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**Frank Thielman**, Presbyterian Chair of Divinity, Beeson Divinity School



*Christ Crucified*

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# Christ Crucified

*A Theology of Galatians*

Thomas R. Schreiner

 **CROSSWAY**<sup>®</sup>  
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

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## Series Preface

There are remarkably few treatments of the big ideas of single books of the New Testament. Readers can find brief coverage in Bible dictionaries, in some commentaries, and in New Testament theologies, but such books are filled with other information and are not devoted to unpacking the theology of each New Testament book in its own right. Technical works concentrating on various themes of New Testament theology often have a narrow focus, treating some aspect of the teaching of, say, Matthew or Hebrews in isolation from the rest of the book's theology.

The New Testament Theology series seeks to fill this gap by providing students of Scripture with readable book-length treatments of the distinctive teaching of each New Testament book or collection of books. The volumes approach the text from the perspective of biblical theology. They pay due attention to the historical and literary dimensions of the text, but their main focus is on presenting the teaching of particular New Testament books about God and his relations to the world on their own terms, maintaining sight of the Bible's overarching narrative and Christocentric focus. Such biblical theology is of fundamental importance to biblical and expository preaching and informs exegesis, systematic theology, and Christian ethics.

The twenty volumes in the series supply comprehensive, scholarly, and accessible treatments of theological themes from an evangelical perspective. We envision them being of value to students, preachers, and interested laypeople. When preparing an expository sermon series, for example, pastors can find a healthy supply of informative

commentaries, but there are few options for coming to terms with the overall teaching of each book of the New Testament. As well as being useful in sermon and Bible study preparation, the volumes will also be of value as textbooks in college and seminary exegesis classes. Our prayer is that they contribute to a deeper understanding of and commitment to the kingdom and glory of God in Christ.

Written in response to a serious crisis in the church, Galatians is Paul's most passionate and strident letter. Schreiner's theology of Galatians provides a vivid portrait of Paul's opponents and locates the crux of the dispute in an understanding of the cross. Christ crucified not only spells the end of the old age and the inauguration of the new but also provides a new understanding of covenant, law, the family of Abraham, God's work of deliverance, and the new creation. Schreiner provides a lucid and compelling exposition of Paul's gospel, presenting the good news of our full and free acceptance with God, freedom in Christ, and new life in the Spirit.

Thomas R. Schreiner and Brian S. Rosner

## Preface

As one of the coeditors of the series, I wasn't planning on writing more than one volume since I had already written on the book of Revelation. But as everyone who edits a series knows, sometimes contributors who are slated to write particular volumes have to drop out for various reasons. Even then I didn't seriously consider writing this book; but I received encouragement to do so, and my love for Galatians won out. I have previously written a commentary on the letter, and I suppose (even from my doctoral days) that Galatians is the letter I invested the most time in. Thus, it was a special delight to return to it again.

As I reflected on how to outline the book, my son Patrick was a particular help as I bounced ideas off him about how to structure my presentation. The theme pursued in this book is the truth of the gospel, a phrase Paul uses twice in the letter (Gal. 2:5, 14). I divided the volume into three parts because there is a natural progression in the book. In part 1, we have the conflict between Paul and the opponents that must be resolved. The adversaries (chap. 1) questioned Paul's apostolic authority and his gospel, and thus (chap. 2) Paul must defend his apostolic authority in order to defend the gospel. The gospel is bound up with Paul's apostolic ministry so that in this case they can't be split apart.

Part 2 examines the gospel itself. It is the truth of this gospel that Paul defends over against the opponents. Under eschatology and apocalyptic (chap. 3), I explore the fulfillment theme in the letter and explain that Paul's gospel is both eschatological and apocalyptic, which is a current debate in Pauline studies. The newness of God's

work in Christ—that is, the end of the old age and the inauguration of the new—is sketched in here. Chapter 4 centers on Christ and the cross (but includes the resurrection as well). Here I show that the cross is at the center of Paul’s gospel and of history and that the cross—not circumcision—is necessary for entrance into the people of God in the new era that has dawned. Either one accepts Christ crucified as the path to salvation or turns to the law and to human performance. Chapter 5 considers further the implications of the Christ event and the cross being the center of history. We see that a right understanding of the cross indicates that justification is by faith alone. The Reformation understanding of justification doesn’t misread the New Testament but accurately captures the message of Paul in Galatians. The newness that has come about in Christ provokes questions about the law, and I explore in chapter 6 what Paul says about the law and what it means for our understanding of covenant.

