

COMMENTARY – GALATIANS - Cole

R. Alan Cole. *Tyndale New Testament Commentary on Galatians*. Gen. ed. R.V.G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Erdman's Pub. Co., 1989), 23.

The epistle [Galatians] was written as an answer to the Judaizers who were troubling the Gentile churches of Galatia with their insistent demands that, to be a good Christian, one had first to become a good Jew. Circumcision and some law-keeping at least were necessary to salvation. Salvation is thus not by faith in Christ alone; it is by faith in Christ and by obedience to the law. Paul fought this tooth and nail as being a denial of the gospel that he preached. ...¹

2: 10:

They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do.

Hoi ptochoi, the poor, is one of the early names for Christians which does not seem to be used outside Palestine. Others in the same class are Galilaeans (Acts 2:7) or Nazarenes (Acts 24:5). Early names like 'saints' (Acts 9:32) or 'brothers' (Acts 9:30) or 'disciples' (Acts 9:26) continued to be used in the Gentile churches, even after the new name of 'Christian' was in use (Acts 11:26). It seems a simple deduction that those names were still used which were felt to be still applicable. Naturally, 'Galilaeans' was inappropriate, and equally naturally 'the Poor' was inapplicable. It had a long history in Israel's literature, referring to the pious remnant of God's people. They were usually 'poor' in the economic sense of the word, and always 'poor' in the sense of being in special need of God's help. No doubt the use of 'poor' and 'poor in spirit' in the Gospels had helped to make the word current in Christian as well as strictly Jewish circles. If the Christian church was the new remnant, then the Christians were now 'God's poor.' Paul himself makes use of the concept in passages like 2 Corinthians 6:10 and 8:9. But usually he introduces it in the context of Christian giving, not in the sense of James 2:5, 6 [*Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. * Has not God*

¹ R. Alan Cole. *Tyndale New Testament Commentary on Galatians*. Gen. ed. R.V.G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Erdman's Pub. Co., 1989), 23.

chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? ⁶But you have dishonored the poor]. For the plain fact of the matter is that the Gentile churches might number many poor members in their midst, but there were also rich members. No Gentile church could be described as 'poor' in the sense of the grinding poverty of the Jerusalem church itself. The abuse of the Lord's Supper, mentioned in I Corinthian 11:21, could take place only in churches where there was considerable inequality in the distribution of wealth. And this posits some wealth at least. But the greatest proof of the comparative wealth of the Gentile churches is that Paul did in fact manage to raise such a 'collection' for the Christians of Jerusalem. Indeed, it was one of the major concerns in all of his later Epistles. ²

There were doubles various causes contributing to this chronic poverty of the churches in Judaea. Cynics [Skeptic] will point to the experiment in communal living recorded in Acts 4:34 as a possible cause. But we should notice two things even here: First, those who contributed large sums to this common 'pool' seem to have been 'Overseas Jews;' secondly, the poverty of the church had far deeper roots if the bulk of the members were already poor. Palestine was at the time over-tilled and over-populated. Chronic rebellions and disturbances had worsened a position already made grave by the stony nature of the soil after more than a millennium of deforestation. Added to this, the land was crowded with pilgrims returning to their home land for festivals. Jerusalem was a bloated religious capital, crammed with hungry, unproductive mouths. It seems to have had little true economic basis for its life. ³ [Therefore, Paul was eager to remember these poor saints of Jerusalem and was eager to do fund-raising for them through Gentile Christians in the Gentile world].

² R. Alan Cole. *Tyndale New Testament Commentary on Galatians*. Gen. ed. R.V.G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Erdman's Pub. Co., 1989), 71.

³ R. Alan Cole. *Tyndale New Testament Commentary on Galatians*. Gen. ed. R.V.G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Erdman's Pub. Co., 1989), 72.

2: 15-21 – justified by faith

3:28: Equality

There is no longer any place for the traditional distinctions that divide mankind –cultural, linguistic, religious (for *Greek*, opposed to *Jew*, conveys all of these) or sexual. Some have seen here a thrust at the Judaizers. The Jewish male gave regular thanks to God that he was not born a Gentile or a woman, while the woman dolefully thanked God that she was made as she was. Paul would then be pointing out that, in Christ, the ‘party walls’ that were accepted, and even extolled, in Judaism had been broken down (Eph. 2: 14). It may simply be that these were types of division familiar to his hearers, and that he uses them to symbolize all such human divisions. Paul bases his strong position (the abolition to such distinction) on the ground that all are now *heis*, ‘one man’ or ‘an entity,’ in Christ. Here is the concept of the collective whole. It is a short step from this to the use of ‘body concept’ which sees the totality of believers as the body of Christ.⁴

5: 14:

For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Paul says that *all the law is fulfilled, peplerotai*, ‘has reached its climax,’ ‘has reached its end,’ he is probably punning upon two the meanings of this Greek word. First, he means that the content of the whole law ‘can be summed up’ in the great words of **Leviticus 19:18**. [*you shall love your neighbor as yourself*]: This was a common place of Jewish theology, for which great rabbinic names could be quoted. Matthew 7:12 virtually a variation on this theme, and in Matthew 22:39, 40 the Lord quotes this very verse from Leviticus. Apart from the aspect of Leviticus 19: 18 being a useful ‘summary’ of the law,

⁴ R. Alan Cole. *Tyndale New Testament Commentary on Galatians*. Gen. ed. R.V.G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Erdman’s Pub. Co., 1989), 29.

Paul wants to show that Christian love is actually the 'fulfillment,' i.e. the 'carrying-out,' of the law. See **Romans 13:8-10** where this is worked out in detail. [*Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.*⁵*The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder; you shall not steal; You shall not covet'; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'*⁶*Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law*]. This is the answer both to the criticism of the Judaizers and the scandalous living of some of the Gentile converts, not to mention their present party-spirit.⁵

Nomos, law, is in this instance the Jewish Torah with which Paul and his opponents are most directly concerned. Because *torah* in Hebrew and *nomos* in Greek are far wider than the English word 'law,' we have tended to lose something of richness of the meaning. *Torah*, roughly speaking, means 'instruction;' while *nomos* covers 'customary law,' and even 'customs.' Nevertheless, in view of the list of virtues and vices which follows, Paul seems to be thinking of the law here in terms of a series of injunctions, which is the usual English understanding of the word.⁶

⁵ R. Alan Cole. *Tyndale New Testament Commentary on Galatians*. Gen. ed. R.V.G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Erdman's Pub. Co., 1989), 156.

⁶ R. Alan Cole. *Tyndale New Testament Commentary on Galatians*. Gen. ed. R.V.G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Erdman's Pub. Co., 1989), 157.