, as it should. Leviticus 10:11 declares “You are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the Lord has spoken,” and Matthew 28:20 offers familiar words of counsel, “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” The church is the school where one learns the Word and the will of the Lord.

A further reason Lutheran laity is so theologically and doctrinally sophisticated is to be found in the historic style, quite beleaguered in our

day, which has the church teaching broad concepts and relying on its membership to draw practical conclusions and apply what is learned to daily living. The last years have developed a strong stress on activism, and churches are under some pressure nowadays to embrace certain points of view which have political implications. And more and more it is happening. This produces a vague discomfort among some because it represents a departure from historic style. Nonetheless, we shall all be confronted more and more with the necessity to develop some comfort level with the activism of our day, even in the church.

One ready assist to bring comfort to the Christian who finds his face to the winds of change is to have his feet firmly planted on that strong base which solid doctrine provides. If ever there was a time when doctrinal literacy proves an asset before the challenges of day-to-day life in our world, that time is now. And if ever there was a doctrinal review which was pertinent to the issues of the moment, it is the review which Paul offers in Galatians 2:15-4:31.

A quick glance at the morning newspaper will reveal a "rock" singer's philosophy that independence is the ultimate goal of life. Paul's theological treatise here sheds startling light on the concept of independence. Fifteen minutes in front of the television set at 6:00 p.m. will present a variety of demonstrations in defense of human rights. "Rights!" Don't get Paul started. He's ever ready and eager to defend the unique contribution which Christian doctrine has to make to that highly current issue.

The point is, Christian doctrine is not too far removed from the realities of life, and the doctrinal section of Paul's letter to the Galatians is not a dark and somber monastery cell where one can hide in the dust and dryness of impractical "scholarly" pursuit. Scholarship, yes, but for a very practical purpose. Your life, present, future,

eternal, is drastically affected by the doctrinal grasp you can acquire at the great apostle's feet.

So tie all the other considerations and concerns in your life to your belt, take a deep breath, steady your knees and let go. Plunge into deep water now; on the other side, you will not be the same.

GALATIANS 2:15-16

Read chapter 2, verse 17. About the third time through, you begin to get the picture. The Judaizers had come to town late one night and immediately began to plant some doubts in the minds of the Galatian Christians. They said, "Paul has insisted that you are saved by faith in Jesus, the resurrected Son of God. Pure and simple. Period. What we very much fear, those of us who come from the seat of the Christian religion, is that this focus upon salvation by faith alone will open the floodgates to sin and will actually promote a permissiveness which will contribute to the escalation of wrong doing." They feared Paul's insistence on the Christian emphasis of Christ as the way, the exclusive way, "for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12), would become an encouragement to sin freely. You might then have to dub Jesus "the minister of sin."

That is the doctrinal charge, the theological question, to which Paul addresses himself in the doctrinal section of his epistle: If Christians need only the free gift of God and not the law (what to do, what not to do, works) won't they abound in sin? Paul has seven things to say about that and if the postman hadn't been waiting, you get the feeling he might have had seventy. The seven, however, like the seven churches in Revelation and the seven words of Christ on the cross, are a perfect unity and make a point.

Verses 15-16 of chapter 2 are the first part of seven parts to answer the question. We may well

declare the upshot right here; it's the conclusion, the doctrinal point of the epistle: *cast out* (get rid of) *the law* (works) *as a criterion for the right relationship with God*. That certainly blows the Judaizers' suggestion right out of the water — to insinuate a little regulating law into the process and compliment grace with a few good works. No compromise from Paul's side.

Non-Jews (religiously speaking) were considered shameless sinners. "Gentiles" in 2:15 is accurately rendered "Gentile dogs"; Matthew 15:27, "Yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table," uses the metaphor in reference to non-Jews. There was a moment in time, Paul points out, when some of us were comfortable with the conviction that, even though we had been practitioners of the Old Testament, law-oriented, work-enamored religion, faith alone was the way to be right with God. We had discovered a new way (v.16), a better way, the right way. We turned to the religion, the Gospel of grace. "A person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ." We bought that. You bought that. Big. Full bolt. We know and you know that "by works of the law no one will be justified."

Here is the strong reminder that the call to circumcision, any call to law or works which makes us the active agent, even just in part, is a giant step backwards. We've been there and didn't like it. We had that and gave it up.

It didn't work then and it won't work now. The world has never been in short supply of the prophets of works or the religion of the bootstrap. The uniqueness, the refreshment, the good news, glad tidings essence of the Christian faith turns from all that and embraces Christ as active agent, and the free giving of God as the process, "while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8), and God's love as the reason for our hope.

It's funny (not ho-ho, at all, but strange) that the Christian's strongest temptation is to abandon what

is truly Christian for the slavery he knew before Christ set him free; the slavery to do this or that, measure up to this standard or that, in order to accomplish a sense of security. Ironically, that sense of security is shattered by the necessity to do this or that or measure up to this standard or that because it is ever just beyond our reach to do or measure up. "I know all that already," one friend likes to say in response to suggestions and advice. The fact is we all know that already, the way of law and works, and we don't much care for it. We gave it up for the Christian way of faith. That doesn't answer the question: "If Christians need only the free gift of God and not the law, won't they abound in sin?" But it makes a point that leads to another. We'll get to that later and when we've covered all Paul's points, we'll have our answer.

GALATIANS 2:17-21

Of course, it does make eminent good sense. If you had something going for you and you gave it up because you discovered that it didn't work or because something else did work, and did work so much better, then to abandon the workable solution and return to the unworkable leaves you nowhere. In the case of law versus Gospel, works versus faith, it's even worse. You find the rope-ladder climbing approach to heaven — hand over hand on the rungs of your good works — getting you nowhere and you give that way up happily for the Gospel of grace. *Then*, you give up the Gospel of grace; you give up the one thing that works to go back to the one thing that doesn't that leaves you in sin.

