

**NOTES
ON
PAUL'S LETTER
TO THE
GALATIANS**

by
RUSSELL H. COLLINS

FOREWORD

As I have written in the introduction to these notes on Paul's letter to the Galatian churches, the letter to the Galatian brethren is one of a group of three letters, all of which concentrate on the relationship of Jews and Gentiles to the Church of Jesus Christ.

The comments offered are intended to encourage the reader to think carefully about the Apostle's inspired words and understand their significance to present-day Christians. The letter to the Galatians was written nearly two thousand years ago, but is full of instructions, exhortations and words of advice which are still very relevant to the life of the Christian now in the twenty-first century.

I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to many scholars and commentators, in particular John Stott's book, *"The Message of Galatians"*. I am grateful to John Stott, an eminent theologian, for the thoughtful way in which he has divided and sub-divided the message of the great Apostle's letter, written as it was in a spirit of disappointment and indignation because of the Galatians' falling from grace, especially after the efforts that he (and also Barnabas) had made to preach, exhort and convert them to the freedom of the Christian life. I am also grateful to John Stott for his clear explanations of many thoughts and understandings, some of which I had not previously identified or thought through. I could not improve on the structure of John Stott's book, and have for the most part, followed it closely.

My most grateful thanks go to my dearly-loved wife for her sustained and uncomplaining typing of my handwritten notes; to Joan and Mervyn Buckmaster for the many hours they spent in reading and suggesting improvements to my comments, and producing the amended copies in a form suitable for publication; and to Shirley and Harry Shallcross for the time-consuming arrangement of the notes in a format suitable for publication in book form, and the negotiations necessary to enable the book to be produced.

Russell Collins.

CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
	INTRODUCTION	1
1	PAUL'S AUTHORITY AND HIS MESSAGE (Galatians 1:1 - 5) Paul's Authority Paul's Gospel	3
2	INCORRECT DOCTRINE AND FAITHLESS GALATIANS (Galatians 1:6 - 10) The Unfaithfulness Of The Galatians The Activity Of The Judaizing Teachers The Reaction Of The Apostle Paul	8
3	THE SOURCE OF PAUL'S GOSPEL (Galatians 1:11 - 24) The Situation Before His Conversion The Situation At His Conversion The Situation After His Conversion Paul's Journey To Arabia Paul's Brief Visit To Jerusalem Paul's Journey To Syria and Cilicia	15
4	THERE IS ONLY ONE GOSPEL (Galatians 2:1 - 10) Paul's Companion Paul's Relationship With The Apostles The Outcome Of The Consultation	22
5	PAUL'S CLASH WITH PETER AT ANTIOCH (Galatians 2:11 - 16) The Conduct Of Peter The Conduct Of Paul Conclusion	29

Chapter		Page
6	JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE (Galatians 2:15 - 21) Paul's Exposition The Doctrine of Justification By Works Of The Law The Doctrine Of Justification Through Faith In Jesus Christ Paul's Argument	36
7	THE FOOLISHNESS OF THE GALATIANS (Galatians 3:1 - 9) Paul's Argument From The Galatians' Own Experience Paul's Argument From Old Testament Scripture	44
8	THE ALTERNATIVES OF FAITH AND WORKS (Galatians 3:10 - 14) Two Alternatives The Alternative Of Works The Alternative Of Faith The Two Destinies	49
9	ABRAHAM, MOSES AND CHRIST (Galatians 3:15 - 22) The History The Theology The Law Does Not Make Void The Promise Of God The Law Shows The Need For The Promise Of God And Makes That Promise Indispensable The Truth About God The Truth About People	55
10	UNDER THE LAW AND IN CHRIST (Galatians 3:23 - 29) Under The Law The Law Was Like A Prison The Law Was A Tutor What It Means To Be In Christ	65

Chapter		Page
11	ONCE SLAVES BUT NOW CHILDREN (Galatians 4:1 - 11) The Human Condition Under The Law God's Action Through Christ The Appeal Of The Apostle	72
12	THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PAUL AND THE GALATIANS (Galatians 4:12 - 20) Paul's Appeal The Galatians' Attitude To Paul Paul's Attitude To The Galatians Lessons For Us	79
13	ISAAC AND ISHMAEL (Galatians 4:21 - 31) The Historical Background The Allegorical Argument The Personal Application	85
14	A NEW COVENANT ESTABLISHED BY GOD THROUGH CHRIST (Galatians 5:1 - 12) Believers Of Incorrect And True Doctrines Teachers Of Incorrect And True Doctrines The Origin Of The Incorrect Teaching The Effect Of The Incorrect Teaching The Purpose And End Of The Incorrect Teaching	95
15	THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM (Galatians 5:13 - 15) Christian Freedom Is Not Indulgence Of The Flesh Christian Freedom Is Not Freedom To Exploit Others Christian Freedom Is Obeying The Law Of Christ	103

Chapter		Page
16	THE FLESH AND THE SPIRIT (Galatians 5:16 - 25) Christian Conflict The Works Of The Flesh The Fruit Of The Spirit Christian Victory Crucifying The Flesh Walking By The Spirit	108
17	CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIPS (Galatians 5:26 - 6:5) How Christians Should Not Behave Towards One Another How Christians Should Behave Towards One Another An Example Of Burden Bearing What To Do Who Is To Do It How It Should Be Done	118
18	SOWING AND REAPING (Galatians 6:6 - 10) Christian Ministry Christian Holiness Sowing To The Flesh Sowing To The Spirit Christian Well-Doing	125
19	THE ESSENCE OF CHRISTIANITY (Galatians 6:11 - 18) Is Christianity Outward Or Inward? Is Christianity Human Or Divine?	132
20	A SUMMARY OF PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIAN CHURCHES The Issue Of Authority - Chapters 1 and 2 The Issue Of Salvation - Chapters 3 and 4 The Issue Of Holiness - Chapters 5 and 6 NEW COVENANT FELLOWSHIP PUBLICATIONS LISTING OF RECENT AND OLDER PUBLICATIONS	140 145

NOTES ON PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

INTRODUCTION

For a period of some thirty years after his conversion on the Damascus road, the Apostle Paul travelled extensively through the Roman Empire as an ambassador of Jesus Christ. He completed three missionary journeys, during all of which he preached the gospel, and founded churches in the provinces of Galatia, Asia Minor, Macedonia (Northern Greece) and Achaia (Southern Greece). Paul reinforced his evangelising work with his letters, by which he sought to guide, correct and supervise the churches he had founded.

One of these letters was the epistle to the Galatians, which was probably the earliest he wrote. It was possibly written between 48 and 58 AD, after his second missionary journey. Paul addressed it *"to the churches of Galatia."* (Galatians 1:2) The exact borders of Galatia are not known with certainty (nor are the borders of Pisidia, Phrygia and Lycaonia), but the areas so named in the Scriptures are identifiable, and their locations can be seen in Biblical maps.

Paul did not name the churches he included under the general title "Galatians". It seems to me that Paul would have meant the churches in the four cities in which he evangelised during his first missionary journey, namely Antioch in Pisidia, and Iconium, Lystra and Derbe in the southern parts of Galatia. The accounts of Paul's missionary work in this region are recorded in Acts, chapters 13 and 14.

After Paul had departed from the Galatian churches he had founded, deceivers, mainly Judaising teachers, went among them, attacking Paul's authority and the gospel he preached. They contradicted Paul's message of justification by grace through faith, and insisted that believers had to be circumcised and keep all the law of Moses, as is recorded in Acts 15: 1 and 5.

Paul clearly saw the dangers of this two-pronged attack, and, right at the beginning of this letter, firmly stated his apostolic authority and his gospel of grace, two themes to which he would constantly return in his letter to the Galatian churches.

The title apostle was used by Jesus for His special representatives. From the wider company of disciples He chose twelve, called them apostles, and sent them out to preach, as recorded in Luke 6:13 and Mark 3:14. They were personally called, chosen and commissioned by the Lord Jesus, and authorised to teach in His name. This group of twelve was unique. The word "apostle" was not a general word which could be applied to every Christian such as the words "believer", "saint", "brother" or "sister". It was a special term reserved for the twelve men, one of whom, Judas, "*by transgression fell*" (Acts 1:25), and was replaced by another, Paul, personally appointed by the risen Christ.

The Lord Jesus did not establish an apostolic succession, therefore there is no apostolic succession. The apostles had no successors. No-one could succeed them. Their appointment was unique. To this select company of apostles Paul claimed to belong.

The letter to the Galatians is one of a group of three on related doctrinal matters, the remaining two letters being those to the Romans and the Hebrews. These three letters clearly define the relationship of Jews and Gentiles to the Church of Jesus Christ, and all three should be read in their entirety to gain a full and complete picture of those doctrinal matters.

Detailed commentaries have been written in the past by brethren, namely "*Comparisons and Contrasts*" on the letter to the Hebrews by the late Ernest Henninges, and "*A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*" by the late Hugh Fleming. These "*Notes On Paul's Letter To The Galatians*" have been compiled with the intention that my comments will be helpful to Christian believers who love the sacred Scriptures and are seeking to increase their understanding of the gracious truths they contain. My comments are based on thoughts given in class studies of Galatians, and some years of research and endeavours to understand and comment on the sacred books.

Unless otherwise indicated, the translated passages quoted are from the New King James Version of the Scriptures.

CHAPTER 1

PAUL'S AUTHORITY AND HIS MESSAGE

*"Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead), and all the brethren who are with me,
To the churches of Galatia.*

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,
To whom be glory for ever and ever, Amen." - Galatians 1:1 - 5*

Paul's Authority

Paul authoritatively claimed for himself the very title which the deceivers were trying to deny him. He was a chosen apostle of Jesus Christ. R. Alan Cole, in his book *"The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians"*, wrote as follows, on page 31: "To the Jew the word was well defined; it meant a special messenger, with a special status, enjoying an authority and commission that came from a body higher than himself."

We should refer to him as the Apostle Paul rather than simply Saint Paul, because every Christian believer is a saint according to the New Testament, while no Christian, other than the chosen twelve, is an apostle. Paul clearly distinguished himself from other Christians who were with him when he wrote his letter. He called them in verse 2 *"all the brethren who are with me."* He was happy to be associated with them in his greeting to the Galatian churches, but confidently put himself first and gave himself a title which he did not give to his brethren. They were all brethren, but he alone was an apostle.

Therefore there is no doubt about the nature of his apostleship.

In other epistles he was content to describe himself, as *"called to be an apostle,"* (Romans 1:1) or *"called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus."* (1 Corinthians 1:1) In other letters he did not mention his call, but referred to himself as *"an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God,"* as he did in 2 Corinthians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 1 Timothy 1:1 and 2 Timothy 1:1.

But at the beginning of the Galatian letter he enlarged on his description of himself, making a forceful statement that his apostleship was not human in any sense, but wholly divine. He stated authoritatively that he was an apostle "*not from men nor through man,*" that is, he was not appointed by a group of men such as the eleven, or the Church at Jerusalem or the Church at Antioch. His apostolic appointment was "*through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.*" God the Father chose Paul to be an apostle and appointed him through Jesus Christ, Whom He raised from the dead. It was the risen Lord Who commissioned Paul on the Damascus road, and Paul several times referred to this sight of the risen Christ as an essential condition of his apostleship. - 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15: 8 and 9

Why did Paul so forcefully assert and defend his apostleship? He did so because the gospel that he preached was at risk of loss. If he were not a true apostle of Jesus Christ, then the gospel he preached could, and indeed would, be rejected. Paul proclaimed Christ's message with Christ's authority. Therefore he defended his apostolic authority in order to defend the truth of his message.

This special divine authority of the Apostle Paul is sufficient in and of itself to discredit and dispose of certain modern views of the New Testament. Some modern radical theologians contend that the apostles were merely first-century witnesses to Jesus Christ, whereas we today are twenty-first century witnesses, and our witness is just as good as theirs, if not better, because we have the written record to consult, whereas they did not. The radical theologians write and speak as if they have equal authority with the apostles to teach and decide what is true and right. They also recommend that we must have the courage to disagree with the apostles' writings if we do not consider them to have relevance for us. What they are in fact telling us is that any reasons for disagreement are subjective, that is, our reasons for disagreement come down to matters of taste and opinion, so we are to prefer our own taste and opinion to the authority of Christ's apostles.

Professor C.H. Dodd, an eminent theologian, in his book "*The Epistle to the Romans*" writes, in his introduction to his commentary (pages XXXIV and XXXV), "Sometimes I think Paul is wrong, and I have ventured to say so".

Christian believers have no liberty to think, speak or write in this way. The Biblical view is otherwise. The apostles derived their authority from God through Jesus. Apostolic authority was divine authority. It was neither human nor ecclesiastical, and because it was divine we must all submit to it. The apostles of Jesus Christ were unique – unique in their experience of Jesus as God’s Son on earth, unique in their fellowship of the risen Lord, unique in their commission by Christ’s authority, and unique in their inspiration by Christ’s God-given Spirit. We may not exalt our opinions over theirs or even claim that our authority is as great as theirs. Their opinions and authority are from God through Christ. If we would bow to His authority, we must of necessity bow to the authority of His chosen apostles. As Jesus Himself said, *“he who receives you receives me.”* - Matthew 10:40; John 13:20

Paul’s Gospel

Paul sent the Galatians a message of grace and peace, as he did in all his letters. The terms *“grace”* and *“peace”* summarise Paul’s message of salvation. Salvation – deliverance from sin and its consequence death – brings peace, peace with God, peace with people and peace in our hearts and minds. The source of salvation is grace – the gift of favour from God to the undeserving. Grace and peace come to us and to all believers from the Father and the Son together.

Paul then proceeded immediately to the great event in history in which God’s grace was shown and from which His peace comes, namely, the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and His resurrection. Galatians 1:4 tells us that Jesus *“gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.”* Jesus’ death was a sacrifice for sin. The New Testament teaches that Jesus’ death was a sin offering, the one and only sacrifice by which our sins may be forgiven and taken away. This fundamental truth is not explained here, but later in his letter (chapter 3 verse 13) we are told that Jesus actually became *“a curse for us.”* He bore in His righteous person the curse or condemnation that we, because of our sins, deserved. We and all people were, and are, unable to save ourselves, however hard we may try.

Christ’s death was a sacrifice to deliver and rescue us from our sins and *“from this present evil age.”*

The Christian Gospel is in fact a religion of rescue. The Greek verb used in Galatians 1:4 translated by “deliver” is “exaireo” (Strong’s 1807), a verb with strong meaning. It is used in Acts in relation to the rescue of the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt, (Acts 7:34) in relation to the rescue of Peter from prison and the power of Herod the King, (Acts 12:11) and in relation to the rescue of Paul from the infuriated mob bent on killing him. (Acts 23:27) Verse 4 of Galatians 1 is the only place where “exaireo” is used metaphorically of salvation. Jesus Christ died to rescue us.

Jesus has rescued us from sin and therefore also from death. Christians, along with everyone descended from Adam, must die, but Christ’s promise is that believers in Him have qualified to be raised from death because of their faith and obedience. The human race as a whole will also be raised from death, but will be raised to a resurrection of judgment in which they must learn the lessons of faith and obedience. The Christian believer who dies in faith will already have been judged and will be raised to eternal life. - 1 Peter 4:17

But how or in what way has He rescued us from this present evil age? We must go on living and witnessing in this present evil age, letting our light shine in an endeavour to bring others to Christ. It seems to me that Paul is telling us that as believers we are delivered from the sinful allurements and attractions of this present evil age in which Satan still has dominion. (2 Corinthians 4:4) We have become “*new creatures*” (Colossians 3:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15 and Ephesians 4:24), and as such we have become, by faith, citizens of the new age, the age to come, and with Jesus Christ’s help we should in this life be living the life of the age to come, when Satan will be bound and eventually destroyed.

Jesus Christ gave Himself indeed for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age.

The origin, source and reason for Jesus’ death derive from the will of the Father. Jesus’ death happened “*according to the will of our God and Father.*” In Christ’s sacrifice on the cross He willingly submitted to the will of the Father, rescued us from sin and its outcome death, and from this present evil age, the kingdom of Satan. - Matthew 12:26, Luke 11:18

In these introductory verses of his letter, Paul outlined three divine actions for our salvation. Firstly, Christ died to rescue us from sin and from this present evil age; secondly, Paul was appointed as a chosen apostle to bear witness to Christ and His resurrection; and thirdly, we and all believers have the gifts of grace and peace which Jesus made possible and to which Paul was a witness.

There could be no Christian experience today without the once-for-all achievement of Christ on the cross, and the unique witness of the apostles. We cannot do without the work of Christ, nor can we do without the witness of Christ's chosen apostles if we want to enjoy the grace and peace freely given by God through His Son Jesus Christ.

It seems only natural and indeed inevitable that Paul ended his introductory message with a doxology to God the Father – *“to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”*

CHAPTER 2

INCORRECT DOCTRINE AND FAITHLESS GALATIANS

"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach any gospel to you other than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any gospel to you other than what you have received, let him be accursed.

For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a servant of Christ." - Galatians 1:6 - 10

The Unfaithfulness Of The Galatians

In his letters to the churches, except for the letter to the Galatians, Paul told them that he prayed for them, or gave praise and thanks to God because they had remained faithful to his preaching. But in his letter to the Galatians there is no mention of prayer, praise, thanksgiving, and no commendation. Instead, Paul addressed himself immediately to his theme with some urgency. He expressed astonishment at the backsliding and instability of the Galatian churches, and attacked the Judaisers who were subverting them. And he then declared a most solemn and indeed fearful anathema upon those who dare to pervert the gospel of Christ.

The Greek word translated "*turning away*" is "*metatithemi*", and means "to transfer one's allegiance". It is used of soldiers in the army who revolt or desert, and of people who change sides in politics or philosophy. The Greek word really means a "turncoat", that is, a traitor.

This is the accusation that Paul brought against the Galatians. They were showing themselves to be religious turncoats and spiritual deserters. They were turning away from Him who had called them in grace, and were giving allegiance to another gospel. The true gospel is as Paul described it in Acts 20:24, "*the gospel of the grace of God.*"

It is good news of the grace of God to undeserving sinners. In grace He gave His Son to die for us, in grace He justifies us when we believe, and in grace He calls us to be His children and joint-heirs with Christ. *"All is from God"* Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:18, meaning that all we have and all we are spiritually come from His grace. Nothing is due to our efforts, merits or works. Our salvation is due to the grace of God through the Lord Jesus.

However, the Galatian converts, who had received this gospel of grace, were turning away to another gospel, a gospel of works. The Judaizing teachers who came among them said, *"Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."* (Acts 15:1) They did not deny that belief in Jesus is necessary to gain salvation, but stressed that believers must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses as well. What they were saying is that believers must finish, by obedience to the Law, what Christ had begun in them. They must add their works to the work of Christ. In other words, they must finish what they alleged was Christ's unfinished work.

This doctrine Paul would simply not tolerate. The work of Christ is a finished work; and the gospel of Christ is a gospel of free grace. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, without any combination or mixture of human works or merits; and is due solely to God's gracious call, completely independent of any works of our own, no matter how good or numerous those works might be.

But Paul went even further. He wrote that the defection of the Galatian converts was in their conduct as well as in their understanding. He accused them of *"deserting him who called"* them in grace. He was saying that Christian faith and Christian life belong together, and cannot be separated. To turn from the gospel of grace is to turn from the God of grace, and Paul warned the Galatians that it is impossible to forsake the gospel without forsaking God. As he said later in Galatians 5:4, *"You have fallen away from grace."*

The Activity Of The Judaizing Teachers

The reason why the Galatians were turning from God Who had called them in grace was that *"there are some who trouble you."* The Greek word for "trouble" is "tarasso", and means to "shake" or "agitate". The same word "tarasso" was used by the Council of Jerusalem in their letter to the churches:

"We have heard that some persons from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions." - Acts 15:24.

The trouble was caused by incorrect doctrine. The Judaizing teachers were trying to "pervert" (AV, RSV) or "distort" (NEB) the gospel. They were proclaiming what J.B. Phillips calls *"a travesty of the gospel of Christ."* In fact, the Greek word "metastrepsei" is even stronger, and can mean "to reverse". The Judaizers were not merely corrupting the gospel, they were actually reversing it. They were turning it back-to-front – from grace and freedom to works and bondage.

The two chief characteristics of the Judaizers were that they were changing the gospel and that was troubling the church. The two go together. To tamper with the gospel is always to trouble the church, because the church is founded on the gospel and lives by it. Christian believers best serve the church in all its endeavours by believing and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ as laid down by Him and taught by His chosen apostles.

The Reaction Of The Apostle Paul

In the churches of Galatia, Judaizing teachers were undermining and distorting the gospel, so that Paul's converts were turning away from it. The apostle's first reaction was one of surprise and astonishment. He wrote in Galatians 1:6 *"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ."* (NIV) It seemed to Paul that someone had *"bewitched"* them (Galatians 3:1), cast a spell over them, which was indeed the case. The apostle did not lay the blame with Satan, but by looking at the disastrous consequences of incorrect teaching, we can see the effects of Satan's deception of the Galatians by the dissemination of incorrect doctrine among the newly-converted believers. Satan will use any means at his disposal to lead believers astray, whether by enticement to sin and disobedience, or by deception with incorrect doctrine.

The Apostle's second reaction was indignation against the Judaizers. Using his apostolic authority he pronounced a solemn curse on them, as recorded in Galatians 1:8 and 9 : *"But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach any gospel to you other than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if*

anyone preaches any gospel to you other than what you have received, let him be accursed."

The Greek word twice translated "*accursed*" is "anathema". It was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to apply to a divine ban, that is, the curse of God pronounced upon anyone or anything commanded by God to be destroyed. The account of Achan in Joshua chapter 7 is an example of this. When Jericho and all that was in it was accursed by the Lord and decreed to be destroyed, Achan secretly took some of the spoil and hid it in his tent. For this sin God punished Israel by allowing them to be defeated in their attack upon Ai. When Achan confessed his guilt, and the stolen spoil was discovered, he and his family were stoned to death, and their bodies, together with their property, were destroyed by fire.

The apostle Paul in his indignation, desired that these deceivers should come under the divine ban, curse or anathema; that is, he expressed the wish that God's judgment would fall upon them. The implication seems to be that the Galatian churches should refuse to receive or listen to them because they were persons whom God had rejected. We are reminded here of 2 John 10 and 11: "*If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house or greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.*"

What are we to think about the apostle's anathema? Some have criticised it adversely and have said that Paul was attacking his opponents in a personal way. But such a personal attack was not the apostle's intention, as we can judge from two main facts. The first is that the curse expressed by the apostle is universal in its application. It rests upon any and every teacher who distorts the gospel and teaches the distortion. The use of "*anyone*" in Galatians 1:9 means that there is no exception. In Galatians 1:8 the apostle even applied the anathema to angels as well as people, and applied it to himself also: "*But even if we....*" So impartial was Paul's zeal for the gospel, that he even invoked the curse of God upon himself, if he should ever be guilty of distorting or undermining the gospel. The inclusion of himself in his strong comments cleared him from any accusation of personal attack or animosity.

The second fact that demonstrates that the apostle's anathema was not personal is that it was written deliberately and with acknowledged responsibility to God. It is expressed twice in verses 8 and 9 of Galatians 1. John Brown, a nineteenth century Scottish commentator, wrote in 1853, "The apostle repeats it to show the Galatians that this was no excessive, exaggerated statement, into which passion had hurried him, but his calmly formed and unalterable opinion."

Paul continued in verse 10, "*Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.*" It would seem from these words that the Judaisers had accused Paul of trying to please people, and tailoring his message to suit his audience. But this outspoken condemnation of the Judaisers is not the language of one trying to please his audience. Paul was first and foremost a servant of Jesus Christ, and his avowed intention was to please his master Jesus, and not people. Therefore, as a servant of the Lord Jesus and responsible to Him, he chose his words carefully in delivering his solemn anathema.