Then in part 3, we see what it looks like to live out the truth of the gospel in the new era. Chapter 7 considers the people of God, what I am calling the family of Abraham. The boundaries of God’s people are redrawn through Jesus Christ, and thus Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ Jesus. Old tribalisms and ethnocentricism are set aside in the family of God. Then in the final chapter, I explore the new life of the Spirit, showing that the Spirit is the engine for the Christian life, that believers who are indwelt by the Spirit live transformed lives. The book concludes with a short epilogue, summing up the path the book has traversed.

This book was stimulated in part by an invitation to give lectures at Moore Theological College, and I am thankful for the invitation and the opportunity to share my study. I also want to thank Justin Taylor, executive vice president of book publishing for Crossway, for encouraging me to write the book. I am also grateful for Chris Cowan who was—a long time ago and far away—one of my PhD students but who now has served as an editor for several books that I have written. Chris’s light touch as an editor and his keen eye have helped me immensely, and I am thankful for his suggestions that have made the book better than it would have been otherwise.

# Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i> , by Josephus
2 Bar.	2 Baruch
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Ryland University Library of Manchester</i>
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentary
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CC	Continental Commentaries
CD	Damascus Document
ConcC	Concordia Commentary
CSC	Christian Standard Commentary
CTJ	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
1 En.	1 Enoch
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IVPNTC	IVP New Testament Commentary
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>

<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
Jub.	Jubilees
LNTS	The Library of New Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint
m. 'Abot	'Abot (Mishnah)
1–4 Macc.	1–4 Maccabees
<i>Migr.</i>	<i>On the Migration of Abraham</i> , by Philo
MT	Masoretic Text
NCC	New Covenant Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NTL	New Testament Library
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>OTP</i>	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> . Edited by James H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985.
Pss. Sol.	Psalms of Solomon
1QpHab	Pesher Habakkuk
4QpNah	Pesher Nahum
11QTemple	Temple Scroll
Sir.	Sirach
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series

SP	Sacra Pagina
<i>Spec. Laws</i>	<i>On the Special Laws</i> , by Philo
SSST	Short Studies in Systematic Theology
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–76.
<i>Them</i>	<i>Themelios</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament





PART 1

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THE CONFLICT



# The Adversaries

## Introduction

Galatians heralds the truth of the gospel, and this gospel stands as the authority over all people everywhere. Thus, Paul defends it passionately in the letter (Gal. 2:5, 14) over against his antagonists. The adversaries in Galatia, on the other hand, insisted that Paul deviated from the gospel and that he wasn't a genuine apostle. The identity of the opponents in Galatians has been a matter of sharp controversy over the years, and examining that issue in detail would require a longer chapter than is possible here.<sup>1</sup> Instead I will attempt to paint a portrait of the agitators from the letter itself. Such an enterprise is not without risks since we don't hear the adversaries in their own voice. We only know about their views through what Paul says about them. If we could talk to Paul's opponents, we would certainly gain a fuller and deeper understanding of their perspective. Since we are confined to what Paul says about the agitators and since Paul doesn't provide a full account of their views, we have to engage in what is called mirror reading.<sup>2</sup> From what Paul writes, we attempt to discern the identity and theology of the opponents. We recognize our historical distance from the first readers at

1 For a more detailed discussion on the identity of the opponents, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 31–52.