There's a left-handed crack involved in Paul's argument. The Judaizers were suggesting that the Gospel of grace without works might very well lead to sinning, might very well make people sinful. But Paul is suggesting that to abandon grace and return to the way of works is what leaves you "still in your sin." Do that, and there is nothing to remove you from the ranks of sinners. So the two sides keep exchanging their "suggestions."

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*Only the Gospel of grace produces good works,
because it leads us to “put on Christ.”*

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Paul, in chapter 2:17-21, is building on the point he made previously: “Once you said law and works didn’t do the trick. You said that when you turned to the Gospel of grace” (v.16). Now he proceeds: “Turning back to that law and those works (which didn’t work) abandons grace. That means you have nothing left going for you. You’ll end up a transgressor, take it from me, because then nothing works to free you from transgression.” And, he points out, “you’ve got no one to blame but yourself.”

There is another side, a telling side, to that coin. The Gospel of grace puts it all into the hands of the only One who can live a life of good works and fulfill the law, Jesus. The Gospel of grace puts Jesus in your driver’s seat so that He does your living for you. The result, “Eureka,” is good works, good life, lawfulness, and right in your daily life. By grace.

If the Judaizers really are concerned that the Gospel of grace produces sinfulness and sinners because it leads to permissiveness, they lose on two counts: Only the Gospel of grace produces good works, because it leads us to “put on Christ.” And to abandon the Gospel of grace is what makes us sinners, because then we are left without any rescue, no way out at all.

Actually, Paul’s blood pressure has mounted too quickly to allow him to make a careful and reasoned statement of the above. He blurts it out, tumbles the thoughts one upon the other, anxious to make the point. That’s how a brand new idea gets insinuated right at the very end. “If righteousness were through the law,” you know “then Christ died for no purpose.” Paul doesn’t expand, but maybe we should.

It’s a startling thought for a Christian. Every time we impress ourselves with our own piety or puff ourselves up with comparisons which leave us looking good, whenever we are willing to let what we do play a part in our acceptability and stature before God, we’re as much as wasting Christ’s all-sufficient sacrifice on our behalf. That’s the worst kind of presumption. “Thanks, Lord, kindly, but no thanks. I’ll take a few steps on my own. You didn’t really have to go all that far out for me. Dying is pretty extreme. I may need help, but nothing quite so total. I hate to say it, Lord, but your death was not needed. It was in vain.” Paul is carrying the argument to an extreme, of course, drawing caricatures, but think about it. As if we could regard Jesus’ death for no purpose!

PERSONAL APPLICATION – GALATIANS 3:1-9

With each new day, dear Savior, Your mercies are new. With each added study which I make of Your most Holy Word, another revelation becomes mine. To You be praise and glory. Amen.

1. In Galatians 3:1-2:

a. What part did works play in the Galatians' conversion to the Christian faith?

b. What was the path to Christianity, the style, along which the Galatians came to faith?

2. Read Romans 8:7; Ephesians 2:1; 1 Corinthians 1:23 and 12:3.

a. Left strictly to yourself, would you believe the Gospel of grace? Why?

b. Who is responsible for such faith as you have?

How does doubt affect your faith? (Mark 9:24)

3. Romans 10:14-17.

a. Paul speaks of "hearing with faith" (3:2). What is the method by which the Holy Spirit "calls and gathers" His people?

b. What is the tool, the means, He uses?

4. Where does your desire to be a Christian come from? (3:3)

5. What are some of the so-called "advantages" with which Satan tempts us away from the Christian faith?

6. In Galatians 3:4, "suffered" may refer to "persecution" or it may be translated "experience."

a. What sort of "persecution" do converts sometimes encounter today?

b. If Paul is saying, "have you experienced so much in vain," how would you understand his meaning?

7. Read Galatians 3:5.
- Why is faith a miracle?

 - Read Matthew 9:5-8, 9:22. Which is the greatest miracle and why?

 - Which person is closest to you with whom you find evidence of the “greatest” miracle?

8. Paul calls upon the personal experience of the Galatians to underscore his argument.
- How did the Galatians come to the faith?

 - What part did law have in their coming to faith?

 - What part did the law have in your call to faith?

 - What part does law have in your continuing in faith?

9. Compare Genesis 12:1-3 and Genesis 17:1-8 with Galatians 3:6-9. Why would Paul call those who take God “on faith” children of Abraham?

10. In Genesis 22:1-2, beyond the obvious odiousness at the prospect of killing his own son, what made the call for trust on the part of Abraham so overwhelming in this case?

11. What are the words of prophecy in Genesis 22:8?

12. In the events recorded in Genesis, in whom did Abraham trust?

- In whom did he not trust?

13. With what does Paul equate righteousness (lawfulness)?

14. In verse 8 we read, "Preached the gospel beforehand," that is, before the occurrence of the central fact of the Gospel at Calvary. Read Genesis 3:15, 49:10; Isaiah 62:11 and Micah 5:2. List (describe) these and any other instances of which you know in which the Gospel was preached "beforehand."
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15. According to Hebrews 11:8-13 why did it require faith for Abraham to "go out"?
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- a. Why did it require faith for Sarah to accept the promise of God that she would have a son?
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- b. Why did it require faith for "these all" (Hebrews 11:13) to die in peace?
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16. Read Acts 3:18 and Acts 13:29-33. Tell how the Old Testament promises and the promise of the Christian religion were fulfilled.
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