There are two main reasons why Paul felt so strongly and used such direct fear-inspiring language. Firstly, the glory of Jesus Christ was at risk of defamation. To make human works necessary to salvation, even as supplementary to the work of Christ, is derogatory to Christ's finished work. The notion implies Christ's work was in some respects unsatisfactory or inadequate, and that humans need to add to it to improve it. Such a notion makes Christ's sacrifice on the cross of no effect - "*If justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose.*" - Galatians 2:21

Secondly, why Paul felt so keenly about this matter was that people's salvation was at risk of negation. He was writing, not about some trivial or unimportant matter, but about fundamental doctrine essential to salvation. He was not concentrating merely on those who hold incorrect views, but on those who teach error and mislead others by their teaching. Paul well knew and understood that the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation. Therefore to corrupt the gospel and undermine it was to destroy the way of salvation, and ruin the prospects of those who might otherwise have been saved.

The Lord Jesus Himself gave a solemn warning to anyone who causes others to stumble, saying, *“It would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea.”* - Mark 9:42.

It seems pertinent to say here that today we live in an age in which it is often considered narrow-minded and intolerant to have strong opinions of one's own, and that it is not acceptable to disagree strongly with anyone else. Where the truth of the gospel and the glory of Christ are concerned, we should never shirk the responsibility of declaring our understandings of the Scriptures and the free grace of God, and never compromise or water down the fundamental truth that we are saved by God's grace and the finished work of Jesus Christ, without any obligation or merit on our part except faith and obedience to the best of our abilities as unprofitable servants.

The lesson which stands out in verses 6 to 10 of Galatians 1 is that there is only one gospel. There is a popular view in these latter days that there are many different ways to God, and times have changed greatly since the gospel of Christ was founded and preached in the first century AD. The gospel must be adapted, it is sometimes said, to make it relevant to the twenty-first century.

Paul would not have endorsed these notions, nor should we. There is only one gospel, and this gospel does not change. As Paul wrote, any teaching that claims to be *“another gospel”* is *“not another,”* that is, not a worthwhile alternative. In order to make his point, Paul used two adjectives: “heteros” (“another” meaning “different”), and “allos” (“another” meaning “a second”). The RSV makes the matter clear: *“You are turning to a different gospel – not that there is another gospel.”* There is not another gospel nor is there a second gospel; there is only one. The message of the deceivers was not an alternative gospel, it was a perverted message which undermined the saving work of Christ.

How can we know and recognise the true gospel? We know and recognise the gospel from its nature or substance (what it is) and from its source or origin (where it originates or comes from). The gospel is the message of God's grace, His freely-given unmerited favour to the human race. If any admixture is taught by anyone, whether it be the Mosaic Law or any implication that people can contribute anything to their

salvation by their own merit, the gospel of grace is being corrupted. That is the first criterion by which we recognise the gospel. The second criterion concerns the gospel's origin. The true gospel is the message proclaimed by the Lord Jesus and His chosen apostles, in other words the New Testament.

Paul's anathema was pronounced on anyone who preaches a message "*contrary to that which we preached to you*" or "*contrary to that which you received*". The standard criterion by which all teachings and opinions are to be tested is the original gospel, the message recorded in the New Testament. Any teaching or system of belief "*other than*" (AV, NIV, REB), or "*contrary to*" (RSV) or "*at variance with*" (NEB) the gospel of Jesus and His apostles is to be rejected.

It follows from this that anyone who rejects the apostolic gospel, no matter who he or she may be, is himself or herself to be rejected. An evangelist may even appear to be "*an angel from heaven,*" but if the message preached is not the true gospel, the message and the messenger are to be rejected. We are to judge the message and the messenger by the gospel; we are not to judge the gospel by the messenger or the message. Dr. Alan Cole in his commentary on Galatians wrote (pp. 41,59) "The outward person of the messenger does not validate his message; rather, the nature of the message validates the messenger."

So the two tests to be applied to views and comments of a religious or theological nature are as follows. Firstly, do the views and commands fully accord with the freely-given grace of God? Secondly, are such views and comments in full accordance with the teaching of the New Testament?

If the views and comments pass these two tests, then we must accept them and hold them fast. But if they do not, we must reject them and those who proclaim them, however distinguished the commentators may be. We must not make compromises, as the Judaising teachers did, nor turn from the true message, as the Galatians did, but strive ever to live according to the true gospel, and make it known to others.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOURCE OF PAUL'S GOSPEL

"But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man.

For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.

And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter and remained with him fifteen days.

But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

(Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie).

Afterwards I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ.

But they were hearing only, "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy".

And they glorified God in me." - Galatians 1:11 - 24

In the comments on Galatians 1:6 to 10, it was said that there is only one true gospel, and that this gospel, as presented and taught by Paul, is the criterion by which all opinions and teachings are to be tested.

The source of the gospel that Paul preached and taught will now be examined. How did Paul, a zealous and devoted Jew, come to know and embrace it?

He wrote in Galatians 1:11 and 12:

“But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

The gospel Paul preached was “no human invention,” as J.B. Phillips translated it, nor did Paul receive it from a human teacher, as a tradition handed down, nor was he instructed in it by a teacher or teachers. Instead, “it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Paul’s mission and his authority came directly to him from God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul was claiming that the gospel he preached, which was being questioned by the Judaizing teachers and forsaken by the Galatians, was neither an invention, nor a tradition handed down, but a revelation from God and Jesus Christ. As John Brown in his book “*An Exposition of the Epistle to the Galatians*” wrote (page 58), “Jesus Christ took him under his own immediate tuition. So Paul is able to declare that the gospel he preached was and is my gospel.” (As he also wrote in Romans 16:25). It was not Paul’s because he made it up, but because it had been specifically revealed to him. Paul’s message was and is God’s message, his gospel was and is God’s gospel, his words were inspired words from God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul then proceeded to confirm his remarkable claims from historical and autobiographical evidence. Paul outlined three situations in his religious development: the situation before his conversion, the situation at his conversion, and the situation after his conversion.

The Situation Before His Conversion

“For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.” - Galatians 1:13 and 14.

In these two verses, Paul described his pre-conversion situation in Judaism when he was still a practising Jew. He mentioned two aspects of his former days: his persecution of the church, which he subsequently came to know as “the church of God,” and his zeal for the traditions of his fathers.

In both activities he was fanatical. He went from house to house in Jerusalem seizing any Christians he could find, both men and women, and dragged them off to prison; (Acts 8:3) and when Christians were put to death he cast his vote against them. (Acts 26:10) Not only did he persecute the church, he was determined to destroy it. - Galatians 1:13

Paul was equally fanatical in his enthusiasm for Jewish traditions. He had been brought up according to *“the strictest sect”* of the Jewish religion, (Acts 26:5) that is, as a Pharisee, and that is how he lived.

Such was the state of Saul of Tarsus before his conversion. A person in that mental and emotional state would not consider changing his mind or even being persuaded by others who would want him to change. Paul was so zealous and fanatical that he was beyond reason or persuasion and was rigidly set in his thought and action. It would have taken a miracle to change him, and that is what happened. We read of it in Acts 9:3 to 22.

The Situation At His Conversion

“But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles...” - Galatians 1:15 and 16 (NIV).

The contrast between verses 13 and 14 and verses 15 and 16 of Galatians 1 is dramatic and sudden. In verses 13 and 14 Paul was speaking about himself, but in verses 15 and 16 he spoke of God, *“Who set me apart before I was born,”* (RSV. LB. Today's EV) *“called me by his grace to reveal his Son in me.”* Paul was bent on a course of persecution and destruction of the church, but God stopped him and changed his life completely.

Paul outlined three stages of his conversion. Firstly, Paul revealed to us that God chose him before he was born, as He did with Jacob (Romans 9:10 to 13) and Jeremiah. (Jeremiah 1:5) Paul, before he was born, was set apart to be an apostle.

Secondly, God called Paul as an act of grace; God's undeserved mercy and love. Paul was fighting against God, against Christ and against the early Christians.

He did not ask for mercy and did not deserve mercy, but God freely granted mercy to Paul by His grace.

Thirdly, Paul wrote, God “*was pleased to reveal his Son in me.*” What was revealed to Paul, beginning on the Damascus road, was Jesus Christ, God’s Son. Paul had been persecuting Christ because he did not believe in Him, but his eyes were opened and he understood that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God and the Saviour of the human race.

The whole experience was both an external and an internal revelation, because Paul claimed that he saw the risen Christ. (1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8 and 9) But the experience was also a mental and spiritual revelation, because God “*shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*” (2 Corinthians 4:6) The revelation was given within Paul’s heart and mind and became a part of him so that he was able to make it known to others, especially the Gentiles.

Paul’s words are very compelling. He had been a fanatical opponent of the gospel, but God called him and made him a preacher of the very gospel that he had so strenuously and bitterly opposed. The conversion of Paul, his call and the revelation of Christ to him, were all the work of God. Neither his apostolic call nor his message came from any human source. Nor did he receive instruction from any human source after his conversion, as will become apparent later.

The Situation After His Conversion

*“...I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,
nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before
me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.
Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and
remained with him fifteen days.
But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord’s
brother.
(Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before
God, I do not lie).
Afterwards I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia;
and I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which
were in Christ.
But they were hearing only, ‘He who formerly persecuted us
now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy’.
And they glorified God in me.” - Galatians 1:16 - 24.*

In this section, the apostle said emphatically, *“I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,”* meaning that he did not consult or speak with any other person. We know that Ananias was sent to him (Acts 9:10), but Paul did not discuss the gospel with him nor with any of the apostles in Jerusalem. He then provided further details of his movements and travels, revealing that he did not spend time in Jerusalem, and therefore could not have gained his knowledge of the gospel from the other apostles. He told the Galatians of three separate and successive periods after his conversion, proving that he did not spend time with the other eleven apostles, nor could he have gained his knowledge of the gospel message from them.

Paul’s Journey To Arabia

In Acts 9:20 we are told that Paul spent a short time preaching in Damascus. This suggests that he knew enough of the gospel to declare and proclaim it. It must have been soon after this short time in Damascus that Paul went into Arabia. He did not tell us where he went in Arabia or why he went there. Galatians 1:18 tells us that he stayed in Arabia for three years.

It seems to me that the apostle went there to meditate on the Old Testament Scriptures, on the ministry and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, on the experience of his conversion and on the grace of God that had been revealed and granted to him. It also seems reasonable to think (suppose) that while he was there, the Lord Jesus gave him revelations and instructions which He had given to the other apostles during His earthly ministry, such as those mentioned in 2 Corinthians 12:1 to 4 and 1 Corinthians 11:23 to 26.

Paul’s Brief Visit To Jerusalem

The occasion was probably the one referred to in Acts 9:16 after he had been secretly smuggled out of Damascus by means of a basket lowered down the city wall. Paul made no secret about this visit to Jerusalem, but did not attach great importance to it.

It took place *“after three years,”* meaning three years after his conversion, by which time he would have had the gospel revealed to him. We need to keep in mind that in those early years the gospels had not been written, so Paul had to rely on the revelations that God gave to him through Jesus Christ.

When he reached Jerusalem, he saw only two of the apostles, Peter and James, whom he went to see, but did not see any of the other apostles. Perhaps the other apostles were absent from Jerusalem, or too busy, or they may even at that stage have been frightened of him, as Acts 9:26 records.

Paul was in Jerusalem for only fifteen days. This brief visit would not have provided him enough time to learn from Peter the whole gospel. In any case, much of the two weeks in Jerusalem were spent in preaching, as we are told in Acts 9:28 and 29. Paul would no doubt have talked about Jesus and the gospel in his short time with Peter, but could not have obtained the gospel from the apostles in Jerusalem. There was simply not enough time to have had it explained to him or for him to remember it.

Paul's Journey To Syria And Cilicia

This visit to northern parts corresponds to Acts 9:30, where we learn that Paul, whose life was already being threatened, was brought by brethren to Caesarea, from where they *“sent him off to Tarsus”* which is in Cilicia. Paul said here that he *“went into the regions of Syria”* as well, which suggests that he may have revisited Damascus and called at Antioch on his way to Tarsus. Whatever may have happened, Paul was saying that he was in the far north, nowhere near Jerusalem.

It follows from this that Paul *“was still not known by sight to the churches of Christ in Judea.”* (Galatians 1:22) They knew him only by hearsay *“that he which persecuted us in times past now preaches the faith which once he tried to destroy.”* (Galatians 1:23) When the churches learnt this *“they glorified God in me.”* (Galatians 1:24) They did not glorify Paul, but glorified God in the grace shown to Paul.

It was not until fourteen years later, (Galatians 2:1) presumably fourteen years after his conversion, that Paul revisited Jerusalem and had longer discussions with the other apostles. But by that time Paul's gospel was fully developed. During the fourteen-year period between his conversion and that second visit to Jerusalem, Paul had paid only one brief visit to that city, and had met only Peter and James. The rest of the time he had spent in distant Arabia, Syria and Cilicia. His experiences were clear evidence of the independence of his knowledge of the gospel.

What Paul said in Galatians 1:13 to 24 may be summarised in this way. The fanatical, persecuting conduct of his career before his conversion, the divine instructions he received at the time of his conversion, and his almost total isolation from the Jerusalem church leaders after his conversion, combined to demonstrate that Paul's message was not from any human source but from God and the Lord Jesus. This historical evidence could not be questioned, but nevertheless the apostle confirmed and guaranteed it by a solemn affirmation, "*...the things which I write unto you, before God, I do not lie.*" - Galatians 1:20

Some modern-day theologians reject Paul's teaching, and claim he did not understand the spirit of the Master, and did damage to Christianity by wiping out many of the traces of Jesus' footsteps. Others again say that Paul was just an ordinary man, and his opinions were no better than anyone else's. His views, they say, were simply those of first-century Christianity.

Such claims fly in the face of Paul's assertion: "*But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.*" - Galatians 1:11 and 12

To reject or try to modify Paul's inspired words is simply heresy. Paul asserted many times in Galatians and other letters written by him that his gospel is not man's but God's. Therefore, to reject Paul's message is to reject God and His only-begotten Son.

CHAPTER 4

THERE IS ONLY ONE GOSPEL

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

And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.

Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.

But this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

But from those who seemed to be something – whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favouritism to no man – for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me.

But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter

(for he who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me towards the Gentiles).

And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do." - Galatians 2:1 - 10

The bane of Paul's witness and ministry was the insidious and undermining activities of the Judaising teachers. They followed him wherever he went. No sooner had he planted the gospel in some locality, than those teachers began gainsaying and perverting his message and disrupting the church he had founded. Further, in order to discredit Paul's message, they also challenged his authority.

This matter is relevant to us because Paul's detractors have successors in Christian communities today. They hold that

we do not need, in the twenty-first century, to pay much attention to his writings, because they were written nearly two thousand years ago when social customs, circumstances and the environment were very different.

Such detractors fail to remember or acknowledge that Paul was a chosen apostle of Jesus Christ, especially and uniquely called, commissioned, authorised and inspired to teach and preach in His name. The detractors ignore Paul's own claim (Galatians 1:11 and 12) that he received his gospel not from man but from Jesus Christ.

One of the ways in which some of Paul's detractors tried to undermine his authority was to allege that his gospel was different from Peter's, and indeed from the views of all the other apostles at Jerusalem. Those people, mainly Judaisers, were endeavouring to isolate Paul, and drive a wedge of disagreement between his teachings and those of Peter and the other apostles. They were, in effect, trying to disrupt the unity of the apostles' work and teaching, implying that the apostles contradicted one another.

Paul addressed himself to these insinuations. He had already shown that his gospel came from God and Jesus and not from any human source. He then showed, in chapter two, that his gospel was exactly the same as that of the other apostles. To establish the independence of his gospel, Paul stressed that he paid only one visit to Jerusalem in fourteen years, and that this visit lasted only fifteen days. Then, to demonstrate that his gospel was identical with the gospel of all the apostles, he stressed that when he later paid a longer visit to Jerusalem, the gospel that he preached was endorsed and approved by them.

That second visit of Paul to Jerusalem was a very significant occasion in the development and growth of the early church. Paul wrote, *"Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain."* - Galatians 2:1 and 2

There were two important aspects of this visit, his companions and his message.

Paul's companions were Barnabas and Titus. Barnabas was a Jew (although he was associated with Paul in his mission to the Gentiles in Antioch and later on the first missionary journey), while Titus was Greek, an uncircumcised Gentile. The Judaising teachers were challenging Paul's mission to the Gentiles by insisting that Gentile converts be circumcised and obey the Law of Moses, which claims Paul vigorously and authoritatively opposed.

Paul's gospel, which he preached to the Gentiles, he then laid before the other apostles. This was not his reason for going to Jerusalem, because, as he told us, he "*went up by revelation.*" This must mean that God told him to go, but we are not told any details about this revelation.

The consultation between Paul and the other apostles was a small and private affair, and not an official conference or council, but the consultation did take place. Paul "*laid before*" the Jerusalem apostles the gospel that he was preaching to the Gentiles, and he stated that he did it "*lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain*". This certainly does not mean that Paul had any doubts or misgivings about his gospel which he had been preaching for fourteen years, but rather that he feared that his ministry might be rendered of no effect by the Judaisers. The reason that Paul laid his gospel before the Jerusalem apostles was to make clear the undermining influence of the Judaisers and to overthrow their insidious influence.

The situation was really tense and crucial with important consequences for the Christian Church. Paul took with him a Gentile companion and an account of his mission to the Gentiles. What would be the reaction of the Jerusalem apostles? Would they accept Titus as a brother? Would they endorse Paul's gospel or attempt to modify it in some way? Would the liberty in Christ be maintained, or would the new Church lapse into bondage and condemnation? Did the Judaising teachers have any ground for their insinuations that there was disunity among the apostles?

Paul told the Galatians what happened at that crucial consultation. His Gentile companion was not compelled to be circumcised (Galatians 2: 6 to 10). On the contrary, Titus was accepted and Paul's gospel was accepted also. A significant victory was won for the truth of the gospel, and the insinuations that there was a rift in the ranks of the apostles was shown to be

untrue and with no substance at all. Paul's statements will now be examined in more detail.

Paul's Companion

"Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. But this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you." - Galatians 2:3 to 5

It was courageous of Paul to take Titus with him, to introduce him, a Gentile, into the headquarters of the Jerusalem Church. But the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit, and understood that Titus was to be accepted as a fellow believer in accordance with the truth of the gospel. That was Paul's intention, to establish the truth that Jews and Gentiles are accepted by God on the same basis – faith in Jesus Christ – without discrimination of any kind. - Galatians 3:28

Such was the issue. The truth was established, *"Titus...was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek."* It seems, however, that there was strong pressure for Titus to be circumcised, not from the apostles but from *"false brethren"* who had somehow intruded into the private conference with the apostles. They must have been Judaisers, and Paul has some stern words to say about them. J.B. Phillips described them as interlopers *"who wormed their way into our meeting"*. In Paul's view they were spies *"who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage"*. They evidently tried to insist that Titus be circumcised. Their insistence was the policy of the Judaisers, as Acts 15:1 describes it for us, *"Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."*

Paul saw the issue clearly. The issue was a matter of fundamental importance regarding the truth of the gospel, that of Christian freedom versus Law Covenant bondage. The Christian has been set free from the Law, and the Christian's acceptance by God depends entirely on faith in Jesus Christ, the only way to God, as Peter has testified in Acts 4:12. To introduce the works of the Law, and make our acceptance by God depend on obedience to rules and ritual, was bringing free

people into bondage again. Titus was in fact a test case. He was an uncircumcised Gentile, but he was a converted Christian. He believed in Jesus and had been accepted by God, and that, said Paul, was enough. Nothing further was necessary for salvation, as the Council of Jerusalem was later to confirm, as recorded in Acts 15.

Paul stood firm. The truth of the gospel was the fundamental issue, and he was determined to maintain it. He resisted the pressure of the Judaisers saying *“to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.”*

Paul’s Relationship With The Apostles

It seems that Paul had a private interview with James, the Lord’s brother, Peter and John, as he told us in Galatians 2:9. Paul referred to them as *“those who were of reputation”* (Galatians 2:6). He was not being derogatory to them, as he had acknowledged them already as *“apostles before me,”* (Galatians 1:17) and told us in Galatians 2:9 that they gave him *“the right hand of fellowship.”*

Paul seemed to have had in mind the incorrect claims of the Judaising teachers that the Jerusalem apostles were somehow superior to Paul, because they had been with Jesus during His earthly ministry, which, of course, Paul had not. This was probably behind Paul’s comments in Galatians 2:6, *“...those who seemed to be something – whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favouritism to no man – for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me.”*

Paul was not showing any disrespect for the apostles and their authority, he was simply indicating that he accepted their office as apostles, but was not personally overawed by them as persons. They were men, like himself, and they should not have been considered superior to him, as the Judaisers were alleging that they were. He made the point in verse 6 of Galatians 2 that God does not show partiality.

The Outcome Of The Consultation

Paul mentioned two results, one negative and the other positive. The negative outcome was seen in Galatians 2:6, they *“added nothing to me.”*

In other words the Jerusalem apostles found nothing lacking or defective in Paul's gospel. They changed nothing in the gospel that Paul was preaching to the Gentiles.

The positive outcome of the consultation was that the other apostles gave to Paul (and Barnabas) the right hand of fellowship. They realised that they and Paul had been entrusted with the same gospel. The only difference was that different spheres or cultures were allocated to them in which to preach the gospel. There was only one gospel to be preached to the Jews and the Gentiles. The apostles and Paul and Barnabas shook hands on their missions and the grace that had been shown to them all. The eleven apostles recognised that they were to go to the Jews, while Paul (and Barnabas) were to go to the Gentiles, although neither commission was exclusive to either group.

So we learn that on his second visit to Jerusalem, Paul encountered two groups whose attitudes to him differed completely. The false brethren, the Judaising teachers, disagreed with Paul's gospel and preaching and tried to compel Titus to be circumcised. Paul refused to submit to them. The apostles, on the other hand, acknowledged the truth of Paul's gospel, and gave him their hand in fellowship and confirmation.

Some present-day Christians seem to think that a visit of Paul to Jerusalem in the first century AD, the matter of Titus being uncircumcised, a consultation between Paul and the Jerusalem apostles, are matters that seem remote and unrelated to twenty-first century issues. But this is not the case. Two principles of the utmost importance are involved here.

The first principle is that the truth of the gospel is one and unchanging. The whole New Testament presents this one gospel consistently. Some commentators speak of the "Pauline" gospel, the "Patrine" gospel and the "Johannine" gospel as though they were different from one another. Some even speak of "Paulinism" as if it were a different kind of Christianity. Sometimes people set Paul and James against each other as if they were putting forward contradictory teachings.

The above-mentioned commentators are seriously mistaken. The inspired New Testament writers did not contradict one another. Certainly there are differences in style,

and differences in emphasis because different audiences with differing situations and problems are involved. There was only one gospel, a recognisable body of doctrine taught by the apostles of Jesus Christ and preserved for us in the New Testament.

It is still so today. There is only one gospel to be believed and preached by any who choose. The gospel message has not changed over the centuries. Whether it is preached to young or old, Jew or Gentile, educated or uneducated, scientists or non-scientists, easterners or westerners, it is still the same. Presentation and exposition may vary, but the substance remains and must remain the same.

The second principle that is brought to our attention in Galatians 2 is that the truth of the gospel must be maintained. Paul was determined to resist the Judaisers who were undermining the truth of the gospel. He was even prepared, as we shall see in the next verses (11 to 14), to oppose Peter face to face when Peter acted in a manner contrary to the gospel. Paul was gentle with weaker brethren; he was ready to make concessions, as when later he circumcised Timothy; but on matters of principle, when the truth of the gospel was under challenge, he stood firm and would not yield any ground.