2 The classic essay on this is John M. G. Barclay, "Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case," *JSNT* 31 (1987): 73–93.

this very point since the Galatians knew who the adversaries were and what they taught. Paul assumes such knowledge in writing the letter to the Galatians, reminding us that the letter wasn't written to us but to the first readers.<sup>3</sup>

Paul gives us enough information in Galatians so that we can sketch in quite a full picture of those who resisted him. For those of us who believe in divine inspiration of the Scriptures, we also believe that God has given us all the information we need to understand the letter. The providence of God is such that what we have in the Scriptures is sufficient to understand their message. In the case of Galatians we don't claim to have a comprehensive grasp of the letter as if everything is perfectly clear. But I do claim that enough information is given so that we have a clear understanding of the central message of the letter.

We don't enjoy absolute certainty about the identity of the opposition, but they bear striking similarities to the Pharisees who debated with Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15. Even if they were not the same people, they shared the same perspective on the law, the law that was given on Mount Sinai. These Pharisaic believers in Christ insisted that Gentile believers should get circumcised and keep the Mosaic law and that such was necessary for salvation (Acts 15:1, 5). The Galatian agitators almost certainly advanced the same argument, as we shall see. It is probable as well that those troubling the Galatians came from outside the church. Thus, it is possible that the opponents hailed from Jerusalem or possibly Syrian Antioch. If that is the case, they traveled to Galatia, declaring the same message that they promulgated in Israel and its near environs. We don't know, of course, whether Paul's opponents were the same people who questioned him and Barnabas in Acts 15. What does seem plausible, however, is that—if they were distinct from those in Jerusalem and Syrian Antioch—they advocated the same message.

3 Incidentally I support a south Galatian destination of the letter and an early dating as well (see Schreiner, *Galatians*, 22–31), but no major interpretation depends on this historical reconstruction.

## Questioned Paul's Apostolic Authority

As we examine Galatians, some features of the adversaries' teaching come into sharper focus. For instance, we have good reasons to think that they questioned Paul's apostolic authority, and this is particularly evident in Galatians 1–2. We have a hint that they had doubts about Paul from the outset of the letter since in the first verse, after declaring that he was an apostle, Paul immediately adds that he was “not from men nor through man” (Gal. 1:1). Paul often begins his letters by asserting that he was an apostle (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1; Titus 1:1), but this is the only letter where he immediately claims that his apostleship didn't have a human source. A note of self-defense, an apology of Paul's apostolic legitimacy, peeks through the first verse of the letter! Paul defended himself from the beginning because the opponents questioned his apostolic authority. The agitators likely claimed that Paul failed to tell the Galatians that they had to be circumcised (more on this shortly) because he wanted to please people (Gal. 1:10). Perhaps they even claimed that Paul preached circumcision elsewhere (Gal. 5:11) and that he failed to bring up the matter in Galatia because he didn't want to offend them.

Our historical distance from Galatians may screen us from the distinctiveness of Paul's apostolic ministry. We need to remember that Paul wasn't one of the original twelve apostles who were commissioned by Jesus and who accompanied him throughout his ministry. Paul himself says that he was “untimely born” (*ektrōma*) and confesses he was “unworthy” to be an apostle since he persecuted the church (1 Cor. 15:8–9; cf. 1 Tim. 1:12–16). We don't know if Paul ever met Jesus while he was on earth. One can easily understand, then, that questions could be raised about Paul's apostolic legitimacy. We can imagine the opponents saying to the Galatians, “Who is this person who never walked and talked with Jesus? Where did he get his gospel? And does it agree with the gospel proclaimed by the apostles in Jerusalem?” In other words, they probably claimed that Paul's gospel

was *dependent* on the apostles from Jerusalem and that he *distorted* what the twelve taught.<sup>4</sup> They could have unsettled the Galatians by saying that the gospel Paul taught was not the same gospel that the twelve taught in Jerusalem. Paul's gospel was an outlier, they charged, not in accord with the gospel proclaimed elsewhere in the world.

