



For all of you who were baptized into Christ, Paul continues, have clothed yourselves with Christ. Though water baptism is the outward act of public confession of one's faith in Jesus Christ, Paul is not here speaking of that baptism.

The Bible nowhere teaches salvation by physical baptism, especially not in Galatians, where the central message is salvation by faith alone, plus absolutely nothing else. Since it is here equated with being clothed ... with Christ, the phrase baptized into Christ cannot refer to any water ceremony at all but rather to spiritual identification with and immersion into the life of Christ. It is precisely the spiritual immersing into the Person and work of Christ that Paul explains in his letter to the Romans:

- (Romans 6:3–5 ESV) *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We*

were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father; we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

[MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1983). *Galatians* (p. 98). Chicago: Moody Press.]

The whole burden of the letter has been to say that salvation is received through faith in Christ alone apart from the works of the law including specifically the requirement of circumcision. After all that Paul had said against the Judaizers and their interposition of circumcision as a prerequisite for a right standing with God, did he here set forth his own rite of initiation into God's favor?

Was he saying to the Galatians: "My

opponents were wrong in trying to circumcise you. What you really need is to be baptized! The requirement of baptism has replaced that of circumcision. If you want to be right with God, you must trust in Jesus Christ and be baptized with water"?

Yet this is precisely what Paul did not say to the Galatians. **To believe in Jesus Christ and water, Jesus Christ and bread and wine, Jesus Christ and church membership, Jesus Christ and anything else is to profane the grace of God and render useless the death of Christ** (2:21). [George, T. (1994). *Galatians* (Vol. 30, p. 277). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.]

We have no record of the baptism of the Galatians, but we may assume that many of them were baptized by Paul and Barnabas or the elders they appointed to care for the churches soon after the initial evangelization of that area (cf. Acts 14:21–23). However, in the opening verses of Gal 3, when Paul reminded the Galatians of the very beginning of their Christian experience, he did not say, "Were you baptized?" but rather, "Did you receive the Spirit?" (3:2–3). [Ibid. (Vol. 30, p. 278).]

What We Were Under the Law (verses 23, 24):

In a word, we were in bondage. The apostle uses two vivid similes in verses 23 and 24, in which the law is likened first to a prison, in which we were held captive, and then to a tutor, whose discipline was harsh and severe. [Stott, J. R. W. (1986). *The message of Galatians: Only one way* (p. 96). Leicester, England; Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.]

***But there's also this. The law increases sin in still another way: **"Satan would have us to**

prove ourselves holy by that which God gave to prove us sinners," noted Andrews Jukes.

The flesh uses the law as a step ladder to climb above others, and from this exalted position of moral worth we cuff the heads of passersby—for their own good, naturally. Someone has to teach them a lesson! The law hardens the self-aggrandizement we feel over our progress in law-keeping, thereby inflating our comparative righteousness.

Some of us in the church have been working in that field so long that the sun has baked the mud on really well. If we ever think kindly of a sinner, it's more by way of pity than mercy. Certainly it's not love. [Bush, D., & Due, N. (2015). *Live in Liberty: The Spiritual Message of Galatians* (p. 102). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.]

Once the law has caused us to long for Christ by exposing us as sinners and expanding our sins on all fronts, it has done its proper job. It doesn't give life, but kills so that we turn to Christ for life each and every day. Through the law, we die to the law as a means of life, so that we may be crucified with Christ. [Ibid. (p.103)]

In Galatians 3:19–22, we meet the most marked contrast between the gospel and everything else: In the New Testament, **"moral effort can be a mortal sin."** Universally, **natural human reason—especially when applied to religion—puts the law to the wrong use, and out of it we kill ourselves and one another.** That was Paul's story, but it's also ours. [Ibid. (p.100)]