CHAPTER 5

PAUL'S CLASH WITH PETER AT ANTIOCH

"But when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? We who are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles, Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified."

- Galatians 2:11 -16

This episode was one of the most tense and dramatic confrontations in the whole of the New Testament. Two leading apostles of Jesus Christ were face to face in open conflict because of Peter's behaviour which was contrary to Christian teaching and Christian conduct.

The episode took place in Antioch, the chief city of Syria, where the mission to the Gentiles began, and where the disciples were first called Christians. When Paul visited Jerusalem, Peter, James and John gave him the right hand of fellowship, but when Peter visited Antioch, Paul confronted him personally.

Paul and Peter were Christian men who knew what it is to be forgiven through Christ and to have received the Holy Spirit. They had both been mightily used by God, as we read in the book of Acts. In fact, the book of Acts can be roughly divided into two parts, the first part telling of Peter and his actions, the second part telling of Paul and his actions.

In spite of their training, the Apostle Paul was opposing the Apostle Peter and telling him he was to be blamed because he had separated himself from Gentile Christian believers and would no longer eat with them. Peter's offence was not in doctrine or preaching, but in conduct. J.B. Phillips translated the relevant passage as Peter's "*behaviour was a contradiction of the truth of the gospel.*" (verse 14)

Because two leading and highly influential apostles were in opposition, we should examine what each apostle did, why he did it, and what resulted from each apostle's actions.

The Conduct Of Peter

When Peter arrived in Antioch, he ate with Gentile Christians. J.B. Phillips wrote, "*He ... was in the habit of eating his meals with the Gentiles.*" Peter's old Jewish attitudes had been set aside, and he did not consider himself defiled or contaminated by contact with uncircumcised Gentile Christians in Antioch.

Then one day a group of Christian believers, all Jewish in origin and probably Pharisees (Acts 15:5) arrived in Antioch having come from Jerusalem. They came from James (Galatians 2:12), the leader of the church at Jerusalem. This does not mean that they had his authority, because James denied this in Acts 15:24, but rather that they claimed to have had his authority. They seemed to have given the impression that they came as delegates from the Apostle.

On their arrival in Antioch, they began to preach. "*Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.*" (Acts 15:1) It seems that they must have gone even further and insisted that it was improper for circumcised Jewish believers to sit with uncircumcised Gentile believers, even though the Gentiles had believed in Jesus and had been baptised.

These Judaising teachers succeeded in influencing the Apostle Peter with their incorrect teaching, because Peter, who had previously eaten with the Gentile Christians, then withdrew and separated himself from them.

Why did Peter do this and cause a division in the church at Antioch?

Why did he accede to the incorrect teachings of the “*certain men ... from James*”?

Only a comparatively short time previously, as recorded in Acts 10: 9 to 16, Peter had been given a direct, special revelation from God on this very subject. He had been on the rooftop of a house in Joppa one afternoon when he fell into a trance. He was given a vision of a sheet let down from heaven, held by its four corners, containing an assortment of creatures unclean under the Mosaic Law – birds, beasts and reptiles. He then heard a voice saying to him, “*Rise, Peter, kill and eat.*” (Acts 10:13) Peter objected, but the voice then said, “*What God has cleansed, you must not call common.*” - Acts 10:15

The vision was repeated three times, no doubt for emphasis. Peter wondered what the vision meant, but subsequently realised that he must accompany the Gentile messengers from the centurion Cornelius (Acts 10:17 to 48), and enter Cornelius’s house, an action that would have been unlawful for him as a Jew under the Law. In the sermon that Peter preached to Cornelius’s household he said, “*Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality.*” (Acts 10:34) When the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles who believed, Peter agreed that they must receive Christian baptism and be welcomed into the Christian Church.

We cannot think that Peter had forgotten the vision given to him at Joppa, and the conversion of the household of Cornelius. There is no suggestion in Galatians 2 that Peter had changed his mind. Paul told us why Peter acted as he did. He “*separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.*” (verse 12) “*And with him the rest of the Jews acted insincerely, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their insincerity.*” (verse 13) They were being hypocritical, doing something that was contrary to or different from their beliefs. They were behaving falsely.

Paul’s charge was serious but plain. Peter and the others who were following him were acting insincerely and not from personal conviction. They yielded to pressure out of fear of disapproval from a small pressure group. Peter believed the Gospel but failed to live up to his convictions. He failed to practise what he preached, and in this instance lacked the courage of his convictions.

Peter's conduct, in all probability, was derived from a tendency in his character to display rashness and impetuosity, for which he was strongly rebuked by Jesus from time to time. We call to mind the occasion when Jesus foretold to His disciples the events of His trial, death and resurrection, upon which Peter *"took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, God forbid it Lord. This must never happen to you."* (NRSV) Jesus' strong rebuke to Peter is recorded in Matthew 16:23 and Mark 8:33.

When Jesus began to wash His disciples' feet, Peter said to Jesus, *"You will never wash my feet."* (NRSV) Peter's words drew another stern rebuke from the Lord. - John 13:8 (NRSV)

When Jesus said to His disciples that they would desert Him, Peter said, *"Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you."* Further, Peter also said, *"Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you."* (Matthew 26:33 and 35 NRSV) As most of us know, Peter subsequently denied the Lord three times, as the Lord said he would.

Peter's tendency to rash and impetuous behaviour probably contributed to his impulsive action at Antioch in wrongly separating himself from Gentile brethren, for which conduct Paul rebuked him *"before them all."*

It is of great significance that Barnabas was carried away by the extent of the hypocrisy. Barnabas had stood firmly with Paul in Jerusalem, (verses 1 and 9) but then gave way in Antioch. If Paul had not taken his stand against Peter, the growth and development of the whole Christian Church would have been in danger of disintegration. The Church could have drifted into a Jewish backwater and foundered, or there could have been a permanent division between Gentile and Jewish Christians. Paul's outstanding courage in resisting Peter in Antioch preserved both the truth of the Gospel and the brotherhood of the Church.

The Conduct Of Paul

Paul *"withstood"* (KJV) or *"opposed"* (NIV, REV), Peter *"to his face"*. The reason for Paul's dramatic action was that Peter *"was to be blamed,"* that is, Peter was clearly in the wrong. Paul rebuked Peter *"before them all,"* (verse 13) meaning openly and publicly.

Paul knew that Peter was an apostle of Jesus Christ, and had been appointed before him (chapter 1 verse 17). He knew that Peter was one of the pillars of the church, to whom God had entrusted the Gospel to the circumcised. But in this matter of Peter's misconduct, Paul did not defer to Peter, and he did not shrink from contradicting and opposing him publicly. Peter's withdrawal from the Gentile believers was done openly for all to see, so Paul's rebuke had to be open and "*before them all,*" so that Peter's hypocritical conduct could be brought out into the open and made clear to everyone.

Paul acted as he did out of deep concern for the principle that Peter had set aside. The theological principle that was in danger of being discarded was "*the truth of the gospel,*" mentioned twice by Paul in Galatians chapter 2, verses 5 and 14. Paul stated that Peter and the "*rest of the Jews*" were "*not straightforward*" about the truth of the Gospel, that is, they were deviating from the truth by reverting to a requirement of the Law Covenant all of which had been abolished. - 2 Corinthians 3:13

The truth of the Gospel is the good news that sinners, all of them including ourselves, being guilty and alienated from God, may be freely pardoned and accepted because of God's grace. His free and unmerited favour, granted on the basis of faith in His Son's death and shed blood, and not by any merit or work of any or all of us.

The truth of the Gospel is the doctrine of justification (acceptance by God) by grace and faith alone, which Paul continued to explain in verses 15 to 17.

Paul would not allow or tolerate any deviation from this Gospel. In Galatians 1:8 and 9, as we have seen, Paul pronounced a clear and severe anathema on any who distort the truth of the Gospel. In Jerusalem he refused to submit to the Judaisers "*even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.*" (verse 5) Then, on this occasion in Antioch Paul withstood Peter to his face because Peter's conduct had contradicted this fundamental truth. Paul was determined to defend and uphold the truth of the Gospel, even at the cost of opposing and possibly humiliating a brother apostle.

How did Peter's withdrawal from the Gentiles contradict the truth of the Gospel?

Paul said to Peter in verses 15 and 16. *"We who are Jews by nature" ... know "that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ."* These words are part of what Paul said to Peter in Antioch. He was reminding Peter of the Gospel they both knew and held in common. They were agreed that God accepts the sinner through faith in Christ, in the efficacy of His death and shed blood. This is the way of salvation for all sinners, Jews and Gentiles alike. There is no distinction between them in the means of salvation.

God accepts Jews and Gentiles on the same terms, faith in Jesus Christ crucified, and puts no difference between them. In Christ, God has reconciled all believers to Himself, so Peter was blameworthy in withdrawing from Gentile believers whom God had reconciled. Peter should not have done so, and Paul told him plainly. The principle is well stated in Romans 15:7, *"Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God."*

Peter himself had been justified by faith in Jesus. He understood the doctrine of justification by faith and had believed and acted on it. He no longer observed the Law and Jewish food regulations. So Paul said to him, *"If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?"* (verse 14)

We are not told explicitly what happened as the result of Paul's action, but it seems that this incident in Antioch was largely instrumental in bringing about the Council in Jerusalem, described in Acts 15.

From Acts 15:1 and 2 we learn that the dissensions provoked by the Judaizers in Antioch were the immediate cause of the Jerusalem Council. Paul, Barnabas and certain others were appointed by the Church to go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this very question. An important decision of the Council was that circumcision was not to be required of Gentile believers. Thus it seems, partly as a result of the stand that Paul took against Peter in Antioch, the authority of the Gospel message had been re-affirmed.

Conclusion.

What can we learn from this clash between Peter and Paul in Antioch?

We learn that we must understand and apply in our lives the truth of the Gospel. The Gospel is the good news of the justification of sinners by God's grace. The Gospel tells us that the sinner's acceptance with God is by faith only, and not by works.

In our Christian walk it is not enough to believe the Gospel, as Peter did, or even that we strive to preserve it, as Paul and the Jerusalem apostles did, and the Judaizing teachers did not. We must apply the truth of the Gospel in our lives, which Peter failed to do in Antioch. Peter knew that faith in Jesus was the only condition on which God accepts sinners, but under pressure from Judaizers he added circumcision as an extra condition on which he was prepared to have fellowship with others, thus contradicting the Gospel.

Today, there are Christian bodies and people who repeat Peter's mistake. They refuse to have fellowship, or admit to their organization, any who do not meet certain conditions or subscribe to certain doctrines and practices. Such policies are an affront to the Gospel. Justification is by faith alone. No-one has any right to require doctrinal conformity or any denominational, racial or social conditions. The only barrier to communion with God, and with one another, is unbelief, a lack of faith in God through Jesus Christ.

When issues are trivial, Christians must be as pliable as possible. There are issues and understandings of the Scriptures that bring about separation among Christian groups, but the truth of the Gospel is fundamental. If the truth of the Gospel is under threat of contradiction, we and all sincere Christians must stand our ground. If the truth of the Gospel is contradicted or diluted, we and all true Christians must clearly register our opposition.

CHAPTER 6

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE

"We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners from among the Gentiles,

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found to be sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not!

For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain." - Galatians 2:15 - 21

Verses 15 and 16 in the above-quoted passage were included in the comments in the previous chapter, but are repeated to enable us to understand more clearly the central message of Paul's letter. In these verses, an important word occurs for the first time in the letter. It is the word "*justified*", which is central to the message of Paul's letter, central to the Gospel preached by Paul, and central to the Christian religion itself. The word occurs three times in verse 16, once in verse 17, while the noun "*justification*" (RSV) occurs in verse 21 (translated as "*righteousness*" in the KJV, NKJV, RV, NIV, NEB). The Jerusalem Bible has "...*if the law can justify us...*" It seems that "*justification*" (Strong 1343) is a better translation than "*righteousness*", though "*righteousness*" is certainly not incorrect, because of righteousness imputed through justification.

In this momentous passage, Paul revealed and expounded the great doctrine of justification by faith. It is the good news, revealed for the first time to be available to all who believe in Jesus Christ, that sinful men and women may be

considered or reckoned righteous by God, not because of their works, but because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

Martin Luther in his "*Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*" (page 101) wrote, 'This is the truth of the gospel. It is also the principal article of all Christian doctrine, wherein the knowledge of all godliness consisteth. Most necessary it is, therefore, that we should know this article well, teach it unto others, and beat it into their heads continually.'

In other places he referred to it as the 'chief' (page 95) the 'chiefest' (pages 114, 121) and 'the most principal and special article of Christian doctrine' (page 426), for it is this doctrine 'which maketh true Christians indeed' (page 143). He added, 'If the article of justification be once lost, then is all true Christian doctrine lost' (page 26).

If, as has been said, the doctrine of justification is central to the Christian religion, it is vital that we understand it. 'Justification' is a legal term, and is the complete opposite of 'condemnation'. 'Condemnation' means the declaration of a person as guilty, whereas 'justification' is the declaration of a person as innocent, or not guilty. In Scripture, justification refers to God's gracious act of undeserved favour by which He declares and considers a sinner as acceptable to Him, not only pardoning or acquitting him or her, but accepting him or her as righteous, and dealing with each believer as though he or she were righteous.

Some people find Paul's language difficult to understand, and his argument intricate and complex. Paul was writing about a universal human need, as relevant now as it was two thousand years ago. We can follow Paul's message clearly if we understand that God is righteous and we are not. This basic situation means that human beings are alienated from God, and are under His judgment. Human beings were alienated from fellowship with God when Adam sinned, and are unable to approach Him or appeal to Him. The Apostle Paul wrote, "*for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?*" - 2 Corinthians 6:14 (KJV).

This factual state poses the most urgent situation facing human beings, which Bildad the Shuhite asked centuries ago, "*How then can man be righteous before God?*" - Job 25:4

Paul in Galatians addressed the question of how a condemned person can be justified. He expounded the doctrine of justification by faith (verses 15 and 16), then supported his exposition by argument (verses 17 to 21), dealing with the most common objection to it and demonstrating the utter impossibility of any alternative.

Paul's Exposition

Paul's exposition was in the form of a contrast between the Judaisers' doctrine of justification by works of the Law, and the Christian doctrine of justification by faith. He repudiated the Judaisers' doctrine and confirmed the Christian doctrine which he had already established.

The Doctrine Of Justification By Works Of The Law

By '*the Law*' is meant all God's commandments to the nation of Israel, and by '*works of the Law*' is meant all acts done in obedience to the Law given by God through Moses. Devout and sincere Jews thought that they could be justified by obeying the Law.

The Judaising teachers believed this, and professed to believe in Jesus, but also wanted to follow Moses and the Law given through him as well. They maintained that the believer must do everything that the Law commanded and refrain from everything that the Law forbade. They held that the believer must keep the ten commandments, love and serve the living God and have no other gods in any form. The believer must reverence God's name, keep the Sabbath and honour his or her parents. Adultery, murder, theft and covetousness must be renounced and avoided, and false witness must never be given. The believer must be circumcised and join the Jewish church, must fast and pray and give alms.

If all these things were done without fail, the believer would have been accepted by God and justified by "*the works of the Law.*" The Jewish believer had also to observe the many sacrifices as commanded, and all the ritual pertaining to uncleanness and personal hygiene. Such was the position of the Jew under the Law Covenant.

Paul described Jew and Judaizer in Romans 10:3 as "*seeking to establish their own ... righteousness.*" This belief is the fundamental principle of every religious and atheistic system in the world today except New Testament Christianity. It is a

popular belief because it tells people that if they really try hard and persevere, they will succeed in reaching the aim of their system of belief.

But those beliefs are gross deceptions propounded by Satan, the *“father of lies”* as he was designated by the Lord Jesus in John 8:44. Nobody has ever been justified by the works of the Law because nobody has been able to keep them perfectly. A strict adherence to the works of the Law is beyond us. No-one except Jesus Christ has been able to keep the Law perfectly. The Apostle told us in verse 16, no doubt alluding to Psalm 143:2, that *“by the works of the law shall no one be justified.”* It is surely amazing that so many well-intentioned people have imagined that they could please God and gain salvation in this way.

The Doctrine Of Justification Through Faith In Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ came into the world as a man to live and to die. On earth He lived the only life of sinless obedience to the Law which has ever been lived. He died on the cross for our law-breaking, our sin, because the penalty for law-breaking, for sin, is death. All that is required of us, and all people, is to acknowledge our sin and inability to save ourselves, repent, and put all our trust in Jesus Christ to save us.

Faith in Jesus Christ consists of both intellectual conviction and personal commitment. The expression in verse 16, *“we have believed in Christ Jesus”* should read literally *“we have believed into (Greek “eis”) Christ Jesus.”* Belief, then, is an act of conviction and committal, believing into Jesus and coming to God through Him as our Mediator, and asking for grace and mercy to continue to walk *“in newness of life.”*
- Romans 6:4

Paul told us three times in verse 16 that justification is granted to the believer *“through faith in Jesus Christ.”* His triple statement leaves us in no doubt about the matter, to 'beat it into our heads' as Martin Luther wrote. The threefold statement is not, however, monotonous, but on an ascending scale of emphasis: first general, then personal, and finally universal.

Paul wrote, *“knowing that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.”* Paul did not have anyone in particular in mind, just any man or any woman, people in general.

His statement is clear and authoritative – not simply a matter of opinion. He had spent much of the first two chapters of this letter defending his apostolic authority, and then threw the full weight of his authority behind his statement. He claimed that his Gospel was “*not man’s gospel,*” (Galatians 1:11) but was, and is, God’s Gospel revealed to him by Jesus Christ.

Paul’s second statement in verse 16 was personal: “*...even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law...*” Paul was saying that he and other believers had proved this to be the case by personal experience. Paul was setting forth a doctrine which he himself had put to the test. Certainty about the Gospel is more than intellectual, it can be verified by experience in our lives.

Paul’s third statement in verse 16 is universal. Scripture confirms the theological principle and the personal experience. The Apostle quoted Psalm 143:2, as he did in Romans 3:20, “*Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight:*” The Greek original refers to “*all flesh,*” that is, all human beings without exception. Whatever our religious up-bringing, education, social status or race, the way of salvation is the same. No-one can be justified by works of the Law; all flesh must be justified through faith in Christ.

Paul’s Argument

Paul’s exposition is plain and clear. But it was challenged in Paul’s day, and still is being challenged today. So Paul then turned to argument. Firstly he outlined the argument which his critics used in an endeavour to overthrow his teaching, then secondly he put forward the argument which he used to overthrow his critics’ doctrine and establish his, given to him by God through Christ.

“*But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves are found to be sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.*” (Galatians 2:17 and 18) These verses are not easily understood, and have been differently interpreted. Paul’s critics argued that Paul’s doctrine of justification through Christ alone, apart from works of the law, is a dangerous doctrine. It weakens a person’s sense of moral responsibility.

If a person can be accepted through faith in Christ only, without any necessity to do good works, he could be being encouraged to break the law.

The things which Paul destroyed were surely the requirements of the Law Covenant. People today still argue like this, saying, if God justifies bad people, what is the point of being good? Can't we do as we like and live as we please?

Paul's first response to such critics was to deny their claims with indignation - "*God forbid.*" (RV) He specifically denied the allegation that he was guilty of making Christ the agent or author of people's sins. By saying "*I make myself a transgressor*" he meant "If after I am justified I still commit sin, it is my fault, not Christ's. I have only myself to blame, Christ is never to blame."

Paul then proceeded to refute his critics' argument. Their claim that justification by faith encourages a continuance in sin was absurd. They grossly misunderstood the Gospel of justification. Justification is not a legal abstraction or change of status in which a person's character is left unchanged. Our justification takes place when we belong to Christ in faith. Anyone united to Christ is never the same person again. He or she cannot go back to the old life, sinning as he or she pleases, but has been permanently changed. Such a person has become a new creature and has begun a new life.

Paul then enfolded this amazing change which comes over somebody who is justified in Christ. He described it in terms of a death and resurrection. Twice in verses 19 and 20 he wrote of this dying and rising to life again. Both take place through commitment to Christ. It is Christ's complete freedom from sin and the bondage of the Law that we share, so that, like Paul, we are not in bondage to the Law, but to sin, and have been freed from sin by Christ's sacrifice. The demands of divine justice for sin and the Law were satisfied in the death of Christ. Paul then stated, "*...it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*"

Perhaps now it is clearer why a Christian who is "*justified in Christ*" is not free to sin. In Christ "*old things are passed way*" and "*all things are become new.*" - 2 Corinthians 5:17 (KJV)

We live our new lives through faith in Christ, and it is really Christ who lives in us, giving us new desires for holiness, for God, and for the heavenly inheritance promised to believers.

We still commit sin because we are fallen human beings, but we do not want to. The whole tenor of our lives has changed. Paul made his message highly personal – *“Christ lives in me”* and *“Christ gave himself for me.”* No Christian who has grasped these truths could ever contemplate returning to the old life of ignorance and unbelief.

In verse 21, Paul succinctly overthrew his critics’ arguments. *“I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”* The two foundations of the Christian religion are the grace of God and the death and resurrection of Christ. The Christian Gospel is the Gospel of the grace of God. The Christian faith is the faith of Christ crucified and raised to eternal life. So if anyone claims that justification is by works, and that he or she can earn his or her salvation by deeds, he or she is undermining the foundations of the Christian religion. Such a position nullifies the grace of God, because if salvation is by works, it is not by grace; and Christ’s death is made superfluous because if salvation is our own work, then Christ’s work was unnecessary.

There are, however, many people who make these mistakes. They claim to be masters of their own destiny, and seek to commend themselves to God by their own works. Such a position denies the nature of God and the mission of Christ. They seem to think that it is noble to try to win their way to God and to heaven. But such is not noble. It is a rejection of the grace of God, and a denial of the need for Christ to die.

In Galatians 2:15 to 21, four great Christian truths stand out.

Firstly, man’s greatest need is justification, that is, acceptance with God. In comparison with this, all other human needs are of lesser significance. If we can be made right with God, we can be prepared to spend eternity in His service.

Secondly, justification is not by works of the Law, but through faith in Christ. Luther has expressed this succinctly, ‘I must hearken to the Gospel, which teacheth me, not what I ought to do (for that is the proper office of the Law), but what

Jesus Christ the Son of God hath done for me: to wit, that he suffered and died to deliver me from sin and death.' (*"Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians"* page 101)

Thirdly, not to trust in Jesus Christ because of self-assurance, is to reject the grace of God and the sacrifice of Christ, because such an attitude declares both to be unnecessary.

Fourthly, to trust in Jesus Christ and to belong to Him is to begin a new life. If we are *"in Christ"* we have spiritually died with Him to sin and the Law, and in the same manner have risen with Him to newness of life which will be made complete at the resurrection. - Romans 6:4

CHAPTER 7

THE FOOLISHNESS OF THE GALATIANS

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?

This only I want to learn from you. Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

Have you suffered so many things in vain – if indeed it was in vain?

Therefore he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does he do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Just as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.

Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the nations by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed”.

So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.” - Galatians 3:1 - 9

Throughout most of the first two chapters of his letter to the Galatians, Paul had been strongly defending the divine origin of his apostolic authority, his mission and his message. All had come directly from God and were entirely independent of human influence.

Then he turned his attention to the Galatians and their unfaithfulness to the gospel that he had preached to them. They had yielded to the corrupting influence of the wrong teachings of the Judaisers. *“O foolish Galatians!”* Paul wrote at the beginning of chapter three. *“Are you so foolish?”* he continued in verse 3. J.B. Phillips rendered these words with greater bluntness: *“O you dear idiots of Galatia ... surely you can't be so idiotic?”* The Galatians' turning away from the gospel was so foolish that Paul wondered if some sorcerer had bewitched them, or as J.B. Phillips said *“has been casting a spell”* over them.