The adversaries asserted, then, that Paul's gospel was human and not from God or Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:11). I should note, by the way, that we have no clear evidence that these agitators denied that Jesus was the Messiah. Apparently, there was no argument on that matter, and thus both Paul and the opponents claimed that they were Christians—followers of Christ. If they denied that Jesus was the Messiah or that he had risen from the dead, we can be sure that Paul would have responded vigorously. Despite their common belief that Jesus was the Messiah, these troublemakers (1:7; 5:10) asserted that Paul didn't proclaim the true gospel, the gospel that emanated from Jerusalem, the gospel preached by the twelve apostles. Paul's so-called gospel, according to his antagonists, was transmitted to him by human beings and didn't have a divine origin (1:12).

### **Demanded Observance of Circumcision and the Law**

We have seen that the opponents in Galatia questioned Paul's apostolic authority, asserting that his gospel was merely human since it did not agree with the Jerusalem apostles. But what was the controversy between Paul and the agitators precisely? What was the issue that led to such a fierce dispute? If we work backwards and consult the end of the letter, the difference between Paul and the antagonists surfaces, and it comes out most clearly in Galatians 6:12–13

It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For even those who are circum-

4 The use of the word *twelve* here should not be understood technically, as if there were only twelve apostles. It stands for the apostolic circle in Jerusalem and stems from Jesus's appointment of twelve apostles in his ministry.

cised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.

Paul's accusations against his adversaries aren't my concern here; what we see without any doubt is that the opponents required circumcision, that they reproved the Galatians for failing to observe this command from the torah. We have another indication that the issue was circumcision in Galatians 5:2–4 since Paul warns the Galatians in the strongest possible way about the fatal consequences that will follow if they get circumcised. They are warned that they will be severed from Christ, fall from grace, and face eschatological judgment if they receive circumcision. Paul also tells the story in Galatians 2:3–5 about some "false brothers" who wanted to impose circumcision on Titus when he traveled to Jerusalem with Paul and Barnabas. Actually, if we are reading Galatians for the very first time, we don't realize as we encounter this story about the conflict over circumcision in Jerusalem that circumcision was also controversial in Galatia. After reading the entire letter, however, we understand why Paul brought up the story of the attempt to get Titus circumcised. He foreshadows in Galatians 2 the debate that was raging in the Galatian churches.

For modern readers the claim that one must be circumcised seems strange and perhaps even bizarre, but when we read the Old Testament the demand of the opponents has much more credibility. They almost certainly appealed to Genesis 17:9–14:

And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born



in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”

Several features of these verses were probably trumpeted by the adversaries. (1) The covenant is to be observed “throughout their generations” for Abraham’s “offspring after you” (Gen. 17:9) so that the covenant is “everlasting” (17:13). The agitators surely claimed that there was no evidence that circumcision was obsolete. The Bible says it must be kept forever! (2) The covenant is universal and there are no exceptions: “every male among you shall be circumcised” (Gen. 17:10), “every male throughout your generations” (17:12), including all foreigners (that means Gentiles!) (17:12–13), and “any uncircumcised male” (17:14). (3) Circumcision is required as the covenant sign and thus must be kept. The word “covenant” is used six times in this short paragraph, showing how important circumcision was. Those who refuse to be circumcised are “cut off” (Gen 17:14; the pun is deliberate) from God’s covenant—they are not part of the people of God. It isn’t so surprising, then, that the Pharisaic believers in Acts 15:1 said that circumcision was required to be saved, and the Galatian agitators almost certainly said the same thing. Those who aren’t circumcised, they claimed, are severed from God himself and from his covenant with his people. (4) Finally, circumcision isn’t merely spiritual but is also physical. Circumcision is “in the flesh of your foreskins” (Gen. 17:11); and in case we misunderstand, it is repeated—each one must “be circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin” (17:14). It would not do, the opponents must have said, to restrict circumcision to a spiritual matter since it is patently clear that circumcision was physical, involving the removal of the foreskin.