Paul really knew the answer to his question because he was well aware of the activities of the deceivers. It seems highly likely also that behind the activities of those Judaising teachers Paul detected the actions of Satan himself, the arch-enemy of God and the father of lies. (John 8:44) Interference with the truth of the gospel throughout the Gospel Age and in our day may well be due to the influence which Satan casts.

What the Galatians had done was to yield to the influence of the Judaising teachers. The Galatians had embraced the truth that sinners are justified by faith in Jesus Christ, but then were persuaded to take the view that circumcision and the works of the Law are also necessary for salvation.

The essence of Paul's argument was that the Galatians' new position was a contradiction of the gospel. The reason for his amazement was that before their very eyes "*Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified.*" He seemed to be implying that some sorcerer had put them under a spell when before their own eyes Christ had been proclaimed as crucified.

This then is the gospel that Paul had preached to them. It is a specific proclamation of Jesus Christ crucified, as also mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:23 and 2:2. Christ's work was completed on the cross, and the benefits deriving from His crucifixion are forever applicable and available. Sinners may be justified before God and by God, not because of any works of their own, but because of the atoning work of Christ. The gospel is not simply good advice but good news about Jesus Christ, a declaration of what God has done for the human race through Jesus Christ. This good news is not a demand but an offer, an offer of everlasting life on the basis of faith.

If the Galatians had grasped the gospel of Jesus Christ properly, they would have realised that they needed only to receive the good news by faith. To add works to the atoning work of Christ was in reality an offence to His finished work.

Paul exposed in these verses 1 to 9 the foolishness of the Galatians. They should have resisted the arguments of the Judaisers. They knew perfectly well from Paul's preaching that the gospel is received by faith alone, since their own experience and Paul's apostolic message had told them so.

Paul's Argument From The Galatians' Own Experience

Paul wrote in verse 2 *"This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith?"* Further, in verse 4, Paul asked, *"Have you suffered so many things in vain – if indeed it was in vain?"* Paul took it for granted that all had received the Spirit, and asked if they had received the Spirit by works or by faith. He assumed in verse 3 that this is how their Christian life had begun - *"Having begun in the Spirit."* What he was asking concerns how they had received the Spirit. Did they receive the Spirit by obeying the Law's demands or by believing the gospel message?

The contrast is between the Law and the gospel. The Law demanded 'Do this'; the gospel declares that Christ has done it all. The Law required works of human achievement, while the gospel requires faith in Christ's achievement. The Law and the gospel are contrary to each other; they are not two aspects of the same thing, or interpretations of the same Christianity. Martin Luther (page 122) wrote: 'The establishing of the law is the abolishing of the Gospel.' The reverse is also true. The Law was abolished on the cross. - Colossians 2:14

In verse 5 Paul used the same argument in a second way – not from the point of view of their receiving the Spirit, but from the point of view of God giving the Spirit. When Paul visited Galatia, God gave them the Spirit and worked miracles through Paul's influence and activities, *"the signs of a true apostle."* (2 Corinthians 12:12) They received the Spirit not because they obeyed the Law, but because they believed the gospel.

This was a fact of their experience, so Paul argued that it was ludicrous that, *"having begun in the Spirit"*, the Galatians should then expect to continue and complete their Christian lives *"by the flesh."* Paul was telling them that they must not go back to the Law or imagine that the Law was needed to supplement the gospel. To go back to the Law would be an act of degeneracy and a rejection of the gospel.

Paul's Argument From Old Testament Scripture

"Just as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." (verse 6). Paul's reference to Abraham was a masterstroke.

Judaising opponents looked to Moses as their teacher, so Paul went back to Abraham, centuries earlier. His quotation is from Genesis 15:6 *“God told Abraham to look up at the sky and count the stars, then said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” Abraham believed God’s promise, “and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.”*

God’s promise of descendants from Abraham was reinforced to Abraham by the display of the night sky full of stars, just as the promise of forgiveness through Christ was reinforced to the Galatians by the experiences of Paul and the Galatians themselves. From the human standpoint, God’s promise to Abraham seemed impossible, but Abraham believed God and he was accepted by God as righteous because of his faith. Abraham was justified, that is, accepted as righteous, by faith. He had not done any works to deserve God’s grace and favour; he had simply believed with all his heart and mind.

With this promise of God to Abraham, Paul then linked another earlier promise. In verses 7 to 9 Paul wrote, *“Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the nations by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed”. So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.”*

Here Paul was quoting from Genesis 12:3, with which we may compare Genesis 22:17,18 and Acts 3:25. The blessing promised is surely justification, the greatest of all blessings. The means by which the blessing would be inherited is by faith, and faith is the only way by which Gentiles could inherit the blessing promised to Abraham, since Abraham was the father of the Jewish race. The Galatians were already the children of Abraham, Paul was telling them, because they had believed, just as Abraham had believed. The works of the Law, including circumcision, could avail them nothing.

The true children of Abraham are not his descendants by physical descent, as were the Jews, but are his descendants by faith, men and women who share Abraham’s faith, namely Christian believers.

All of this, the Apostle said, the Galatians should have known. They should not have been so foolish as to have been bewitched by the Judaising teachers.

If they had kept in their minds and hearts the fact of Christ crucified for them and all people, they should have realised that the Judaisers were contradicting the gospel teaching of justification by faith alone. They should have known from their own experience and from Old Testament Scriptures. And so should we.

The gospel is Christ crucified, His work was finished on the cross. It was not simply a first-century event; it is a work which Christ accomplished in obedience to the will of the Father, and is applicable to us and all people today. Christ's finished work is for acceptance and belief by us and all people for forgiveness, and thus acceptance by God as His children and heirs.

On the basis of the sacrifice of Christ, the gospel offers a great blessing. It is in fact a double blessing. The first part is justification, (verse 8) and the second part is the gift of the Spirit. (verses 2 to 5) With these two gifts, God blesses all who are committed by faith to Christ. He justifies them and gives them of His Spirit. He does not bestow one gift without the other. Everybody who receives the Spirit is justified, and everybody who is justified receives the Spirit. There are not two stages, as is sometimes taught today, that justification comes first, and at a later stage the Spirit is given. The two blessings occur together.

What do we have to do to receive these blessings? We have to believe in Christ and commit ourselves to His teachings. We do not have to pay money, do good works, obey the Law of Moses including the ten commandments, or do works of penance. Christ has done everything for us. This is the true gospel which God Himself began to preach to Abraham, and which Paul continued to preach in his day. It is the setting forth of Christ crucified, and offers on this basis both justification and the gift of the Spirit. Its only requirement is faith and faithfulness until death.

CHAPTER 8

THE ALTERNATIVES OF FAITH AND WORKS

"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse, for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them".

But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "The just shall live by faith".

Yet the law is not of faith, but "The man who does them shall live by them".

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree").

That the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." - Galatians 3:10 - 14

These verses are fundamental to Christianity. They concern the central issue of how to come into a right relationship with God. Paul described this relationship in two ways. Firstly he called it being *"justified before God."* (verse 11) To be *"justified before God"* is the exact opposite of being condemned by Him. It is to be declared righteous, to be accepted, and to live in His favour. This is a matter of the highest importance. We are sinners, and by nature alienated from God, and, if we are to gain His approval and acceptance, we need to be put right with Him.

Secondly, he said of a person who is accepted by God that *"he...shall live."* (verses 11 and 12) The life referred to is the life to be gained in the age to come. The Lord Jesus said, *"This is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."* - John 17:3

Paul was telling the Galatians, and us, how a sinner can be justified and receive eternal life. These verses explain how this can be attained. Justification means acceptance by God, and eternal life means to be in fellowship with Him as His children. The two are inseparable: once believers are in favour with Him, fellowship with Him is granted to them also.

Two Alternatives

There are two alternatives in the answer to the question, how can a sinner be justified and receive eternal life? One alternative is false, that is, incorrect; the other is true, that is, correct. We will look closely at the Apostle Paul's statements.

The Apostle quoted twice from the Old Testament: "*The just shall live by faith,*" (verse 11) and "*The man who does them shall live by them.*" (verse 12) The first statement comes from the prophet Habakkuk, (chapter 2 verse 4) the second from the Law. (Leviticus 18:5) Both statements are from the word of God, and both promise life. But the path to life in each case is different.

The first promised life by faith, the second by works. The first said that only God can justify, because He alone can impute righteousness, the second implied that people can manage to be righteous by their own efforts. This then is the issue. Can righteousness be gained by faith or by works? Do we receive life by believing or by doing? Do we gain life by the free grace of God in Jesus Christ, or can we gain life by our own conscientious efforts? What does the Bible teach?

The Alternative of Works

"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." Paul quoted yet again from the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 27:26, because he was striving to show, as he was later to say to King Agrippa, that he was teaching "*no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come...*" (Acts 26:22) In the verse from Deuteronomy a solemn curse was pronounced on everyone who failed to keep all the commandments of the Law.

Nowadays these words may sound unduly harsh. Many present-day Christians like to think of a God Who blesses rather than a God Who curses. But we should be ever mindful that the Law of the Old Testament is God's Law. What the Law said, God said; what the Law blessed, God blessed; and what the Law cursed, God cursed. We should not try to be apologetic about these direct statements, for they express what the Scriptures repeatedly tell us about God in relation to sin.

God cannot look on sin (Habakkuk 1:13), and no-one can continue to sin with impunity, for God is the righteous Judge of all people. Disobedience and wrong-doing bring people under God's curse, and expose them to the penalties of His judgment, namely condemnation and death. "Curse" does not mean simply "denounce" but actually means "reject" (Strong 3671).

Such is the position of every human being who has ever lived, except the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul described the universality of sin, as he did also in the early chapters of Romans. Sinners include people who consider themselves righteous and respectable and therefore excluded from God's curse. Dr. Cole in his book on Galatians (page 95) commented that it was the "am haaretz", the common people without the Law, whom the Jews regarded as being under God's curse. But the Apostle in Galatians (and elsewhere in later letters) shocked the Jews, including the Judaizing teachers, by proclaiming that those who were under God's curse were not simply the ignorant, lawless Gentiles, but the Jews themselves as well. Paul later wrote in Romans 3:22 and 23, "...*For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*"

We know this from our own experience. John defined sin in 1 John 3:4 as "*lawlessness*", meaning disregard of the law of God. All of us are lawless, for we have not at all times loved God with all our being, nor have we unfailingly loved our neighbour as ourselves. We have broken the Law of God, and deserve the curse that God has pronounced on all who break His Law. And this is true of all people, not only the irreligious and immoral, but Jews descended from Abraham who were in covenant relationship with God. "*Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them*" as the Apostle wrote in Galatians 3:10.

Paul wrote that all who rely on the works of the Law are under God's curse. This is why no-one can be righteous before God by the works of the Law. It is of course true "*that the man who does them shall live by them.*" (verse 12) But nobody (except Jesus) has ever done them, so no-one can live by them.

The function of the Law was to condemn, not to justify or declare not guilty. No matter how hard sincere Israelites tried to obey the Law, lead upright lives, and do good works as well as they could, they could not do all things perfectly and without

blemish, so could not be delivered from the curse of the Law which fell and remained on every lawbreaker.

So the first supposed path to God and righteousness led to a dead-end. There is neither justification nor life by this path, only darkness and death. We conclude, as Paul did, *“that no-one is justified by the law in the sight of God.”* (verse 11).

The Alternative Of Faith

The second alternative introduces Jesus Christ. It tells us that Jesus Christ has done on the cross for all people what they could not do for themselves. The only way for the Israelite to escape God’s curse was not by the individual’s own work but by Christ’s. He has ransomed, redeemed, rescued, and set the Israelites free from the bondage in which the curse of the Law and therefore the curse of God had held them prisoner. *“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law”* (verse 13) were astonishing words.

The way Christ has redeemed the Israelites was by becoming a curse Himself. The curse has been transferred from human lawbreakers to Him. He took it voluntarily upon Himself to deliver all people from the curse. This *“becoming a curse for us”* helps to explain the awful cry from the cross *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* or, better translated, *‘To what hast thou abandoned me?’* - Matthew 27:46; Psalm 22:1

Paul then added a scriptural confirmation of what he had just written. He quoted Deuteronomy 21:23, *“Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.”* Every criminal sentenced to death and executed, usually by stoning, under the Mosaic Law, was then fixed to a stake or “hanged on a tree” as a symbol of his divine rejection. Dr. Cole said that the quotation means “not ... that a man is cursed by God because he is hanged, but that death by hanging was the outward sign in Israel of a man who was thus cursed” (Dr. Cole’s *“Commentary on Galatians”*, page 99). The fact that the Romans executed by crucifixion rather than hanging makes no difference.

To be nailed to a cross was equivalent to being hanged on a tree. Therefore Christ crucified was described as having been *“hanged on a tree,”* as in Acts 5:30 and 1 Peter 2:24; and was recognised as having died under the divine curse.

This was a great obstacle to the Jews believing that Jesus was the Christ, the Anointed of God. It seemed unbelievable to them that, instead of reigning on a throne, Jesus hung on a tree. The fact that Jesus died hanging on a tree remained an insurmountable obstacle to faith until they saw that the curse He bore was for them. He did not die for His own sins, for He was *“without sin”* (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5); He became a curse and *“died for us.”* - Romans 5:8

In Galatians 3:13 and 14 it is written, *“Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree, that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”* Our salvation is in Christ, so we must be in Christ to receive it. We are not saved by a distant Christ Who died nearly two millennia ago, but by an ever-living Christ, Who, having died and risen again, ever lives to enable believers to be *“in Him”* personally and united to Him today.

We are in Christ and united to Him by faith. Paul had already quoted Habakkuk 2:4, *“The just shall live by faith,”* and then he wrote it himself, *“...that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”* (verse 14) Faith means believing personally in Jesus Christ and His finished work. It is not a work in itself, it is a complete trust in Him, and in God through Him, as a result of which God’s grace is freely given and the believer is justified, that is, considered righteous and dealt with by God as though he or she were righteous and blameless.

The Two Destinies

The Apostle had set before the Galatians and us two destinies and two paths by which to reach them. His words are like those of Moses in Deuteronomy 30:13, *“I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse.”*

Paul called the two destinies *“blessing”* and *“curse”*. Much has been said so far about the curse, but what is the blessing?

It is called *“the blessing of Abraham”* in verse 14 partly because it is the blessing which Abraham received when he believed, and partly because God said to him, *“in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”* - Genesis 12: 2 and 3.

In these verses and those to follow we see that the promised blessing to the believer is threefold – justification (made right with God), eternal life (being received into fellowship with God as His children and heirs), and the promise of the Spirit (having God and Christ dwelling spiritually in believers' hearts and minds).

The challenge of Paul's words is straightforward. We cannot obtain righteousness and be acceptable to God by our own efforts. We must go humbly to Christ Who bore our curse and rescued us, and cast ourselves entirely on His mercy. Then, by God's grace freely given, because we have gone to Him by faith in Christ Jesus, we shall be granted justification, eternal life and the indwelling Spirit. The blessing promised to Abraham and his seed will be ours.

CHAPTER 9

ABRAHAM, MOSES AND CHRIST

"Brethren, I speak in the manner of men. Though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed no one annuls or adds to it. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds", as of many, but as of one, "And to your seed" who is Christ.

And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect.

For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made, and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.

Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have offered life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.

But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe."

- Galatians 3:15 - 22

The Apostle continued to expound "*the truth of the gospel,*" namely that salvation is a gift from God received through faith in Christ crucified, regardless of any human work or merit. Paul emphasised this because the Judaising teachers would not accept the principle of faith alone. They insisted that people must work for their salvation, and added to faith in Jesus "*the works of the Law*" as essential to acceptance with God.

Paul drove home God's plan of free salvation by means of references to the Old Testament. To appreciate and understand his argument, we need to be aware of the history and the theology behind his reasoning.

The History

Paul referred back to Abraham, about 2000 BC, then moved on to Moses who lived some centuries later. Moses was not named, but was doubtless the mediator, mentioned in Galatians 3:19, through whom the Law was given.

God promised Abraham that He would give him an innumerable seed, that is, descendants, that He would give certain land to him and his seed, and that in his seed all families of the earth would be blessed. These great promises of God to Abraham were confirmed to his son, Isaac, and then to Isaac's son, Jacob. Jacob died outside the promised land in exile in Egypt, and his twelve sons died in exile too. Centuries passed. A period of 430 years is mentioned in Galatians 3:17, a time which refers to the duration in Egypt (Exodus 12:40; Genesis 15:13; Acts 7:6). Finally, centuries after Abraham, God raised up Moses, and through him delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and gave them the Law at Mount Sinai. This, briefly, is the history which links Moses to Abraham.

The Theology

God's dealings with Abraham and Moses were based on two different principles. To Abraham He gave a promise, recorded in Genesis 12:1 and 2. "*I will show you a land, ... and I will bless you.*" But to Moses He gave the Law, consisting of the ten commandments and numerous other requirements.

Martin Luther, in his "*Commentary on Galatians*", wrote (in 1531), "These two things (as I do often repeat), to wit, the law and the promise, must be diligently distinguished. For in time, in place, and in person, and generally in all other circumstances, they are separate as far asunder as heaven and earth Unless the Gospel be plainly discerned from the law, the true Christian doctrine cannot be kept sound and uncorrupt."

Luther further commented that in the promise to Abraham, God said, "I will ... I will ... I will", but in the law given to Moses God said, "Thou shalt ... thou shalt not." The promise set forth what God would do, while the Law set forth man's duty, man's works, man's responsibility. The promise had only to be believed, but the Law had to be obeyed in every detail. God's dealings with Abraham were based on promise, grace, and faith on the believers' part, while God's dealings with Moses were based on law, commandments and works on the part of those under that law.

The conclusion to which Paul was leading is that the Christian religion is that of Abraham and not of Moses, of promise and not law; and that Christians today benefit from the promise made by God to Abraham centuries ago. But God gave the promise to Abraham and the Law to Moses, so God must have had in mind some definite purpose for both.

We are told in Galatians 3:16 that the true "Seed" of Abraham promised to him was not Isaac, but Jesus Christ; "*Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds", as of many, but as of one, "And to your seed, who is Christ."*" The genealogies given in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 show that Jesus was the descendant of Abraham and of David, and therefore entitled to be considered the heir of the promises made to both.

Jesus had to die and be raised to life again before He, as the promised "Seed", could be given "*all power in heaven and in earth*" (Matthew 28:18) and begin the work of blessing. All who believe in the Lord Jesus, and follow His example, are promised to be closely associated with Him in the age to come in the great work of blessing all the families of the earth. Christian believers associated with the Lord Jesus also become the "*seed of Abraham*" as explained in Galatians 3:29.

The covenant of promise to Abraham may be considered in two parts: (1) to the Seed, and (2) through the Seed.

The covenant as given to Abraham contained no provision for the removal of sin and its consequence, death. As the associates of the "Seed" were to be chosen from the fallen human race, some provision for dealing with sin and death would be absolutely necessary before God's gracious promise could be fulfilled. The "Seed" had to be prepared first. The Abrahamic Covenant did nothing more than indicate that the "Seed" should be of Abraham's line. How the "Seed" would be developed and how it would gain life so that it might be a blessing, was not expressed in the covenant of promise. Therefore some other arrangement had to be made, so that the promise to Abraham might take effect in both of its parts. The Law Covenant then entered God's arrangements, proposing to prepare the "Seed" for the great work of blessing.

The purpose of the Law Covenant is clearly stated in Exodus 19:5 and 6. *“Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.”*

No other purpose was mentioned at the time save that of developing a *“kingdom of priests”* by obedience to the Law Covenant then about to be made. Other purposes of the Law Covenant are mentioned elsewhere, but it is evident that the development of a *“kingdom of priests”* was the primary purpose.

During the Jewish Age, the nation had some kings and some priests, but these did not constitute a fulfilment of Exodus 19:6 as quoted previously. The promise of Exodus 19:6 was that the nation as a whole would be a kingdom of priests if they were obedient to the Covenant about to be made. Kings rule, and priests instruct and bless the people, so the promise must have meant that the purpose of the Law Covenant was to develop the Seed promised some 430 years previously.

The process by which the Law Covenant endeavoured to develop the *“Seed”* was by obedience, as the people had agreed (Deuteronomy 6: 17 to 25). All commandments and requirements were to be scrupulously observed to the smallest detail. Not one *“jot or tittle”* was to fail, and life was the promised reward to the doer of the Law. (Leviticus 18:5; Ezekiel 20:11; Galatians 3:12) The standard had to be perfection of holiness.

Penalties were imposed for breaking the Law. Some were against individual transgressors, while others were against the people collectively. The reward for obedience was life, while the penalty for disobedience was death, individually and nationally. - Leviticus 23:29 and 30; 26:14 to 20

For many centuries, the Jews were permitted to try and prove their ability to keep the Law and gain the reward of life. Sad experience proved to some that they were unable to keep the Law, and they realised that, although the Law was ordained to life, it was in reality a condemnation to them, and could never be anything else.

The people were sinners, and the perfect standard of the Law was unattainable by them. - Romans 7:10, 12 to 19; 8:3; 2 Corinthians 3:7

The Law Covenant did not and could not make good the first part of the Abrahamic promise, but it did serve other purposes. It was a shadow of things to come. (Hebrews 10:1; 8:5) It served to make sin appear as exceedingly sinful. (Galatians 3:19; Romans 7:13) It was a schoolmaster to bring the Jews to Christ. (Galatians 3:24) It did not fulfil the Abrahamic Covenant, but it did not interfere to prevent the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham or make this promise of no effect. - Galatians 3:17

The Law Covenant was set aside "*for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof.*" (Hebrews 7:18 and 19; 8:7) The effect of setting aside the Law Covenant was to leave the Abrahamic promise as it had been before the Law was introduced, the promise of a Seed to bless all the families of the earth. But the promise contained no provision for its own fulfilment, for the removal of sin and death is essential to a permanent blessing.

And so another covenant, the New Covenant, was instituted. This covenant, based on the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, takes care of sin and death, and makes possible the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham. A detailed discussion of this most gracious covenant must be left for another occasion.

The Law Does Not Make Void the Promise of God

In Galatians 3:15 the Apostle began: "*I speak in the manner of men.*" The NRSV has "*I give an example from daily life,*" while J.B. Phillips translated this sentence as "*Let me give you an everyday illustration.*" Some theologians consider the context to mean a will rather than a covenant. The Greek word in verses 15 and 17 of Galatians 3 is "diatheke" which can mean "a last will and testament", but it seems to me inappropriate to speak of God's promise to Abraham as a "will".

God's promise to Abraham is a covenant to which the Lord God has bound Himself, and "diatheke" is used as "covenant" in the Septuagint, and is rendered "covenant" in the AV, RV, Today's EV, NIV, while J.B. Phillips used the word "contract" in his translation.

The point Paul was making is that the promises and terms expressed in a binding contract are unalterable, so that if contracts made and signed by human beings cannot be set aside or added to, so much more are the promises made by God immutable.

To what divine promise was Paul referring? God promised an inheritance to Abraham and his descendants, namely the land which God showed to Abraham. God also promised that in Abraham's seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. Paul made clear in Galatians 3:16 in the following words that the promised seed is Jesus Christ: "*He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.*" The singular word "seed" refers to Jesus Christ and all those who are in Christ by faith, as Galatians 3:29 tells us.

Such was God's promise to Abraham. It was free and unconditional. There were no works to do, no laws to obey, no merit to establish and no conditions to fulfil. God simply said, "*I will give you a seed. To your seed I will give the land I promised, and in your seed all the nations of earth will be blessed.*" The seed', in this case, being Abraham's descendants.

The seed therefore has two applications: (1) To the Lord Jesus, and (2) To Abraham's descendants. The context will enable us to determine which application is meant.

God's promise to Abraham was for future generations and was, and remains, unalterable. It is still in force, for it has never been rescinded. Some theologians do not take into account, or do not understand, that God's promise concerning the inheritance of the land that Abraham saw has application on earth in the age to come. To Abraham and his descendants who died in faith before Jesus was crucified, the promise meant that the faithful of old would be raised to life again to inherit the promise of the land made to Abraham. The faithful of old, some of whom are mentioned in Hebrews 11, will become "*princes in all the earth*" as we are told in Psalm 45:16.

Most of the fleshly descendants of Abraham did not, and still do not, qualify as Abraham's seed, as the Lord Jesus told them in John 8: 37 to 45.

We must leave the sorting out of the faithful to the Lord according to His infinite knowledge.

In Galatians 3:17 Paul continued, *“And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect.”*

The Judaisers were teaching that our Christian inheritance, that is our justification, is granted to those who keep the Law, but Paul correctly maintained, in verse 18, that if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise. They could not have it both ways.

Paul continued, *“But God gave it to Abraham by promise”*. God gave it – the Greek word “kecharistai” emphasises both that it is a gift, and that it has been given without any time limit. God has not gone back, indeed could not go back on His binding promise. So every sinner who believes and trusts in Christ crucified for salvation, apart from any merit or good works, will receive the blessing of eternal life and thus God will fulfil the promise He made to Abraham.

The Law Shows the Need for the Promise of God and Makes that Promise Indispensable

Paul then explained the function of God’s Law in relation to His promise by answering two questions.

The first question is *“Why then the Law?”* Paul did not refer to the primary purpose of the Law as set out in Exodus 19: 5 and 6. He simply asked, as translated by the Diaglott, the RSV, the NRSV, Weymouth, Rotherham, and Young’s literal translation, *“Why then the Law?”* He then said, *“It was added because of transgressions.”* The Law was added to the experience of Abraham’s descendants; it was not added to the Abrahamic Covenant, because nothing could be added to, or taken from, that Covenant. Paul expounded the reason for the Law in some detail in his letter to the Romans: *“Through the law comes knowledge of sin.”* (Romans 3:20) *“Where there is no law there is no transgression,”* (Romans 4:15) and *“If it had not been for the law I should not have known sin.”* - Romans 7:7

So, it seems that the Law’s main work was to expose sin. *“It was added to make wrongdoing a legal offence.”* (Galatians 3:19 NEB) It was intended to make plain the

sinfulness of sin as a revolt against the will and authority of God. And it was added *“until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made.”* (Galatians 3:19) Thus the Law looked forward to Christ, Abraham’s seed, as the One through Whom transgressions would be forgiven. The function of the Law was not to bring about salvation, but to convince people of their need of it.

The remaining part of Galatians 3:19 and verse 20 are generally acknowledged to be difficult to understand.

It seems that the Apostle was comparing the inefficacy of the Law with the gospel first preached to Abraham. He said the Law *“was ordained through angels by a mediator.”* The activity of angels in connection with the giving of the Law is mentioned in Deuteronomy 33:2, Psalm 68:17, Acts 7:53 and Hebrews 2:2. The mediator was certainly Moses. So when God gave the Law, He spoke through angels and through Moses, so that in the giving of the Law there were two intermediaries.

But when God spoke to Abraham and gave him His promise, He did so directly, and that is probably the meaning of *“God is one”* in Galatians 3:20. God Himself gave the covenant of promise to Abraham. No mediator or intermediary was involved. The only One bound by the Abrahamic Covenant is the Lord God Himself.

The second question that Paul asked was different from his first question in that it seems that Paul was directing the question to the Judaisers. He was accusing them of making the Law contradict the gospel and thus the promises of God. Their teaching was, *“keep the law and you will gain life”*. But Paul said in Galatians 3:21, *“Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have offered life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.”* But no such law had been given. Nobody, except the Lord Jesus, has ever been able to keep the Law of God. Therefore the Law could never justify anyone other than Jesus Christ.

So how is it possible to harmonise the Law of God and God’s promise? Human inability to keep the Law has made the promise of God indispensable. In Galatians 3:22 Paul wrote, *“...the Scripture has confined all under sin,”* as declared in the Old Testament, *“there is none that does good, no, not one.”*

(Psalm 14:3). The Scripture maintains that every sinner is held in prison for his sins, in order that *“the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”* - Galatians 3:22

Luther wrote, in page 316 of his *“Commentary on Galatians”*, “The principal point ... of the law ... is to make men not better but worse; that is to say, it sheweth unto them their sin, that by the knowledge thereof they may be humbled, terrified, bruised and broken, and by this means may be driven to seek grace, and so to come to that blessed Seed (Christ).”

The Judaisers incorrectly held that the Law made void the promise and superseded it, while the inspired Apostle taught that the Law confirmed the promise and made it indispensable. The Apostle was here expounding some eternal truths.

The Truth About God

The Bible is not a book of varying ideas, many of which are unrelated to us nowadays, as some present-day commentators seem to think. One of the glories of the Bible is its coherence. The whole Bible, from beginning to end, tells the full account of God’s sovereign purpose of grace, His master-plan of salvation through Christ.

The Apostle, with great breadth of vision brought together Abraham, Moses and Jesus Christ. In eight short verses he covered some 2,000 years of human history. He showed how God’s promise to Abraham was confirmed by Moses and fulfilled in Christ. He demonstrated the unity of the Bible, the unity of both Old and New Testaments.

We in the twenty-first century need to pause and try to take in the whole counsel of God, His eternal purpose to redeem a people for Himself through Jesus Christ. People nowadays are so pre-occupied with current affairs that neither the past nor the future seems to have any great interest for them. We should contemplate not only the centuries after Christ, but also the centuries before Him.

We should remember Adam, through whom sin and judgment entered our world; Abraham and Moses through whom the promise and the Law came, and the Lord Jesus, through Whom salvation has come, and is with us now and remains with us and all believers.

We should look to Christ's reign in power and glory as the Scriptures foretell, and realise that God is working to a plan "*according to the counsel of his will.*" - Ephesians 1:11

The Truth About People

After God gave the promise to Abraham, He gave the Law to Moses. God's purpose in giving the Law was to expose sin and condemn it.

The Law took the cover off human respectability and revealed what is really beneath – sin, rebellion, guilt, the judgment of God to condemnation, and the utter impossibility of release from it.

One of the great faults of contemporary society, including Christianity in general, is the tendency to minimise the effect of sin and judgment. The New Testament exposes sin fully and frankly, as in Romans 1:18 to 32, 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 10, Ephesians 5:3 to 7 and Galatians 5:19 to 21.

We do not need to concentrate on sin, nor rail against it, but we do need to take a stand when necessary and make our position clear. What we do need to concentrate on is Christ and Him crucified, and be ready to tell anyone who will listen that belief in the Lord Jesus Christ will bring the free gift of God's grace to every believer, and qualify him or her to walk the narrow way that leads to eternal life.

CHAPTER 10

UNDER THE LAW AND IN CHRIST

"But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterwards be revealed.

Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." - Galatians 3:23 - 29

In the previous verses, 15 to 22 of Galatians 3, the Apostle summarised some 2000 years of Old Testament history, from Abraham through Moses to Christ. Paul showed how God gave to Abraham a promise, to Moses a law, and how through Christ, God fulfilled the promise to Abraham which the Law had shown to be so necessary. The Law condemned the sinner to death, while the promise offered the sinner justification and eternal life.

Paul had explained to the Galatians that they had been delivered from the Law because they had inherited justification and eternal life promised by God. But he learnt that the Galatians were turning back to the Law, to condemnation and bondage, instead of believing in what Jesus had done for them in setting them free. Both positions are outlined in Galatians 3: 23-29, describing the condition of people under the Law and the condition of people in Christ.

Under The Law

In Galatians 3:23 and 24 the Law was likened to a prison holding people captive, then to a tutor whose discipline was strict and severe.

The Law Was Like A Prison

“But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law.” (Galatians 3:23) The Greek verb “phroureo” means to “protect by military guards”. When the word was applied to a city, it was used to mean keeping the enemy out and keeping the inhabitants in. The same word is used in the New Testament concerning the attempt to keep Paul in Damascus: *“The governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me,”* as Paul himself wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:32. Luke also described in Acts 9:24 how the Jews *“were watching the gates day and night, to kill him.”* The same word was also used metaphorically of God’s peace and power in Philippians 4:7 and 1 Peter 1:5, where it was applied to the Law. It is defined as “to hold in custody” in the Greek-English lexicon by W.F.Arndt and F.W.Gingrich.

The second word “kept” in Galatians 3:23 (*“kept for the faith”*) is the Greek word “sungkleio” which means “to hem in or coop up” according to the Greek-English lexicon compiled by H.G.Liddell and R.Scott.

Both verbs, “phroureo” and “sungkleio” emphasise that God’s laws and commandments, as mediated by Moses, kept the Israelites confined in a virtual prison from which they could not escape. The NEB renders the first clause of Galatians 3:23 as *“we were close prisoners in the custody of the law.”*

The Law Was a Tutor

“The law was our tutor” was Paul’s second metaphorical description of the Law. The Greek word translated as “tutor” is “paidagogos”, and means literally a “a guide and guardian of boys” according to the Greek-English lexicon by C.L.W.Grimm and J.H.Thager. In Paul’s day the tutor was usually a slave, whose duty it was to conduct the boy or youth to and from school, and to superintend his conduct generally. The KJV *“schoolmaster”* is not strictly accurate, because the paidogogos was not the boy’s teacher but his disciplinarian. J.B.Phillips thought that the modern equivalent is “a strict governess”.

Paul used the word again in 1 Corinthians 4:15 when he wrote, *“You may have ten thousand tutors in Christ, but you have only one father.”* (NEB) Later in 1 Corinthians 4:21 Paul wrote, *“Am I to come to you with a rod in my hand (that is, like a paidogogos), or in love and a gentle spirit (that is, like a father).”* (NEB)

These two similes of the Law being like a prison and like a strict tutor expressed the will of God for His chosen people, telling them what to do and what not to do, and warning them of the penalties for disobedience. All His chosen people, except Jesus Christ, disobeyed and stood condemned because none could keep the Law in every detail. No-one could be delivered from its tyranny. Like a gaoler, the Law held the Israelites in prison, and like a strict tutor it punished all who were under its authority for their failures and misdeeds.

But, let us be thankful to the Lord God; He never meant this oppression to be permanent. He gave the Law in order to make the promise more desirable. So to both descriptions of bondage, Paul added a time reference in Galatians 3:23, *“But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterwards be revealed.”* Again, Paul wrote in Galatians 3:24, *“the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”*

These are really two ways of saying the same thing, because *“faith”* and *“Christ”* go together. Both verses tell us that the oppressive work of the Law was temporary, and that it was intended ultimately not to condemn but to lead to blessing. Its purpose was to shut the Israelites in prison until Christ should set them free, and to put them under a strict tutor until Christ would make them His children under God.

Gentiles like ourselves can benefit from these lessons. We were never under the Mosaic Law, but like the Israelites and the whole human race, we are under the penalty of death because death is the penalty for sin, and all have sinned and fallen short of God’s righteous requirements. (Romans 3:23) The whole human race without Christ is under condemnation.

But Christ has made it possible, by His atoning death, for everyone who understands and believes what Christ accomplished on the cross, to come to God through Him and be delivered from condemnation and be granted salvation and life. This is what it means to be justified by faith. God graciously grants life to sinners who believe in Him through Jesus Christ and repent of their sins. All who so believe are received by God and become His children in Jesus Christ.

What It Means To Be In Christ

In Galatians 3:24 Paul wrote, *“But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian.”* (NRSV) The words *“but now”* indicated to the Galatians that their new situation was quite different from their former situation under the Law. They had become children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, (Galatians 3:26) that is, they had been accepted by God as His children for Christ’s sake in spite of their grievous law-breaking.

The last four verses of Galatians 3, 26 to 29, refer constantly to Jesus Christ. Verse 26 states *“...in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.”* Verse 27 tells the Galatians *“As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”* The NEB translates this as *“put on Christ as a garment.”* Verse 28 ends with the words *“for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”* Verse 29 has *“And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.”* These words tell us what a Christian is. He or she is *“in Christ,” “baptised into Christ,”* has *“put on Christ,”* and *“belongs to Christ.”*

In the last four verses of Galatians 3 Paul revealed three results of being united to Christ.

(1) Through Christ we are sons of God. (Galatians 3:26,27) God is our Father, Who in Christ has forgiven us and accepted us as His children. We do not dread receiving the punishment we deserve, but enjoy the status and privilege of being His children, and have come to love Him as His children and heirs.

Our sonship is *“in Christ,”* it is not ours by any right or merit. God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of those whom He adopts into His family through Christ. It is through faith that we are in Christ, and it is through being in Christ that we are children of God.

Our baptism in water is a witness to our commitment to Christ. Paul wrote *“As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”* (Galatians 3:27) The ceremony of baptism in water does not make anyone a child of God, only faith in Jesus Christ does that. Faith secures the union with Christ, baptism gives witness outwardly and visibly to each person’s faith. Thus in Christ by faith inwardly (3:26) and baptism outwardly (3:29) we are all children of God.

(2) Through Christ we are all one. (Galatians 3:28) These words must mean that through faith in Christ we belong not only to God as His children, but to one another as brothers and sisters. We belong to one another in such a way as to render of no account the things which would otherwise distinguish us, namely race, rank and gender.

Firstly, there is no distinction of race. The Apostle wrote, *“There is neither Jew nor Greek.”* God called Abraham and his descendants, the Israelitish race, and made covenants with them, covenants which we know as the Abrahamic and the Law Covenants. The covenant God made which involved Abraham was a covenant of promise, declaring that the “Seed”, through which all families of the earth would be blessed, would be born of Abraham’s line. - Genesis 22:16 to 18

The Law Covenant was a covenant God made with the nation of Israel, the primary purpose of that covenant being to prepare the “Seed” for the great work of blessing. (Exodus 19: 1 to 6) The promise to Abraham includes all nations of every race, colour and language. All are equal in their need of salvation, equal in their inability to earn or deserve it, and equal in that God offers salvation freely to all in Christ. Once we have received salvation, our equality becomes a fellowship, a brotherhood which can exist only in Christ.

Secondly, there is no distinction of rank. *“There is no longer slave nor free.”* Nearly every society in history has developed a social class or caste system. Circumstances of birth, wealth, privilege and education have divided men and women from one another. But in Christ snobbery is prohibited and class distinctions are made void.

Thirdly, there is no distinction of gender. *“There is neither male nor female.”* This remarkable declaration of the equality of the sexes was made centuries in advance of the times. Women were nearly always despised in the ancient world, even in Judaism, and were frequently exploited and badly treated as well. But here in Galatians, Paul has made the assertion that in Christ male and female are one and equal.

But as we contemplate Paul’s inspired assertion, we need to keep in mind that the great statement of verse 28 does not mean that racial, social and sexual distinctions cease to exist.

Christians are, of course, aware that people's skin colours are often different, and people have different cultural and educational backgrounds, and persons are either male or female. So when we say that in Christ these distinctions are abolished, we do not mean that they cease to exist, but that they do not matter.

Christians should recognise one another as equals, brothers and sisters in Christ, and should resist the temptation to look down on other disadvantaged or less privileged Christians, because all are united through faith in Christ Jesus.

(3) In Christ we are Abraham's seed. (Galatians 3:29) *"And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."* - Galatians 3:29

Through faith in Christ we belong to God and to one another. We take our place in the noble historical succession of faithful believers, many of whom are mentioned in Hebrews 11, and of whom Abraham is the leading example. We should never feel insignificant or isolated, because God has graciously prepared a place for us in His plan for the blessing of all nations and all families of the earth. We are through Christ the spiritual seed of Abraham, who lived and died some four thousand years ago, because through Christ we have become heirs of the promise that God made to Abraham.

These are the outcomes of being *"in Christ,"* and they have great relevance for us today. In our generation a philosophy of meaninglessness is being developed and propounded. There is a tendency nowadays to believe and claim that life has neither meaning nor purpose. Many say that they have nothing to live for because they feel that they do not belong anywhere. They consider themselves in the group known as *"the unattached"*.

To all people, including such people mentioned above, we as Christians should declare that in Christ we find ourselves. The unattached become attached. They find their place in God's plan as His sons and daughters, and become brothers and sisters in the Divine family, and share the promise of becoming heirs, *"heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ."* - Romans 8:19

The great work of blessing all nations and all families of the earth will provide an opportunity and a place for all “joint heirs” of Christ to belong to that promised “*kingdom of priests*,” graciously decreed by God and led by Jesus Christ as God’s appointed King to reign in the world-wide work of blessing, which will last for one thousand years. - Revelation 20:6

Paul showed that Christ brought the answers to the most basic of human questions – Who am I? Where do I belong? Where am I going?

Through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, all faithful believers of the past, present and future are united as children of God. They will have a place in God’s plan of redemption for the whole human race, living and dead. They belong to Christ, and to God through Christ, and are bringing to pass the blessing promised to Abraham so long ago. That blessing is salvation and eternal life in heavenly places promised to Gospel Age believers in Christ, and to all the human race in the future on a restored, peaceful and bountiful earth.

CHAPTER 11

ONCE SLAVES BUT NOW CHILDREN

“Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.

Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, To redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son unto your hearts, crying out, “Abba Father!”

Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods.

But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have laboured for you in vain.” - Galatians 4:1 - 11

In the previous chapter, the Apostle surveyed some two thousand years of Old Testament history. He showed the relationship between three of the greatest figures of biblical history: Abraham, Moses and Jesus Christ. He explained how God gave Abraham a promise to bless all families of the earth through his posterity, how God gave Moses a law which did not make void the promise, but made it more necessary and urgent; and how the promise was fulfilled in Christ, so that everyone who believes in Christ inherits the promise made to Abraham.

In Galatians 4:1 to 11 Paul recounted the same history again, contrasting the human condition under the Law (verses 1 to 3) with the human condition in Christ (verses 4 to 7), and basing on this contrast an impassioned appeal about the Christian life (verses 8 to 11). His sequence of thought may be expressed in these words: “Once you were slaves, now you are sons; so how can you possibly return to the old slavery?”

The Human Condition Under The Law

Paul wrote that under the Law men were like heirs during their childhood or minority. A man during his minority, although he will inherit the estate eventually, *“is no better than a slave.”* (NEB) He is put *“under guardians and trustees,”* (RSV, NEB) who act as the controllers of his person and property. They direct and discipline him and keep him under restraint so that he has no liberty. He will remain in this bondage *“until the time appointed by the father.”* - Galatians 4: 2

“Even so we,” Paul continued in verse 3 of Galatians 4. In Old Testament times before Christ came, when the Israelites were under the Law, they were heirs, heirs of the promise God made to Abraham. But they had not inherited the promise. They were like children during the years of their minority; they were under restraint and bondage. Their bondage was the Law, their “custodian” or “tutor”, from which they needed to be redeemed. - Galatians 4:5

But in this context, the Law appears to be equated with *“the elements of the world”* or as in the RSV and the NEB, *“the elemental spirits of the universe.”* (Galatians 4:3) In Galatians 4:9 these elements or elemental spirits are called *“weak and beggarly,”* because the Law had not the strength nor the wealth to redeem or bless the Israelites.

What is meant by the “elements” or “elemental spirits”? The Diaglott translates the Greek word “stoicheia” as “rudiments”. Dr. Strong (4747) stated that it means “something orderly in arrangement, that is, (by implication) a serial (basal, fundamental, initial) constituent (literally), proposition (figuratively)”. The Greek word “stoicheia” and the English word “elements” both have two meanings.

First, they can be used in the sense of elementary things, such as the alphabet or simple sums of addition or subtraction. The word “stoicheia” is used in this sense in Hebrews 5:12, where it is translated by “principles” in the KJV. If the Apostle had this meaning in mind, then he was likening the Old Testament period to the rudimentary education of the people of God, which education was completed by the knowledge of Christ and His deliverance of them. J.B. Phillips translated the phrase as *“basic moral principles”*. This translation is certainly appropriate to the comparison with childhood that the Apostle was making, if we acknowledge that

the early education of children is a form of bondage which must be experienced to enable children to progress to adulthood and maturity.

The second way in which “elements” can be understood is, as rendered in the RSV and the NEB, “*the elemental spirits of the universe.*” In the ancient world, these “elemental spirits” were thought to be the physical elements (earth, water, air and fire), and the heavenly bodies (sun, moon and stars). The heavenly bodies control the seasons and therefore the timing of the seasonal festivals observed by people on earth. Such an understanding helps to explain Galatians 4:8 where people are said to have “*served those which by nature are not gods,*” or as the new RSV renders the passage “*enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods.*” The Apostle here seems to mean demons or evil spirits, which had deceived the people of God in ancient times. So the people of God under the Law were in bondage to the Law itself, and also to Satan and his emissaries, who led God’s people astray and caused them to worship false gods and engage in idolatrous practices forbidden by God.

The Law was given to Moses by God, with the assistance of angels (Galatians 3:19), and was “*holy and just, and good,*” (Romans 7:12) and life was promised to any and every person who could observe all the requirements fully in every detail. The Apostle told the early Christian believers, and the Galatians in particular, that God intended the Law to reveal to His people that they were sinners, all of them, and needed Christ and His sacrifice to deliver them from the bondage of the Law and from sin. - Galatians 3:19 to 25

Satan, as always, worked against God, and led people away from their endeavours to obey the Law, tempting and persuading the Israelites to worship false gods with all the idolatrous practices that such worship entailed.

God’s Action Through Christ

Galatians 4:4 states that “*the fullness of the time had come.*” The Israelites’ bondage under the Law continued for more than 1,300 years. But the fullness of the time had come, as is also recorded in Mark 1:15, the time having been determined by the Father when the children should attain maturity, be freed from bondage and tutelage, and inherit the promise He made originally to Abraham.

A number of factors combined to make the time of Christ's coming to earth *"the fullness of the time."* It was the time in history when Rome had conquered and subdued the known inhabited earth, built roads to facilitate travel and stationed army legions to guard them. The Greek language and culture had given a degree of cohesion to society, and the old mythological gods of Greece and Rome were losing their hold on people. It was also the time when the Mosaic Law had done its work in preparing Israel for Christ the Messiah.

When this fullness of time had come, God took action in two main ways. Firstly, He sent His Son, as recorded in Galatians 4:4 and 5. *"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."* God's purpose was both to redeem and to adopt, not merely to rescue from bondage or slavery, but to make bond-servants or slaves into children and heirs.

The Apostle did not tell us here how the redemption was achieved, but we know from Galatians 1:4 that it was by the death of Christ, and from Galatians 3:13 that Christ, in dying on the cross, became a curse for us and all people. The emphasis in these two verses is that the One Whom God sent to accomplish our redemption was uniquely qualified to do so. He was God's Son, born of a human mother, a Jewish mother, into the Jewish nation and subject to the Jewish Law. Throughout His life, He submitted to all the requirements of the Law, and succeeded where all others failed in fulfilling completely the righteousness of the Law. As a righteous man, Christ could die and shed His blood, constituting an offering for sin and a redemptive price, an atonement suitable to God, to enable God to be just *"and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."*
- Romans 3:26

Secondly, God sent His Spirit, as we are told in Galatians 4:6; *"And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'"* The Greek verbs translated *"sent forth"* in verse 4 and *"has sent"* in verse 6 are from the same word and in the same tense (exapesteilen). There was therefore a double sending forth from God.

Firstly, God sent His Son into the world, and secondly He sent His Spirit into our hearts. Entering our hearts, the Spirit cries "*Abba, Father!*" or as the parallel passage in Romans 8:15 and 16 puts it, "*When we say, 'Abba Father!' it is the Spirit itself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*" "Abba" is an Aramaic diminutive for "Father". Jesus Himself used the word in prayer to God (Mark 14:36). J.B. Phillips renders the phrase "*Father, dear Father.*"

God sent His Son to secure our sonship, and His Spirit to assure us of it. His Son gives us the status of sonship, and His Spirit enables us to experience the blessing of it. We can therefore approach God in prayer, not as slaves or bond-servants, but as children.