When we read the Old Testament and grasp the nature of the Lord’s covenant with Israel, we understand why circumcision was considered to be indispensable by Paul’s adversaries. Controversies don’t typically

exist if the other side doesn't have some plausible things to say. When we examine the Old Testament the necessity of circumcision is impressed on us. I have already noted the strong words in Genesis 17:9–14. In addition, every Hebrew boy was to be circumcised after his birth on the eighth day (Lev. 12:3; cf. Jub. 15:12), and we know from Philippians 3:5 that Paul's parents had him circumcised on the eighth day as well. A remarkable story about Israel entering the land of promise is found in Joshua 5:2–9. We discover that the children of the wilderness generation weren't circumcised, and before they were allowed to enter the land of promise they had to be circumcised. We learn from this that the covenant people could not receive the covenant promise of the land without the covenant sign being applied to their bodies. The covenantal significance of circumcision also explains the bizarre story about Yahweh threatening to kill Moses as he was returning to Egypt as God's deliverer, as the mediator of the Lord's liberation of Israel from Egyptian slavery (Ex. 4:24–26). The meaning of the passage is intensely debated, and thus there is only space here to present my own reading. Why would Yahweh try to kill Moses? We see that his death is only averted when Zipporah circumcises her son, calling Moses a "bridegroom of blood" as she touches Moses's feet with her son's foreskin. Probably Zipporah resisted circumcising her children since it wasn't the custom of her clan. But the covenant deliverer (Moses) could not return to Egypt and save Israel if the covenant sign was flouted in his very own family. The account impresses on us that circumcision wasn't an optional choice to belong to Israel. The Lord demanded it from his people.

The post-Old Testament history of Israel also confirms the importance of circumcision. Circumcision became the center of controversy when Antiochus Epiphanes—a Seleucid king—exercised control over Israel (ruled 175–164 BC). Antiochus wanted to turn Israel's cult into one that accorded with his own pagan culture (1 Macc. 1:41–50), and thus he suppressed Jewish customs and oppressed those insisting on observing the torah. Some Jews compromised and even "removed the marks of circumcision" (1 Macc. 1:15 NRSV) since death was decreed

for those who violated the king's command. On the other hand, mothers, families, and children who were circumcised were even put to death (1 Macc. 1:60–61; 2 Macc. 6:10; 4 Macc. 4:25) for their allegiance to the law and to God's covenant. Israelites were viciously persecuted for observing the torah. We can understand why some in Israel would be outraged, therefore, when Paul diminished the importance of circumcision since about two hundred years earlier Jews had lost their lives for their faithfulness to the Lord's commands.

The importance of circumcision wasn't lessened during the Second Temple period (roughly 400 BC–AD 200). Circumcision is considered to be an "eternal ordinance" in Jubilees (15:25 *OTP*),<sup>5</sup> and those who aren't circumcised "on the eighth day" have "broken" the Lord's covenant and will "be destroyed and annihilated from the earth" (Jub. 15:26 *OTP*). Reading Josephus confirms that circumcision continued to be understood in Paul's day as a physical requirement for covenant membership (*Ant.* 1:192 [1.10.5]). Alternatively, some have said that circumcision wasn't necessary for salvation in Jewish circles in Paul's day, and there is some evidence of disagreement on this matter. Josephus tells the fascinating story of King Izates of Adiabene (AD 1–55), who was convinced by a certain Jew by the name of Ananias about the truth of the Jewish religion (*Ant.* 20:34–42 [20.2.3–20.2.4]). Still, Izates's mother Helena, who was a convert to Judaism herself, worried about the political consequences of Izates receiving circumcision and being identified as Jewish. Ananias assured Izates that circumcision wasn't necessary to worship God and that he could be forgiven for not adhering strictly to the law. Ananias advocated a laxer approach to the law, yet he did not do so for principled reasons but because of pragmatic concerns. He wanted to spare Izates from negative political consequences that could come from being circumcised. Nevertheless, another Jew, Eleazar, came along and admonished Izates to be circumcised (*Ant.* 20:43–46 [20.2.4]), emphasizing that the law plainly required it. Izates was convinced and was circumcised. We have seen from the

5 Jubilees may have reached its final composition around 100 BC.

Old Testament texts discussed above why Eleazar's case was more convincing than Ananias's. It seems quite obvious that the Old Testament demands that converts to the Jewish faith must be circumcised.