The indwelling presence of God's Holy Spirit is the precious privilege of all God's children. It is because we are sons (4:6) that God has sent the Spirit into our hearts. No other requirement or qualification is needed. We do not have to pay money, recite some formula, do some good work, have some specified experience or fulfil some condition or conditions. Because we are God's children, God has sent His Spirit into our hearts. We are assured of God's Spirit by its quiet inward witness as we pray and as we do our best to live Christian lives.

The Apostle concluded this stage of his exposition with the words in Galatians 4:7, "*Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*" What we are as Christians, as children and heirs of God, is not through our own merit, or through our own effort, but through Christ, Who died for us and made it possible for God to extend grace to us, and consider us righteous because we believe in the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice and commit our lives to Him.

The Appeal Of The Apostle

The Apostle wrote in Galatians 4: 8 and 9. "*But then, indeed, when you did not know God, ... but now after you have known God, or rather are known by God ...*" The Galatians had been ignorant of God's plans and purposes for His people, being in bondage to the Law and to Satan's devices, but had then come to God through Jesus Christ, and had come to know Him as a God of mercy and grace, and God had come to know them as His people because they believed in His Son, Jesus, and what Jesus had done for them and all believers.

Then followed the Apostle's appeal to the Galatian brethren. He said this to them in effect, "If you were slaves and are now sons, if you did not know God but now know Him, and are known by Him, how can you turn back to the old regime of slavery? How can you be enslaved again by the elements or rudiments from which Jesus Christ has freed you?"

He continued in verse 10 of Galatians 4, "*You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years.*" In other words, your religion has degenerated from a free and loving relationship with your heavenly Father, and has become a formal and routine observance of rules, ritual and regulations. The Apostle then added, surely with great regret and sorrow, "*I am afraid for you, lest I have laboured for you in vain.*" He feared that all the time and trouble he had spent teaching and exhorting them had been wasted. Instead of growing in the liberty with which Christ had set them free, they had slipped back into the old bondage. Under the influence of the Judaising teachers, the Galatians were being so foolish as to prefer slavery to freedom and sonship.

We can learn from this section of the Apostle's letter what the Christian life is, and how we should live it. The Christian life is the life of sons and daughters, not slaves. It is a life of freedom in Christ, not bondage as under the former Law Covenant nor bondage to any organisation or institution. Christians are, of course, dedicated servants of God and of Christ and servants to one another. The Lord Jesus Himself said, "*And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.*" (Matthew 20:27) He also said, "*But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.*" - Matthew 23:11

Christians belong to God, to Christ, and also to one another, and we as Christians should love to serve those to whom we belong. This kind of service is freedom because it is given voluntarily. Our salvation does not depend on our ability to serve without failure or shortcomings, it rests on the finished work of Christ, on His death and shed blood to take away sin, on His becoming a curse for us and all people to remove the curse from everyone, on the basis of our faith in what Christ has done for us by God's mercy and grace.

How should we live the Christian life?

We must at all times remember who and what we are. We have become children of God through Jesus Christ. This is what Paul told the Galatians. They were formerly slaves, but had become children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. But they were turning back to their former slavery and provoked the Apostle's stern and indignant warnings to them.

The way for us as Christians to avoid the foolishness of the Galatians is to heed Paul's words. We must allow God's Word to keep reminding us of what we have and who we are in Christ. Some of us have come into Christ from unbelief and from erroneous beliefs. We need regular Bible study and prayer to help us remember that God has forgiven us, justified us, and made us His children. He and the Lord Jesus dwell in us and have given us a measure of the Holy Spirit.

We must not allow ourselves to become slack and permit the affairs of this life to crowd out our devotion to God and His Son and to one another. God has extended His grace to us because of Jesus Christ's finished work, and we should forever retain this greatest of all blessings firmly in our minds and hearts.

CHAPTER 12

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PAUL AND THE GALATIANS

"Brethren, I urge you to become as I am, for I am as you are. You have not injured me at all. You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first. And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me. Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth? They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them. But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you. My little children, for whom I labour in birth again until Christ is formed in you. I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I have doubts about you." - Galatians 4:12 - 20

In this passage, the Apostle appealed to the Galatians with deep feeling and great tenderness. He called them his "brethren" in verse 23, then his "little children" in verse 19. He even went on in verse 19 to liken himself to their mother, who was in "labour" for them until Christ is formed in them. In this passage, Paul changed his tone of reproof and displeasure to one of heartfelt love and appeal.

Paul's Appeal

The NKJV in verse 12 of Galatians 4 translates the first sentence as "*Brethren, I urge you to become as I am, for I am as you are.*" In the English translation, the verb "to be" is used three times, but none of these three uses appears in the Greek original. The Greek original reads, "*Become as I, for I as you.*" What did Paul mean?

In the text, following Paul's anguished complaint that the Galatians were turning back to the old bondage under the

Law from which Christ had redeemed them, indicated that this appeal can have only one meaning. Paul longed for them to become like him in his Christian life and faith, to be delivered from the evil influence of the incorrect teachings, and to share his convictions about the truth as it is in Jesus Christ, and about the liberty with which Christ has made us free. He wanted them to become like him in his Christian freedom. He expressed a similar thought to King Agrippa when the King said, *“Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”* Paul replied, *“I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.”*
- Acts 26:28 and 29

All Christians should be able to express similar thoughts, namely that we are so satisfied with Jesus Christ, with the freedom He has given us, with inner contentment and with the salvation that we have, that we want other people to become like us in our state of forgiveness and acceptance by God, our heavenly Father.

In the light of the verses which follow, it seems that the verb “to be” must be supplied in the past tense: *“Become as I am, for I also became as you are.”* When Paul went to the Galatians, he did not keep his distance or act as though he were superior to them or above them. He became like them and identified himself with them. He was a Jew by birth and upbringing, but put himself on equal terms with Gentiles. His actions were in accordance with his principle as stated in 1 Corinthians 9: 20 to 22: *“To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews To those outside the law I became as one outside the law ... that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.”*

In these words, a principle of great importance for Christians is stated. The principle is that in striving to win people for Christ, we should do our best to make them join with us in Christian conviction and experience. The means to this end is to demonstrate Christian compassion towards them exhorting them to turn to Jesus as we have done, for forgiveness and acceptance with God through faith in Jesus Christ. We should not appear as in any way superior or self-righteous, but as sinners saved by grace.

The Apostle's briefly stated appeal introduced his readers to the message to follow, in which he wrote of their attitude to him (4:13 to 16) and of his attitude to them. (4:17 to 20) Paul drew a contrast firstly between the Galatians' attitude to him when he was with them, and their attitude to him after he had moved away from them. Secondly, he contrasted his attitude to them with the attitude adopted towards them by the deceivers.

The Galatians' Attitude To Paul

Paul had no complaint about the Galatians' former treatment of him, saying "*You have not injured me at all*" (NKJV) or "*You did me no wrong.*" (RSV) Paul reminded the Galatians that he first preached the gospel to them "*through infirmity of the flesh,*" (KJV) or "*because of a bodily ailment.*" (RSV) We do not know what he meant because he did not give us any details. Luke in the Acts says nothing about Paul being ill or contracting any illness in his missionary visit to the cities of Galatia.

It may be the same as his "*thorn in the flesh*" of 2 Corinthians 12:7, but we are not told precisely what that was either, so it is not profitable to speculate. Galatians 4:15 suggests that Paul's eyesight was a problem when he wrote: "*for I bear you record that, if it had been possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.*" There is certainly evidence in the New Testament that Paul suffered from some form of eye trouble. - 1 Corinthians 16:21; Galatians 6:11

Paul's physical weakness and infirmity, it seems, was a trial to the Galatians. The NRSV in Galatians 4:14 reads, "*though my condition put you to the test, you did not scorn or despise me.*" Instead of rejecting Paul they welcomed him "*as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.*" This is an extraordinary statement. It is another indication of Paul's awareness of his apostolic authority. He does not question or rebuke the Galatians for receiving him as one of God's messengers or as if he were Jesus Christ Himself.

Paul was fully aware that he was a sinner as they were, indeed as he declared to Timothy, he was "*the foremost of sinners.*" (1 Timothy 1:15 NRSV) But he was a chosen apostle of Jesus Christ, with Christ's full authority to preach, teach, and make disciples in His name.

Paul was one of God's messengers, so the Galatians were quite right to receive him "*as an angel of God,*" since he came to them with the authority of Jesus Christ the Son of God and Christ's message. The apostles of Christ were His personal representatives, as He said in Mark 10:40, "*He who receives you receives me.*" So, in receiving Paul, the Galatians rightly received him as Christ, for they recognised him as a true Apostle of the Master.

On another occasion in Lystra, one of the Galatian cities, Paul healed a man crippled from birth, and then had to rebuke the multitude and stop them from sacrificing oxen to him and to Barnabas, telling the people that they should turn to God and worship Him, and not offer sacrifices to them as "*men of like passions*" to themselves. (Acts 14: 8 to 18) The people of Lystra had clearly misunderstood the purpose of the authority and power given to Paul, and were behaving in a manner unacceptable to God and Christ, and brought about their strong rebuke from Paul.

However, the situation in the Galatian churches changed greatly after Paul had left them. They had been so pleased and happy to have had Paul among them, but subsequently, as Paul wrote, "*What has become of the good will you felt?*" (4:15 NRSV) "*Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?*" (4:16 NRSV) The one they had received as God's angel, even as God's Son, they now regarded as their enemy. Why was this so? Simply because he had been telling them some painful truths, rebuking them and taking them to task for deserting the Gospel of grace and turning back to bondage.

There is an important lesson here. When the Galatians accepted Paul's apostolic authority, they treated him like an angel, like Jesus Himself. But when they did not like his message they treated him as an enemy. We must not conduct ourselves in this way. We cannot be selective in following New Testament teaching; we cannot accept what suits us and reject what we do not like. The apostles of Jesus Christ had authority in everything they taught, whether we happen to like it or not.

Paul's Attitude To The Galatians

In Galatians 4:17 to 20 Paul drew a contrast between the attitude of the deceivers to the Galatians and his own attitude to them.

In verse 17 Paul said of the Judaizing teachers, *“They make much of you”* (NRSV) or *“They zealously court you.”* (NKJV) Paul seemed to be saying that the Judaizers were flattering the Galatians insincerely. They fawned on them in order to persuade the Galatians to accept their perverted message.

So Paul continued in verse 18, *“It is good to be made much of for a good purpose at all times,”* (NRSV) but the Judaizers were not sincere in their devotion to the Galatians. Their real motive was *“to exclude”* them from Christ and from the freedom that is in Christ, in order *“that you may make much of them,”* that is, in order that the Galatians might become devoted to the Judaizers and their incorrect teachings.

Christianity is freedom in Christ, and the ambition of Christians should be to become mature in Christ and not be subservient to human teachers. But if Christianity becomes a bondage to rules and regulations, then followers are led into subjection, becoming immovably devoted to their human teachers, as happened in the Middle Ages, and still happens in some Christian circles today.

Paul’s attitude to the Galatians was quite different from that of the Judaizing teachers. In Galatians 4:19 he called them *“my little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.”* The point of this metaphor is not to imply their dependence on him, but to emphasise his travail for them. It was not enough that Christ dwelt in them; Paul longed to see Christ formed in them, that is, he wanted to see them transformed into the image of Christ. He likened his pain to the pain of childbirth. He had been in labour over them previously at the time of their conversion, when they initially were born spiritually, but then he was in labour again because of their backsliding.

Paul was writing figuratively, expressing his deep, sacrificial love for the Galatians, longing to see them conformed to the image of Christ. He was perplexed about them and wished he could visit them and change his tone, presumably from severe rebuke to more gentle exhortation and persuasion.

The difference between Paul and the deceivers should be clearly discerned and understood.

The Judaisers were seeking to dominate the Galatians, whereas Paul longed for Christ to be formed in them. The Judaisers had a selfish eye to their own prestige and position, while Paul was prepared to sacrifice himself for them, to be in travail, so to speak, until Christ-likeness was formed in them.

Lessons For Us

We can learn from Paul's message and attitude to the Galatians. A congregation's attitude to those who address them should be based on the speaker's message and its faithfulness to the Word of God. When the speaker expounds the Word of God, the congregation should receive the message, and take care when they comment on and criticise it, or when they criticise adversely the speaker's technique, mannerisms or voice, how long or short the address happened to be and whether they understood or agreed with the speaker's message.

The Christian speaker should strive to emulate Paul and not the Judaising teachers. The Christian speaker should be occupied with helping his brethren spiritually and not be preoccupied with his own prestige. He should long, as Paul did, for Christ to be formed in himself and in his hearers, and for this happy state of affairs to continue and endure.

John Calvin wrote, "If ministers wish to do any good, let them labour to form Christ, not to form themselves, in their hearers" (quoted by John Brown in *"An Exposition of the Epistle to the Galatians"* 1853, page 226).

CHAPTER 13

ISAAC AND ISHMAEL

"Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?

For it is written that Abraham had two sons; the one by a bondwoman, the other by a free woman.

But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the free woman through promise,

Which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar-

For this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children-

But the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.

For it is written:

Rejoice, O barren,

You who do not bear!

Break forth and shout,

You who do not travail!

For the desolate has many more children

Than she who has a husband".

Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise.

But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now.

Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman.

So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free." - Galatians 4:21 - 31

Paul's comments were addressed to people who desire to be under the Law. There are some people like this today. They are not, of course, the Jews and Judaisers to whom Paul was referring, but people to whom the Christian religion is legalistic, people who think that the way to please God is by the observance of rules. Such people suppose that their relationship to God depends on a strict adherence to regulations, traditions and ceremonies.

To such people Paul wrote, *"You who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?"* (4:21)

Paul used an argumentum ad hominem, that is, an argument designed to appeal to the prejudices of the Judaizing teachers, and expose the illogicality of their attitude and position. To paraphrase the Apostle's words, he said, "You want to be under the Law? Then listen to the Law, for that Law you want to follow will judge and condemn you."

There are three stages in the argument of Galatians 4:21 to 31. The first is historical, the second allegorical and the third personal. In the historical verses (22 and 23), Paul reminded his hearers that Abraham had two sons, Ishmael the son of a slave woman, and Isaac the son of a free woman. In the allegorical verses (24 to 29), Paul argued that these two sons with their mothers represented two covenants, one a covenant of bondage, which is Judaism, and the other a covenant of freedom, which is Christianity. Then in the personal verses (28 to 31), Paul applied the allegory to Christian believers. If we are Christians, we are not like Ishmael, in slavery or bondage, but like Isaac, in freedom.

The Historical Background

Paul recorded that *"it is written that Abraham had two sons."* (4:22) One of the Jews' proudest boasts was that they were descended from Abraham, the father and founder of their race. After centuries of confusion, earthly corruption and violence among the human race, after the world-wide flood and the resettlement of the earth, God chose Abraham and gave revelations and promises to him. God promised to give to Abraham and his descendants the land of Canaan and a posterity as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore.

Because of this covenant of promise to Abraham and his descendants, the Jews believed they would be safe and secure for ever. So it was necessary for John the Baptist to say to the Jews who came to him, *"Do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones."* - Matthew 3:9

Similarly, Jesus told the Jews that if they continued in His word, they would be truly His disciples and would know the truth, and the truth would set them free. The Jews replied:

"We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, 'You will be made free'?" Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.

And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever.

Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.

I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you.

I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father."

They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham.

But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this.

You do the deeds of your father." Then they said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me.

Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word.

You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.

When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it." - John 8:33 - 44

The Apostle Paul then explained to the Galatians what John the Baptist implied and what Jesus clearly taught. True descent from Abraham is not physical but spiritual. Abraham's true children are not those with a provable and demonstrable Jewish genealogy, but those who believe as Abraham believed, and obey as Abraham obeyed. This was Paul's argument recorded in Galatians 3, namely that the blessing promised to Abraham does not come upon the fleshly descendants of Abraham, but upon Christian believers, whether Jews or Gentiles. Paul wrote, *"If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to the promise."* (Galatians 3:29; Romans 4:16) We cannot claim to belong to Abraham unless we belong to Christ.

These two different forms of descent from Abraham, the literal and physical, and the figurative and spiritual, Paul saw

illustrated in Abraham's two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Both were sons of Abraham, but there were two important differences between them.

The first difference is that they were born of different mothers. In Galatians 4:22 Paul wrote that *"Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a free woman."* Ishmael's mother was Hagar, a slave woman, Abraham's servant. Isaac's mother was Sarah, a free woman, Abraham's wife. So Ishmael was born into slavery, but Isaac into freedom.

The second difference is seen in the circumstances that gave rise to their birth. In Galatians 4:23 Paul wrote that *"he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh (or "in the course of nature" NEB), and he of the free woman through promise."* Ishmael was born according to nature, but Isaac was born against nature by the promise and power of God. When Isaac was born, Abraham was a hundred years old and Sarah, who had been barren, was more than ninety years old. This is how it is recorded in Hebrews 11:11, *"By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged him faithful who had promised."*

These two differences between Abraham's sons, that Ishmael was born a slave according to nature, while Isaac was born free according to promise, Paul declared to be *"an allegory,"* that is, a figurative treatment of a subject under the guise of another, the presentation of a spiritual truth in a concrete or material form. The Apostle then continued to explain the allegory.

The Allegorical Argument.

The circumstances of the births of Ishmael and Isaac stand for a deeply spiritual truth. The New English Bible translation reads, *"The two women stand for two covenants."*

An understanding of the Bible requires an understanding of the two main covenants, the old and the new. The Bible consists of two major sections, the Old Testament, which includes the Old Covenant, and the New Testament, which includes the New Covenant. The two covenants, as recorded in the Bible, are solemn agreements between God and humans by which He makes certain people His own, and promises to be their God.

Many covenants are mentioned in Scripture, most of which originated with God as promises, and became covenants or agreements when the people to whom they were made agreed to them or fulfilled certain conditions. The most important of these are covenants God made with Noah, the promise not to again destroy mankind with a flood (Genesis 9: 8 to 17), with Abraham, the promise of salvation through one of his descendants (Genesis 12:1 to 3; 13:14 to 18; 18:17 to 19; 22:17 and 18) and with David, the promise of the restoration of his kingdom. - 2 Samuel 7:15 to 29

In the passage under consideration in Galatians, Paul concentrated on the two major Covenants, the Old and the New. The Old Covenant was based on law and was established through Moses, while the New Covenant foreshadowed by Abraham and foretold through Jeremiah, is based on promises and was established through Christ, Whose blood ratified it. In the Law, God placed the responsibility on people and *said "thou shalt ... thou shalt not ..."* but in the promise to Abraham and to believers in Christ, God takes the responsibility on Himself and says *"I will ..."*

In the passage in Galatians which is under consideration, there are not only two covenants mentioned, but two Jerusalems also. Jerusalem was the capital city that God chose for the land that He gave to His people. And so it came about that the word Jerusalem in certain Scripture contexts came to stand for God's people, just as today "Moscow" sometimes stands for the Russian people, "Tokyo" for the Japanese, "Washington" for the American and "London" for the English.

If "Jerusalem" in certain Scriptures stands for the people of God, who are they? God's people under the Old Covenant were the Jews, but His people under the New Covenant are Christians, believers in God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Both are called "Jerusalem", but the Old Covenant people of God, the Jews, are *"the present Jerusalem,"* the earthly city, whereas the New Covenant people of God, Christian believers, are *"the Jerusalem above,"* the heavenly city.

So the two women, Hagar and Sarah, the mothers of Abraham's two sons, stand for the two Covenants, the Old and the New, and for the two Jerusalems, the earthly and the heavenly.

The New English Bible makes clear to us what the Apostle wrote about the two women, Hagar and Sarah in its translation of Galatians 4:24 to 27:

“This is an allegory. The two women stand for two covenants. The one bearing children into slavery is the covenant that comes from Mount Sinai; that is Hagar. Sinai is a mountain in Arabia and it represents the Jerusalem of today, for she and her children are in slavery. But the heavenly Jerusalem is the free woman; she is our mother. For Scripture says, “Rejoice, O barren woman who never bore child; break into a shout of joy, you who never knew a mother’s pangs; for the deserted wife shall have more children than she who lives with her husband.”

Hagar was the mother who bore children into slavery. She stands for the Covenant from Mount Sinai, the Mosaic Law. The children of the Law, like Hagar’s children, were slaves. Hagar also *“corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children,”* (4:25) that is, Hagar stands for the earthly Jerusalem or Judaism.

But things were different with Sarah, as the NEB Version reads: *“But the heavenly Jerusalem is the free woman: she is our mother.”* (4:26) Sarah stands for the heavenly Jerusalem, the Gospel Age Church of Christian believers. As Christians we are citizens of the *“Jerusalem above.”* We are bound to God by the New Covenant, and our citizenship is not bondage from which we cannot escape, but freedom from all guilt and condemnation.

Then in this context, Paul quoted Isaiah 54:1, where the reference is to two women, one barren and the other with children. But the reference was not to Hagar and Sarah, but to the Jewish people. The prophet Isaiah was addressing the Jewish exiles in the Babylonian captivity. He likened their captivity under divine judgment to the situation of a barren woman deserted by her husband, and their future situation after their return from captivity to that of a fruitful mother with more children than ever. This promise received a literal but only partial fulfilment in the restoration of the Jews to their promised land. But its true spiritual fulfilment, Paul wrote, is in the growth and development of the Christian Church, since committed Christians are the true seed of Abraham.

The Apostle chose to quote Isaiah's prophecy recorded in Isaiah 54:1, so we will consider it more closely.

"Sing, O barren: Rejoice;" Jewish people under punishment by God and banishment into exile, and therefore during that time destitute of spiritual and productive children.

"Thou that didst not bear:" The Jews lack of spiritual and obedient children during the Babylonian captivity.

"Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child." A second exhortation to the Jewish captives to rejoice in spite of their banishment into exile.

"For more are the children of the desolate:" A reference to Gentiles adopted by special grace into the future Israel of God. - Galatians 6:16

"Than the children of the married wife." The reference is to Israel's people under the Law who were symbolised and likened to the status of a married wife before they were taken prisoner and exiled in Babylon.

Paul in Galatians contrasted the *"Jerusalem which is above ... the mother of us all,"* that is, the Gospel Age Church of Christian believers, with the narrow company of the Old Covenant dispensation of Israel. The full accomplishment of this prophecy is still future.

Thus it seems clear that national Israel was compared to a wife put away for unfaithfulness and disobedience, but then forgiven and taken home again. Converted Gentiles were represented as new children of the abandoned but restored wife. The Jewish Church contained the first company of Gospel Age believers, but they constituted only a remnant, the greater proportion of the Israel of God, the Gospel Age church, has consisted of a majority of Gentile believers.

This, then, is the allegory. Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, each born of a different mother. Ishmael was born of Hagar and Isaac of Sarah. Hagar and Sarah represent two covenants and two Jerusalems. Hagar the slave woman stands for the Old Covenant, and her son Ishmael symbolises the church or company of the earthly Jerusalem.

Sarah, the free woman, stands for the New Covenant, and her son Isaac symbolises the church of the heavenly Jerusalem, the Gospel Age Christian Church. In this passage in Galatians 4, Paul made clear that it is not enough for Christians to claim Abraham as their father, because Christians must also understand who their mother is. The Christians' mother is Sarah, the free woman. "*So then,*" as the Apostle wrote, "*we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.*" - Galatians 4:31

The Personal Application.

Galatians 4:28 – "*Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise.*" We as Christians are like Isaac, not Ishmael. Our descent from Abraham is spiritual not physical. We are Abraham's children by faith through Christ, not by fleshly descent.

It follows from this that if we are like Isaac, we must expect to be treated as Isaac was treated. The treatment Isaac received from Ishmael is the treatment that Isaac's descendants have received from Ishmael's descendants, which has continued to the present time; and the treatment that Isaac received from his father Abraham is the treatment we can expect from God our Father.

"But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now." (Galatians 4:29) At the ceremony in which Isaac was weaned, when he was probably about three years old, and Ishmael a youth of about seventeen, Ishmael ridiculed or mocked his younger half brother Isaac. We are not told exactly what happened in Genesis 21:9, but we are told that Sarah saw Ishmael "mocking". It seems from this verse and from Sarah's demands to Abraham to cast out Hagar and her son, Ishmael, that Isaac must have been scorned and derided by Ishmael.

And so, it seems, that we as Christians must expect the same. The persecution of Christian believers who trace their spiritual descent from Abraham, is not always from the world in general but from other professedly Christian people. The Lord Jesus was bitterly opposed, rejected, mocked and finally condemned by His own nation. The fiercest opponents of the Apostle Paul who dogged his footsteps and stirred up strife against him were his own people, the Jews.

The medieval Papacy persecuted all Protestant minorities with ruthless, unremitting ferocity. And so it often is today, that the greatest enemies of the evangelical faith are not always unbelievers, but sometimes the formal mainstream churches who are part of the social establishment and hierarchy. Isaac symbolising true believers is often mocked and persecuted by Ishmael in this sense.

“Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman.” (Galatians 4:30) Although Isaac had to endure the scorn of his half brother Ishmael, it was Isaac who was the heir and received the inheritance. At one stage Abraham wanted Ishmael to be his heir, but God decreed otherwise, and declared that He would establish His covenant with Isaac. (Genesis 17:18 to 21) Sarah subsequently asked Abraham to cast out the slave woman and her son, and God told Abraham to do as Sarah had said. God also decreed that *“in Isaac shall thy seed be called.”* - Genesis 21:12

So it is that the true heirs of God’s promise to Abraham are not his children by physical descent, the Jews, but his children by spiritual descent, Christian believers whether Jews or Gentiles. The Jews interpreted the casting out of Hagar and her son as God’s rejection of the Gentiles, but Paul boldly reversed this interpretation and applied the Scripture to the casting out of unbelieving Jews from the inheritance. J.B. Lightfoot, in his treatise on Paul’s epistle to the Galatians, written in 1865, on page 184, commented, “the Apostle thus confidently sounds the death-knell of Judaism.”

Such then is the double lot of the symbolic Isaacs; persecution on one hand and inheritance on the other. Christians may be despised and rejected by people, yet they are children of God, *“and if children then heirs, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ.”* (Romans 8:17) This is the paradox of a Christian’s experience. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 6: 8 to 10, we are *“in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute, ... as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.”*

As Christians, we have two great privileges. The first is that we inherit the promises given in the Old Testament.

The promises are fulfilled spiritually, not literally or physically. They are not fulfilled in the Jewish nation, nor in British Israelism, but only in Christ and in the people of Christ who believe and commit themselves to Him. As the Apostle has told us, we are Abraham's seed who inherit the blessing promised to Abraham's descendants. We are citizens of the true Jerusalem, "*the Jerusalem above,*" we are members of "*the Israel of God*" (Galatians 6:16) and "*the true circumcision.*" - Philippians 3:3

All the promises and blessings God made to His people in the Old Testament become ours if we are Christ's.

The second privilege is that we experience the grace of God, His gracious intervention to save us. The attributes of the Old Covenant are nature, law and bondage, while the attributes of the New Covenant are promise, the Spirit of God, and freedom.

The religion symbolised by Ishmael is a religion of nature, of what humans can do by themselves without any intervention from God. But the religion symbolised by Isaac is a religion of grace, of what God has done and continues to do, a religion of divine initiative and divine intervention, just as Isaac was born supernaturally because of God's promise. And this is what Christianity is, it is not a natural religion, but is of divine origin.

It is a religion of freedom, because it is through faith in Christ that people are set free. Only in Christ can we as Christians inherit the promises, receive God's grace and enjoy the freedom God has given us.

CHAPTER 14

A NEW COVENANT ESTABLISHED BY GOD THROUGH CHRIST

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.

And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.

You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law, you have fallen from grace.

For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not come from him who calls you.

A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

I have confidence in you in the Lord, that you will have no other mind, but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.

And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offence of the cross has ceased.

I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!” - Galatians 5:1 - 12

The letter to the Galatians is essentially argumentative. Paul expressed his teachings forcefully and repeatedly because of erroneous teachings that were being introduced into the Galatian churches. Paul set out in this passage two schools of thought, actually two aspects of religion. He contrasted these two aspects, firstly from the standpoint of those who endeavoured to practise them (5:1 to 6), and secondly from the standpoint of those who endeavoured to preach or advocate them. (5:7 to 12)

Believers of Incorrect and True Doctrines

In the KJV, Galatians 5:1 reads as a single command, but the original manuscripts divide verse one into separate statements, firstly an assertion that Christ has set us free, and secondly a command that follows: *“stand fast and do not be*

entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” The Diaglott supports this division: *“In the freedom with which Christ made us free, therefore, stand you firm, and do not again be held fast in a yoke of servitude.”*

The former state of the Galatians was portrayed as slavery; Jesus Christ as the liberator; conversion as an act of emancipation; and the Christian life as a life of freedom. The Apostle emphasised to the Galatians that Christian freedom, while basically a freedom from sin and its consequences, is freedom from the Mosaic Law.

The Christian freedom that Paul described is freedom of conscience, freedom from the tyranny of the Law, the fruitless struggle to keep the Law with a view to winning God’s favour. It is the freedom of acceptance by God and of access to Him through Christ.

As Christians we are to enjoy the wonderful freedom of conscience that Christ has brought to us from God by God’s forgiveness. We must not lapse into the idea that we have somehow to win our acceptance with God by our own efforts. The image suggested by the Apostle’s words is that of an ox bowed down by a heavy yoke. According to the Greek-English Lexicon by W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich, the verb “do not submit” is in the passive voice and means “to be loaded down with”. Once the ox has been freed from the heavy yoke, it is able to stand upright again.

The LORD used this same image when He delivered the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. He said in Leviticus 26:13, *“I have broken the bands of your yoke, and made you go upright.”* The Apostle implored the Galatians not to be burdened again from the crushing yoke of the Law, weighed down by its demands and its condemnation for disobedience. Christ met the demands of the Law, died for the disobedience of the Galatians and for all of us, and bore everyone’s condemnation in Himself. He became a curse, as we saw in Galatians 3:13, He *“redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us.”*

He has lifted the yoke from the Galatians’ shoulders and set them free to stand upright. *“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is*

light." (Matthew 11: 29 and 30) How could they possibly think of putting themselves under the Law again and submitting to its heavy yoke?

From the general theme, the Apostle then addressed the particular issue of circumcision, recorded in Galatians 5:2 to 4. The Judaizing teachers were saying that Christian converts had to be circumcised. This may seem at first sight to be a trivial matter, and we may wonder why Paul attached so much importance to it. Paul stressed its importance because of its doctrinal implications.

Circumcision, as advocated by the Judaisers, was not simply a physical operation, nor a ceremonial rite, but a theological symbol. It stood for salvation by works in obedience to the Law. The Judaisers were saying, "*Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.*" (Acts 15:1) They were thus declaring that faith in Christ was insufficient for salvation. Circumcision and obedience to the Law were to be added to it. They were in fact saying that Moses must be involved with Christ's once-for-all sacrifice.

Paul described the position of the Judaisers who received and advocated circumcision. They were "*bound to keep the whole law,*" and circumcision committed them to "*be justified by the law.*" Paul addressed the Judaisers strongly and authoritatively beginning "*I Paul say unto you.*" (verse 2) He warned them in these words, "*If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.*" (verse 2) "*Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.*" - verse 4

Paul was saying that to practise circumcision is to lose Christ, and to seek to be justified by the Law is to fall from grace. It is impossible to receive Christ, acknowledging that we cannot save ourselves, and then receive circumcision, thereby claiming that we can save ourselves by works.

The choice is between a religion of law and a religion of grace; between Judaism and Christianity. Nothing can be added to Christ as being necessary to salvation, because Christ has done it all. If we try to add anything to Christ, we lose Christ. Salvation is in Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone.

In Galatians 5:5 and 6 the pronoun changes from “you” to “we”. Paul then included himself and described true believers who stand in the Gospel of grace: *“For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith, for in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.”* Paul has placed the emphasis on faith in these two verses, and made two statements about it.

The first statement is in effect “we wait by faith”. What we, and all committed Christians are waiting for is called *“the hope of righteousness,”* which is our expectation for the future, brought about by our justification, namely spending eternity with Christ in heaven. It is for this future salvation that we wait. We do not work for it or try to earn it by doing good works, or strive anxiously to secure it with doubts that we might not be successful. Our promised glorification in heaven is God’s gift to us, just as our initial justification is God’s gift to us. So by faith, trusting in Christ’s sacrifice, we wait for it.

Paul’s second statement was, in summary, “in Christ what matters is faith.” In verse 6 of Galatians 5 Paul again refuted the incorrect teaching of circumcision being necessary for Christians. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision can affect our standing before God. When a person is in Christ, nothing more is necessary. All that is necessary, to be accepted by God as His child, is to be in Christ, and to be in Christ is achieved by faith and faith alone.

We need to be careful about how we understand these words of Paul. Paul did not say or even imply that if we have faith we can live and act as we please. He avoided giving such an impression by saying firstly in Galatians 5:5, *“For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.”* What Paul said is that the Christian life is not only a life of faith, it is a life in the Spirit, and the Holy Spirit dwelling in us produces good works of love, as the Apostle later explained in verses 22 and 23 of Galatians 5.

Secondly, as Paul wrote in Galatians 5:6, it is *“faith working through love.”* This does not mean that works of love are added to faith as a second means of acceptance by God, but that the faith which saves is a faith that is evidenced by works of love, as James told us in James 2, verses 14 to 26.

Teachers of Incorrect and True Doctrines

In Galatians 5:1 to 6 the contrast was between the pronouns “you” and “we”: “you” the believers of incorrect doctrine who wanted to add circumcision to faith, and “us” the believers of true doctrine who were satisfied and content with Christ alone and faith alone. Then, in Galatians 5:7 to 12 the contrast was between “he” the Judaiser “*who troubles you*” and “I” the Apostle Paul who is teaching you the truth of divine salvation from God.

In Galatians 5:7 Paul said, “*You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?*” More than once Paul likened the Christian life to a race in the arena, as he did in 1 Corinthians 9:24 and Hebrews 12:1. To “*run well*” in the Christian life is not merely to believe the truth, nor simply to behave well, but to “*obey the truth*,” that is, to apply faith to behaviour. What we believe as Christians and how we behave go together. Our faith is expressed in our conduct, and our conduct is derived from our faith.

The Galatians had begun the Christian race and had begun well. They believed the truth that Christ had set them free, and obeyed it, enjoying the liberty that Christ had given them. But they had been hindered, an obstacle had been placed in their path to divert them. Judaizers had contradicted the truth that they had believed, and as a result they were misled, had forsaken Christ and fallen from grace.

Paul then traced the course of the incorrect teaching, its origin, its effect and its purpose and end.

The Origin of The Incorrect Teaching

The Judaising teachers had persuaded the Galatians to forsake the truth of the Gospel, but this persuasion was not from God Who had called them. God had called them by His grace, His favour which was unmerited, whereas the Judaizers were proclaiming a doctrine of merit. The Judaizers' message was contrary to the Galatians' call from God. It came from their misunderstanding of the gospel message.

The Effect of The Incorrect Teaching

Paul had already said that the incorrect teaching “*hindered*” the Galatians (5:7), and then said that it “*troubled*” them. (5:10 and 12)

But in Galatians 5:9 Paul used a common proverb “*A little leaven leavens the whole lump.*” What he meant was that the erroneous teaching was spreading in the Christian community and was threatening to contaminate the whole Christian Church. Paul used the same proverb in 1 Corinthians 5:6, where he applied it to sin in the Christian community, not to incorrect teaching as he did in Galatians. One of the most serious features of evil and error is that both of them spread and infiltrate.

Because of the cause and effect of the incorrect teaching, because it was not from God, and because its influence was spreading, Paul was determined to expose and oppose it.

The Purpose And End Of The Incorrect Teaching

Paul was certain that the error would not prevail, but that the Galatians would come to a correct understanding, and that the deceivers, whoever they were, and however eminent they might have been, would fall under God’s judgment. So concerned was Paul about the damage these teachers were causing, that he even said that he wished that they might be cut off.

This statement by Paul seems to derive from the rite of circumcision, and seems also to have given rise to “*make eunuchs of themselves*” (NEB and REB), “*castrate themselves*” (NRSV and Today’s EV), “*emasculate themselves*” (NIV), “*mutilate themselves*” (RSV and Weymouth), and “*see the knife slip*” (Jerusalem Bible). The Diaglott has only “*cut off,*” supported by a learned footnote, and “*cut off*” is the rendering of the KJV and the Syriac version. Vine’s New Testament Dictionary states that the passage in Galatians 5:12 uses the Greek verb “*apokopto*” in a metaphorical sense meaning “to cut oneself off, to excommunicate.”

It seems to me that Paul was saying that he wished the Judaizing teachers would take themselves off, like an actor on stage who was boring or displeasing his audience, or that they would simply go away and stop leading the Galatians astray. For the various translators to state or imply that Paul was wishing that the Judaizers might “*mutilate*”, “*emasculate*” or “*castrate*” themselves is to impute to Paul a coarseness and malice that is entirely at odds with his Christian message.

Some translators as quoted above have taken unwarranted liberties with this passage and have taken the Apostle's message in directions that he did not intend it to be taken. Paul had a deep love for the people of God and for the Gospel of God in Jesus Christ. He simply wished that the Judaisers would take themselves off and cease to subvert the Gospel message of life and freedom that he had brought to the Galatian brethren.

In Galatians 5:16 Paul turned from the Judaising teachers to himself, the teacher of the truth sent from God. It seems from Paul's words that the Judaisers had claimed that Paul had the same views as they did. They had evidently spread the rumour that Paul also preached and advocated circumcision. The Apostle emphatically denied this, and brought forward evidence of the falsity of their claims. He declared rhetorically, *"And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offence of the cross has ceased."*

Paul set himself and the Judaising teachers in stark contrast. They were preaching circumcision, but he was preaching Christ and the saving work of Christ's death and resurrection. To preach circumcision is to declare to sinners that they can save themselves by works, but to preach Christ crucified is to tell them that they cannot save themselves and that only faith in Christ can save them. To preach circumcision in Paul's day meant the avoidance of persecution, whereas to preach Christ crucified meant the inevitability of persecution.

Paul argued that since he was being persecuted he could not have been preaching circumcision. On the contrary he was preaching Christ crucified, and the stumbling-block of the cross remained. The Judaisers were urging the Galatians to be circumcised so that they would avoid persecution consequent on belief and advocacy of salvation through Christ, as Paul indicated later in Galatians 6:12.

The good news of Christ crucified is still a stumbling-block to many. The word is from the Greek "skandalon", meaning "stumbling-block"; and the teaching of Christ crucified is offensive to the pride of many people because it tells them that they are sinners and rebels under the wrath and condemnation of God, that they can do nothing to save themselves or gain salvation, and that only through faith in

Christ can they be saved. If we preach this gospel, as we should do, we will encounter opposition and possible ridicule. Only if we preach the merits and sufficiency of human beings, as we should certainly not do, will we escape opposition and ridicule, and will become popular.

In summary, our age is an age of tolerance. It has often been said that it does not matter what we believe as long as we are sincere, and that we should not clarify issues too plainly or focus on them too sharply.

But such is not the religion of the New Testament. Christianity urges us to be definitive and decisive, and to choose between Christ and humanism, not to live in a sort of spiritual haze. By "humanism" I mean a religion or philosophy of human achievement, what people can achieve by their own works. "Christ" signifies a religion of divine achievement, what God has done for us through the finished work of Christ. "Humanism" corresponds to "circumcision" in significance, and involves law, works and bondage, whereas "Christ" means grace, faith and freedom.

Everyone must choose, either now or in the age to come. The one impossibility is what the Galatians were attempting, namely, to add circumcision, that is, works, to Christ and have both works and salvation. Such an attempt is impossible, "circumcision" and "Christ" are mutually exclusive, and there is no third possibility. What we as Christian believers must do, and what so many people do not wish to do, is to humble themselves before the crucified and risen Christ, and in faith seek to receive God's mercy and grace.

CHAPTER 15

THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

"For you, brethren, have been called to liberty, only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'.

But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!" - Galatians 5:13 - 15

Freedom takes many forms in the world today. African nations are gaining freedom from colonial rule; some economists believe in free trade and the lifting of tariffs; capitalists dislike central controls because they hinder free enterprise; while communists seek to set workers free from capitalist exploitation.

President Roosevelt of the USA set forth in 1941 his famous declaration of the four basic freedoms: "Freedom of speech everywhere, freedom of worship everywhere, freedom from want everywhere, and freedom from fear everywhere."

Christian freedom is none of these because it relates to every individual in and through Jesus Christ. Christian freedom is freedom of conscience. The Christian Gospel tells us that no-one is truly free until he or she accepts the fact that Jesus Christ has taken away his or her burden of guilt.

Paul told the Galatians that they had been called to this freedom. It is equally true of us and all sincere believers. Our Christian life really began with God's call to us to follow Christ. There are many Scriptures that tell us of God's call to become believers in Him through Jesus Christ, for example Acts 2:39; 1 Corinthians 7:17; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 1 Peter 5:10 and 2 Peter 1:3. God called us while we were still in ignorance of our rebellion and sinful state. He took the initiative and called us to freedom in Christ.

Paul knew this from his own experience, for God had called him through His grace, as he wrote in Galatians 1:15.

The Galatians knew it too from their own experience, because Paul declared with a troubled spirit that they were deserting Him Who had called them *“in the grace of Christ.”* (Galatians 1:6) Every Christian knows this also today. Christians are called, not through any merit of their own, but through God’s grace in calling them to come to Him through Christ.

To be a Christian means to be called to freedom. The average person sadly does not know this. The image of Christianity in many minds today is a repressive, restrictive bondage. Christianity is not a bondage; it is a gracious call to freedom. It is the promised inheritance of all believers without distinction. That is why Paul added *“brethren”* when he wrote, *“For you were called to freedom, brethren.”* Every individual Christian brother and sister has been called by God to freedom.

What are the implications of Christian freedom? Does it mean that Christians can do anything without restriction? Does Christian freedom mean anarchy? Paul’s detractors claimed he was teaching these very things, so he set himself the task of defining the freedom to which we as Christians have been called. The freedom that Paul was teaching is freedom from the impossible goal of having to earn the favour of God by works. The freedom that Paul taught was not freedom from all controls, not licence to conduct ourselves as fallen men and women might feel tempted to do.

Christian Freedom Is Not Indulgence Of The Flesh

The Apostle wrote, *“For you, brethren, have been called to liberty, only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh.”* (Galatians 5:13) By *“the flesh”* the Apostle meant our fallen human nature which we inherited from our parents. Our fallen nature causes us to think mainly of ourselves and the pleasures we can gain by selfish acts and desires. We are not to use our Christian freedom to indulge selfish and sinful desires.

The Greek word translated *“opportunity”* is *“aphorme”* which is used in military contexts as a place from which to launch an offensive action, a base of operations. It therefore means a vantage point or place, in other words an opportunity or pretext for action. Therefore the Apostle is saying that our freedom in Christ is not to be used as a pretext for self-indulgence.

Christian freedom is freedom **from** sin, not freedom **to** sin. It is our unrestricted freedom from sin to come to God through Jesus Christ as His children, not unrestricted freedom to do anything that we may wish or be tempted to do. The NEB expresses this well: *"You were called to be free men; only do not turn your freedom into licence for your lower nature."* Such licence is unbridled liberty, and is in reality not liberty at all; it is a more fearful form of bondage, a bondage to the sinful desires of our fallen nature, as Jesus said to the Jews, *"every one who commits sin is a slave to sin,"* (John 8:34) and as Paul said to Titus that before conversion, believers were *"slaves to various passions and pleasures."* - Titus 3:8

In society today there are many such slaves. They claim and proclaim freedom, free love, and a life free from restraints and prohibitions. But in reality they are not free, they are slaves to their own appetites which they freely indulge but cannot control.

Christian freedom is completely different. Christians are said to *"have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."* (Galatians 5:24) What Paul meant was that Christians have rejected the temptation of our lower nature which seeks to dominate and rule over us. The vivid imagery that Paul used, in which he referred to Jesus' sacrifice, he said that we have *"crucified"* our lower nature, that is, put it to death so it has no power to influence us.

Christians seek to walk in the Spirit, and are promised if they do, that they will *"not satisfy the desires of the flesh."* (Galatians 5:15) The Holy Spirit of God will bear fruit in Christians' lives which will culminate in self-control, as we shall see in the later verses of Galatians 5.

Christian Freedom Is Not Freedom To Exploit Others

Galatians 5:13 ends *"but through love serve one another."* Christian freedom is not freedom to do as we please irrespective of the effect or effects on others. It is freedom to approach God through Christ without fear, and freedom to do works of love and benefit to others, with no thought of exploitation or pretence.

The command to us as Christians is to love and serve our neighbours, that is, others whether they are believers or not.

We should respect others as persons and always be prepared to serve them practically as well as spiritually. Christian freedom consists in service, not selfishness.

Such service is really the meaning of love. Our love for God comes first, and we give evidence of this love by serving and helping one another, and in so doing strive to please God by obeying His commands through Jesus Christ. If we serve and help others, we will not *"bite and devour"* them by malicious talk or action or both (Galatians 5:15) as the Apostle wrote. Biting and devouring are destructive, while love is constructive.

Paul further in this letter described some of the evidences of love in his details of the fruits of the Spirit (5:22 and 23). Love is patient toward those who aggravate and provoke us. Love thinks kind thoughts and performs good deeds. Love is faithful, dependable, reliable, trustworthy. If we love one another we will *"bear one another's burdens."* - Galatians 6:2

Christian Freedom Is Obeying The Law Of Christ

The law of Christ is seen in His own words: *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind."* This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it. *"You shall love your neighbour as yourself."* *"On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."* - Matthew 22:37 to 40, also Luke 10:27 (NRSV)

Some commentators on Galatians contend that we in fact keep the old law because we have the Holy Spirit and this enables us to keep it. I believe this to be untrue and misleading because the old law has been abolished and no longer concerns us. The New Testament tells us this repeatedly, for example *".... that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:"* (2 Corinthians 3:13); *"Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments;"* (Ephesians 2:15); *"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;"* (Colossians 2:14); and *"He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second."* - Hebrews 10:9

The three verses which are discussed here have relevance to today's "new morality" and the rejection of authority.

The verses concern the relationship between freedom, licence, the law of Christ and love. We are told in Galatians 5:14 that we are "*called to freedom.*" This freedom, as we have seen, is peace with God, the cleansing of our guilty consciences through faith in Christ crucified, the joy of forgiveness, acceptance by God and access to Him through Jesus, the assurance that we belong to God's family, and the experience of grace and mercy which we, by and of ourselves, could never earn or deserve.

We are free from any and all systems of merit, but have a duty, every one of us, to love God and our neighbour, our fellow human beings. We must control our fallen natures, not indulge them or be led astray by them. We must love and serve others, not make a convenience of them or exploit them.

Everyone who has been set free by Jesus Christ gives evidence of his or her liberty in three ways: in self-control, in loving service to others, and in obedience to the law of Christ.