Even though some Jews (like Ananias) downplayed the requirement to be circumcised for one to be converted to Judaism, it seems that the necessity of circumcision for conversion was the majority position in Israel, and the story of Ananias, Izates, and Eleazar confirms such a perspective.<sup>6</sup> As noted above, a natural reading of the Torah is that physical circumcision was necessary to be in covenant with God. Of course, spiritual circumcision was also emphasized in Jewish circles, but this was not new in the Second Temple period since the demand for circumcision of the heart goes back to the Old Testament as well (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4). It is well known that Philo emphasized spiritual circumcision (*Spec. Laws* 1:6, 305), and that is hardly surprising given his well-known allegorical method. The spiritual was always more important than the physical for Philo as a Hellenizing Jew. Still, in a fascinating discussion Philo emphasizes that one must observe *both the spiritual and physical* dimensions of commands, applying this to both the Sabbath and circumcision (*Migr.* 89–93). Both physical and spiritual circumcision must be observed. Even a Jew such as Philo who prized the spiritual significance of circumcision still required physical circumcision. Thus, Paul's insistence on spiritual circumcision while dispensing with the need for physical circumcision was highly controversial (Rom. 2:28–29; Phil. 3:2–3; Col. 2:11–12) and fiercely opposed by some. We can see more clearly, then, why Paul's adversaries in Galatia criticized him. He was denying the covenant sign required in the law and in effect was denying the election of Israel as God's people.

The troublemakers subscribed not only to circumcision but also to the law of Moses as a whole. Those who accept circumcision for

6 For the minority view that circumcision wasn't required, see Neil McEleney, "Conversion, Circumcision, and the Law," *NTS* 20 (1974): 319–41. Supporting the view that circumcision was required for conversion, see John Nolland, "Uncircumcised Proselytes?," *JSJ* 12 (1981): 173–94; Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew," *HTR* 82 (1989): 26–30.

salvation are also obligated to keep the entire law. I mentioned earlier the Pharisaic believers in Acts (15:1, 5) who demanded the observance of circumcision and the law of Moses. Putting circumcision and the law together was the standard Jewish view since circumcision is part of the law (cf. Lev. 12:3). There is every reason to believe, then, that the adversaries also promoted observance of the entirety of the law given to Moses, and the evidence in Galatians supports this connection. For instance, Paul links circumcision with the law when he charges the opponents with demanding circumcision, and yet they are not observers of the law themselves (Gal. 6:13). We have further evidence that the adversaries demanded observance of the entire law since the Galatians are addressed as those who “desire to be under the law” (4:21). Indeed, Paul connects submission to circumcision with observance of the entire law (5:3), showing again that the two are linked. Requiring circumcision means that one was attempting to be justified by the law (5:4). Observance of days, months, seasons, and years is mentioned (4:10), and given the emphasis on the law in the remainder of the letter we have good reasons to think that observances from the Old Testament law are in view. It seems, then, that the antagonists declared that one must be circumcised and keep the law to be right with God—to belong to the people of God. Paul’s wide-ranging reflections on the law in Galatians (see Gal. 2:16, 19, 21; 3:2, 5, 10–12, 17, 19, 21, 23; 4:4; 5:14, 23) also support the idea that circumcision and law were inextricably intertwined. Thus, Paul had to set forth a theology of law in order to respond to the opponents.

## Conclusion

The opponents in Galatia questioned Paul’s apostolic legitimacy, claiming that his gospel was *dependent* on the Jerusalem apostles and that he *distorted* the gospel the twelve taught. Furthermore, they complained that Paul departed from the clear requirement that one must be circumcised to belong to the people of God. In doing so he was breaking the covenant that the Lord had established with his people. The Galatians, according to the adversaries, must submit to circumcision and

observe the torah handed down from Moses to belong to the people of God. Such a perspective, they likely claimed, represented the historic position of the people of God for centuries. It was this perspective that Paul countered in the letter to the Galatians, and the rest of this book will sketch in the main elements of Paul's response.