This is the freedom with which "*Christ has set us free*" (Galatians 5:1) and to which we "*were called.*" (Galatians 5:13) We are to stand firm in it, neither lapsing into bondage on the one hand, nor venturing into licence on the other.

CHAPTER 16

THE FLESH AND THE SPIRIT

"I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,

Envy, murders, drunkenness, revels, and the like, of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practise such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."

- Galatians 5:16 - 25

The main emphasis of the second half of Paul's letter to the Galatians is that in Christ, believers have liberty. The Jews were in bondage under the Mosaic Law, and Gentiles such as ourselves were slaves of sin, but all believers in Christ are set free from bondage and slavery and have become God's children.

But each time Paul wrote of liberty in Christ, he added a warning that it can very easily be lost. Some fall from liberty into bondage as in Galatians 5:1, while others turn their liberty into licence, as indicated in Galatians 5:13. In Galatians 5:13 to 15 Paul emphasised that Christian liberty is expressed in self-control, loving service to our neighbour and obedience to the law of God, which is the law of love.

But how do we, as fallen human beings, achieve these Christian goals? The answer is, by the Holy Spirit of God.

The section in which Paul expounded this theme is full of references to the Holy Spirit. It is mentioned specifically seven times, and is presented as our Sanctifier to assist us in subduing our flesh (5:16 and 17), freeing ourselves from the Mosaic Law and obeying the law of Christ (5:18), and causing the fruit of righteousness to grow in our lives. - Galatians 5:22 and 23

It is therefore true to say that the attainment and experience of Christian liberty in our lives depend on the Holy Spirit. Christ has set us free, but without the continuing, directing and sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, our liberty may tend to fade and may even degenerate into licence. In these verses of Galatians 5:16 to 25 Paul concentrated on two main themes: Christian conflict and Christian victory.

Christian Conflict

The combatants in the Christian conflict are called *“the flesh”* and *“the Spirit.”* *“Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh...”* (Galatians 5:16 and 17) By *“the flesh”* Paul meant what we are by nature and inheritance – fallen human beings – what the NEB and J.B. Phillips call our *“lower nature.”* By *“the Spirit”* Paul meant the Holy Spirit given to us in a limited measure by the LORD God, helping us to develop the *“new creature”* (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15) within ourselves and remaining to dwell in us.

In other words *“the flesh”* stands for what we are by natural birth, while *“the Spirit”* stands for what we are as new creatures by birth of the Spirit. These two *“are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.”* - Galatians 5:17

Some Christians hold that the believer has no inner conflict because, as they say, the flesh has been vanquished and the old nature is dead. This passage in Galatians 5 contradicts this view. Martin Luther, in his *“Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians”*, page 508, wrote that Christian people are *“not stocks and stones, never moved with anything, never feel any lust or desires of the flesh.”* It is true, of course, that as we learn to walk in the Spirit, the flesh becomes subdued more and more. But the conflict between them remains and it is unremitting warfare for the Christian. This conflict is a specifically Christian conflict.

In saying this, it is acknowledged that there is often a similar moral conflict in non-Christian people, many of whom are honest, good-living people, but with Christians, the conflict is fiercer because they are aware of two forces within themselves, the flesh and the Spirit – the old and new natures – both in irreconcilable opposition.

The Works Of The Flesh

In this letter, chapter 5, verses 19 to 21, Paul then listed *“the works of the flesh.”* Before considering these, we should take into account the rendering in the KJV and the NKJV, *“the lust of the flesh.”* In today’s English “lust” has a meaning that its Greek equivalent did not have. Nowadays “lust” means sexual desire, and the “lusts of the flesh” are those desires arising from our bodily appetites. But Paul’s meaning was, and is, much wider than this. His meaning was all the sinful desires of our fallen nature, such as desire for power, possessions and influence, and his unpleasant list of *“the works of the flesh”* makes this very clear.

Paul did not claim that his list was exhaustive, because he ended his list by saying *“and the like”* in 5:21. But the sinful desires he listed seem to belong to four categories: sex; religion; society; and drink which intoxicates.

In the category of sex in verse 19, the word *“adultery”* in the KJV and NKJV is not found in the most ancient manuscripts, and is omitted in the RV, the Diaglott, and all later translations except Young’s literal translation of the Scriptures. The word translated *“fornication”* by the KJV, RV and NEB is the Greek word “porneia” which means illicit sexual relations, whether between married or unmarried people. The other two words relating to sexual conduct are translated in many versions as *“impurity”* and *“licentiousness”* and refer to open and reckless contempt of propriety.

The three words used by the Apostle are sufficient to show that all sexual offences, whether public or private, whether between the married or the unmarried, whether “natural” or “unnatural”, are to be classed as works of the flesh.

The second category of works of the flesh is religion. *“idolatry”* and *“sorcery”* are mentioned in verse 20. By *“idolatry”* Paul meant the worship of false gods and idols, while *“sorcery”* as used by Paul meant taking an interest in the powers of evil,

such as consulting spirit mediums, attending séances, attempting to communicate with the spirit world and the dead, who are alleged to be still alive in some spirit existence. Such works of the flesh offend against God and our fellow human beings.

Thirdly in the category of society, Paul listed eight examples of the breakdown of personal relationships, which are translated in the NRSV as *“enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy.”* The NEB translated these as *“quarrels, a contentious temper, envy, fits of rage, selfish ambitions, dissensions, party intrigues, and jealousies.”* All these have been part of social behaviour since the fall in Eden.

In the fourth category, Paul listed *“drunkenness”* and *“revels,”* the latter being translated by the NEB as *“drinking bouts, orgies.”* We are reminded here of Paul’s exhortation to the Ephesians, *“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.”* - Ephesians 5:18

To this list of the works of the flesh in the categories of sex, religion, society, and drink which intoxicates, Paul added a solemn warning. He wrote, *“I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”* (NRSV). God’s kingdom is a kingdom of godliness, righteousness and self-control, so those who indulge and practise the works of the flesh will be excluded from it, for such works give evidence that those who practise them are not committed to Christ. And those who practise works of the flesh are not committed to Christ, they are not Abraham’s seed, nor *“heirs according to the promise.”*

The Kingdom of God to which Paul referred is not, as generally thought, heaven, where all good people are supposed to go, but an entirely new world order ruled over by Jesus Christ, God’s appointed King, assisted, according to God’s grace, by the Gospel Age Church of believers changed from human beings to spirit beings, and the faithful of old, often referred to as the Ancient Worthies, as princes or rulers in all the earth. - Psalm 45:16

Paul, along with the other apostles and disciples were teaching and exhorting the early Christians, and all believers throughout the Gospel Age, to qualify for joint-heirship with

Christ, and become members of a kingdom of priests with power over the nations, to reign with Christ for one thousand years. - Romans 8:16 and 17; Revelation 2:26 and 27; 20:4; 11:15, 1:6; 5:10; 17:14: Galatians 4:7 and 30

The kingdom of God is a future world order in which all those who have died will be resurrected to live forever, if they are willing to be faithful and obedient, on this earth which will become a dwelling place of safety, security and happiness for all nations and all families of the earth for all eternity. A detailed discussion of the future kingdom of God is given in our booklet "*The New Era*".

The Fruit Of The Spirit

The Apostle listed nine Christian graces which he called the fruit of the Spirit, meaning, it would seem, that the Spirit working within the Christian should produce all nine of these graces together. Sometimes these nine graces are referred to as the fruits of the Spirit, the understanding being that the various graces can be thought of individually rather than collectively.

However we may choose to think of them, either individually or collectively, the nine graces seem to describe a Christian's attitude to God, to other people, and to himself or herself. They seem to fall into three groups, each group describing three fruits or graces.

The first group of three is love, joy and peace. These virtues seem to concern our attitude to God, since the Christian's first love is love for God, and the Christian's first joy is joy in God, while the Christian's deepest peace is peace with God, all attainable through faith in Jesus Christ.

The second group of three is social virtues, directed primarily to other people. Patience is longsuffering toward those who annoy and persecute; kindness is a matter of disposition of love and support, while goodness is shown by kindly words and deeds.

The third triad is faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Faithfulness is evidenced by reliability and dependability, gentleness is the same humble meekness that Jesus Himself exhibited, while self-control, which concludes the list, is the showing forth and demonstration of self-mastery, of

calmness and steadiness in all situations, particularly situations of stress, difficulty and adversity.

So it may be said that the primary direction of love, joy and peace is toward God, of patience, kindness and goodness toward people, and faithfulness, gentleness and self-control toward ourselves. All of these nine virtues constitute "*the fruit of the Spirit*," and all should be seen to be prominent in the lives and conduct of Christians who are led by the Spirit. It is most significant that Paul added "*against such there is no law*." The function of law is to curb, restrain, deter and punish, none of which apply to the development of the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of Christians.

It should now be clear to all of us that "*the flesh*" and "*the Spirit*" are in active and continuing conflict with each other. The result of this conflict is, as Paul wrote, "*you do not do the things that you wish*," (5:17) or as the NEB renders this passage, "*what you will to do you cannot do*." There is a clear parallel in this passage with Romans 7:14 to 25, where the Apostle lamented his inability to do the good works he wished to do, and profoundly regretted his inclination to do the sinful works he did not wish to do.

The basic reason for this inability to do the good works that we wish to do is sin that dwells within us. (Romans 7:20) A further reason that the Apostle mentioned is the strong desires of the flesh which contend against the Spirit. - Galatians 5:17

This is the Christian conflict, fierce and unremitting; and it is a conflict in which the Christian unaided cannot be victorious. Christians by themselves cannot do the things that they really want to do and know that they should do. An unbeliever may say, "Is this what Christianity offers – a life of continuous defeat?" "Is that all that can be said about a Christian's inner conflict?"

In answer, we affirm that indeed it is not. The Christian unaided, left to himself or herself, cannot do what should be done but will be led astray by the desires of the old nature, the flesh. The committed Christian is given the grace of God because of faith in Jesus Christ, and must continually strive, pray, and ask for forgiveness, and "*walk in the Spirit*." - Galatians 5:16

If we do these things, we, as Christians shall be victorious. (1 John 5:4) If we walk in the Spirit, we will not gratify the desires of the flesh. We will still experience them, but we will not indulge them. On the contrary, we will experience and show forth, as well as we can, the fruit of the Spirit.

Christian Victory

What must we do to control the desires of the flesh and live by the fruit of the Spirit? Briefly, in faith, we must maintain towards each other and towards others, the proper Christian attitude. In the Apostle's words, we must "crucify" the flesh and "walk by" the Spirit.

Crucifying The Flesh

The Apostle wrote in Galatians 5:24 *"And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."* This crucifixion of the flesh is something done not to us, but by us. We as Christians must take the action and "crucify", that is, put to death our old nature.

What did Paul mean? He meant that believers must put out of their minds and conduct, all aspects of the old nature, the flesh. Christians must turn away from, and indeed turn their back on, the old and former life of selfishness and sin and repudiate it completely.

But why did Paul use the term "crucify"? There seem to be three reasons why Paul used such a strong word.

(1) The Christian's rejection of the old nature is to be pitiless. Crucifixion in the ancient world was a shameful death, reserved for the worst criminals. Likewise, the flesh, meaning our sinful desires, is something so evil in God's sight that it is not to be treated softly nor with regret that it must be repudiated, but must be put to death, rejected completely, without mercy or pity.

(2) As crucifixion was an intensely painful death, so it will be painful for the Christian, in his or her inner conflict, to renounce *"the pleasures of sin"* as the Apostle wrote in Hebrews 11:25.

(3) The Christian's rejection of the old nature must be decisive. Although crucifixion was a lingering death, it was a certain death. Criminals who were nailed to a cross did not survive, they remained on the cross until they died. Soldiers were placed at the scene of execution to guard the victim and prevent

anyone from interfering or removing the victim until he was dead.

John Brown, in his *“Exposition of Galatians”* written in 1853, page 309, wrote, “Crucifixion produced death not suddenly but gradually. ... True Christians ... do not succeed in completely destroying it (that is, the flesh) while here below; but they have fixed it to the cross, and they are determined to keep it there till it expire.”

Paul wrote, *“those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”* The Greek verb is in the aorist tense, indicating that this is something that Christians do decisively at the time of conversion. When believers come by faith to Jesus Christ, they repent, and crucify or put to death everything they know to be wrong, and leave all works and desires of the flesh symbolically nailed to the cross of Jesus Christ to die there, never to be revived.

Such true repentance must be decisive, as death by crucifixion was decisive. Christians need to remind themselves daily of their rejection of the flesh, the old nature, and seek God’s forgiveness for all failures and shortcomings in their Christian walk.

Walking By The Spirit

The attitude we as Christians must adopt toward the Holy Spirit was described by Paul in two ways. Firstly we are to be *“led by the Spirit,”* (5:18) and secondly we are to *“walk by (or in) the Spirit.”* (5:16 and 25) In the Greek text in both expressions *“the Spirit”* is placed first, surely for emphasis, the dative case is used and there is no preposition used (no “by” or “in”), and the verb is in the continuous tense.

There is a distinction in meaning between *“being led by the Spirit”* and *“walking by the Spirit.”* The first expression is passive, while the second is active. It is the Spirit that does the leading but it is the Christian who does the walking.

Christians are portrayed as being *“led by the Spirit.”* The verb used in this expression is also used of a farmer herding cattle, of a shepherd leading sheep, of soldiers escorting a prisoner to court or prison, and of wind driving a ship.

The verb is also used metaphorically of both good and evil spirits: of the evil power of Satan leading people astray (1 Corinthians 12:2; Ephesians 2:2); and of the Holy Spirit leading Christ during His temptations in the wilderness; (Luke 4: 1,2) and leading the children of God today. - Romans 8:14

As our leader, the Holy Spirit takes the initiative. It asserts its desires against those of the flesh, (5:17) and forms within us holy and heavenly desires. It puts pressure upon us, albeit gently and persuasively, and we must yield to its direction and control. But this does not mean that we as Christians must passively submit to the Spirit's leading. We must live or "*walk*" actively and purposefully in the right and proper way. The Holy Spirit provides the direction for us to follow, and also leads and guides us along the way.

This understanding is seen more clearly when we examine the Greek words translated by "*walk*" in Galatians 5, verses 16 and 25. The verb in verse 16 is the usual one for walking, but the verb in verse 25 is "*stoicheo*", a verb which refers to people being "drawn up in line", and means to "walk in line" or "be in line with". The same verb was used by Paul in Romans 4:12, referring to believers who, by sharing Abraham's faith, are said to "walk in line with" Abraham, meaning to follow his example. Similarly the word describes Christians who "walk in line with" the position they have reached (Philippians 3:16), or with the truth of the Gospel. - Galatians 6:16

In each of these cases there is a rule, a standard or principle which is being followed. In Galatians 5:25 this rule, standard or "line" is the Holy Spirit. So to "*walk by the Spirit*:" is to walk along the path or follow the line which the Spirit indicates. The Spirit leads us, but we must "*walk by*" the Spirit and conduct ourselves according to its leading.

In walking by the Spirit, we must set ourselves to follow what we know from the Scriptures to be right. The Scriptures tell us to "*set our minds on the things of the Spirit*;" (Romans 8: 5 and 6) "*seek the things that are above*;" (Colossians 3:1 and 2); think about things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report. (Philippians 4:8) These things will be seen in our whole way of life, the leisure and occupations we pursue, the books we read and the friendships we make.

We are to seek fellowship with other believers who will help us to strengthen our faith, show forth the virtues of love and good works, and concentrate on spiritual matters. By walking actively by the Spirit, we will be able to develop and maintain the fruit of the Spirit.

The victory of crucifying the flesh and walking by the Spirit is, by God's grace, within the reach of every Christian. When we are tempted to stray or indulge our fallen natures, we must resolve to think and say, "I belong to Christ; I have crucified the flesh. The Spirit dwells within me, so I will set my mind on the things of the Spirit and walk by the Spirit according to its line and leading. It is altogether out of the question that I should ever think to allow the old nature to turn me aside from the path that leads to joint-heirship with Christ and eternal life in the heavenly places."

CHAPTER 17

CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIPS

“Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

But let each one examine his own work and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.

For each one shall bear his own load.” - Galatians 5:26 to 6:5.

In Galatians 5:16 to 25 the Apostle described the Christian conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, and also showed the way of victory through crucifying the flesh and walking by the Spirit.

The passage quoted from Galatians 5:26 to 6:5 describes one of the practical results of the Christian victory over the flesh. The victory concerns our personal relationships, especially with our fellow-believers. The Apostle wrote, *“Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”* (5:26) The context of Ephesians 5:18 to 21 is similar where the Apostle wrote *“...be filled with the Spirit,”* and he continued to exhort believers to meet together, join in the reading of psalms and singing of hymns and spiritual songs, and *“submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”*

Both the passages in Galatians and Ephesians show that the evidence of walking by the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit is not some private individual mystical experience, but the practical experience of loving relationships with others, especially other believers. Love is the first fruit of the Spirit, so this is what we should expect. - Galatians 5:13

It is easy to talk about love, but it is more difficult to practise love and demonstrate our love for one another. Paul in Galatians 6 then proceeded to tell believers how, if we are walking by the Spirit, we ought and ought not to behave towards one another.

How Christians Should Not Behave Towards One Another

In Galatians 5:26 the Apostle wrote, *“Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”* The Apostle meant that our opinion of ourselves tends to determine our conduct to others. If we are conceited we may well provoke others and may envy them. The Greek word used here “kenodoxos”, denotes having an opinion of oneself which is empty and vain, and even false. If we are conceited, our relationships with others are bound to be adversely affected.

What Paul said is that if we are conceited we tend to do two things, or at least one of them: provoke one another or envy one another, or both.

The Greek word for “provoke” is “prokaleo”, and this is the only place that it is used in the New Testament. Basically it means to challenge someone to a contest, and implies that we are so conceited, so sure of our superiority that we want to show it. So we may challenge others to a dispute or an argument in order to demonstrate our superior knowledge. We may also envy others who may have gifts or achievements which we would like to add to our own, and thus harbour jealousy. It is possible that we could have such a high opinion of ourselves that we cannot tolerate rivals.

These failings are contrary to love, the first fruit of the Spirit, which Christians should show forth when they are walking by the Spirit. A true Christian should have no conceit, or if this tendency exists, should be seeking the Spirit’s help to subdue it. A Christian should not think highly of himself or herself. and should think humbly. - Romans 12:3

Walking by the Spirit should enable the Christian to see his or her unworthiness and the importance of other people in the sight of God. Christians should consider others as important, and seek every opportunity to serve them. Christian relationships should not be influenced by an attitude of rivalry, but by an active willingness to serve. Every believer is important in God’s sight.

How Christians Should Behave Towards One Another

The general principle is stated in Galatians 6:2, *“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”* The basic issue here is that we all have burdens and that God does not mean us to carry them alone and unaided.

Some believers are very independent, and do not wish to bother others with their burdens. Such conduct shows fortitude and often unselfishness, but could be more stoical than Christian.

Some believers maintain that we are told in Psalm 55:22 to “*cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you,*” and that the Lord Jesus invited “*all that labour and are heavy laden*” to come to Him, and He promised to give them rest.
- Matthew 11:28

On the basis of such Scriptures, some believers argue that we have a divine burden-bearer on Whom we should cast all our care, (1 Peter 5:7) and that it is a sign of weakness and lack of faith to ask for any human help. I believe this attitude and course of action to be a serious mistake. We know Jesus alone bore the burden of our sin and guilt on the cross, and has taken this burden away. But this does not apply to our day-to-day burdens, our worries, temptations, doubts and sorrows. We certainly can cast these burdens on the Lord, as we know He cares for us, but He may choose to help us through human means, by the supportive and practical assistance of others.

Paul himself had this experience. He was deeply worried and burdened about the Corinthian church, and in particular about their reaction to a severe letter he had written to them. Paul wrote, “*...our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears.*” (2 Corinthians 7:5) Clearly, the Apostle was greatly troubled and distressed. But he continued, “*Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus.*” (2 Corinthians 7:6) It seems from this passage that God comforted Paul, not by a vision or a divine intervention, but by the comfort and companionship of a fellow-believer and the good news that he brought.

Human friendship in which we bear one another's burdens, is part of God's purpose for His people. We should not keep our burdens to ourselves, but rather confide in a Christian friend who will help us to bear them. By such burden-bearing we “*fulfil the law of Christ.*” (Galatians 6:2) The law of Christ is to love one another as He loves us, which is the new commandment He gave us. - John 13:34 and 35; 15:12

It is most notable that to *“love our neighbour,” “bear one another’s burdens”* and *“fulfil the law of Christ”* are really three equivalent expressions.

Such deeds are not spectacular and may never be well-known, but God and Jesus will know, and will be pleased with us if we know of someone with a heavy burden on his or her heart or mind and do our utmost to share that burden. Also, we must be humble enough to let others share our burdens.

Bearing one another’s burdens is something every Christian can do and should do. It is a natural consequence of walking by the Spirit and fulfilling the law of Christ. Martin Luther, in his commentary on Galatians, page 540, wrote, *“Christians must have strong shoulders and mighty bones.”* He must have been thinking of physical, material burdens, or perhaps was speaking symbolically of Christians having mental and spiritual burdens.

The Apostle continued in Galatians 6:3, *“For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.”* There seems to be an implication here that if we do not or will not bear one another’s burdens, it is because we are thinking too highly of ourselves, and would not demean ourselves by becoming involved with less spiritual and more ordinary people. Galatians 5:26 makes it apparent that our conduct to others is greatly influenced by an opinion of ourselves.

The truth is that we are not something special, we are of no importance. We understand this because the Spirit within our hearts and minds has opened our eyes to see ourselves as we really are, alienated from God, Who made us in His image, and deserving nothing from Him except destruction. We should not even contemplate thinking of ourselves as better than others, but should be ready to serve them and bear their burdens willingly.

The supreme example of service is that of the Lord Jesus. He said, *“... whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant ... just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”*
- Matthew 20:26 and 28 (NRSV)

We should not even compare ourselves with others, because comparisons may be dangerous to our spiritual welfare. The Apostle wrote, *“But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load.”* (Galatians 6:4 and 5) Here the Apostle seems to mean that we should not scrutinise our neighbour and compare ourselves with him or her, but should examine our *“own work”* and bear our *“own load,”* that is, we are responsible to God for what we do and must take responsibility for our actions and failures.

These exhortations seem at first sight to contradict the exhortation in Galatians 6:2 to *“bear one another’s burdens.”* But this is not the case. The Greek word for burden is different in verses 2 and 5. In verse 2 the Greek word is *“baros”*, meaning a weight or heavy load, while in verse 5 the Greek word is *“phortion”*, meaning a person’s pack.

The burdens which we should share, or help to bear, are those too heavy for one person to bear alone, but the burden we cannot share is one light enough and necessary for us to carry alone, and that is our responsibility to God through Jesus Christ. We must bear this burden, that is, carry this responsibility by ourselves.

An Example Of Burden Bearing

In Galatians 6:1 Paul gave an example of burden-bearing, *“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.”* Paul told the Galatians, and all of us, what to do, in the case of a serious sin, who is to do it and how it is to be done.

The Apostle did not here specify or say what constitutes a serious sin, but he provided a list of serious offences against Christian behaviour in Galatians 5:19 to 21. It is surely difficult to imagine that a committed Christian would fall into or practise any of these offences on the Apostle’s list, but if such did occur, either in those early days or nowadays, the Apostle has told us what to do.

What To Do

The Greek verb translated *“restore”* is *“katartizo”*, and means to *“put in order”* and so *“restore to its former condition”* according to the Greek-English lexicon by W.F. Arndt and

F.W. Gingrich. The word was used in secular Greek as a medical term for setting a fractured or dislocated bone.

It was used in Mark 1:19 to describe the “*mending*” of their fishing nets by the Apostles, and Arndt and Gingrich suggest a wider interpretation, namely, that after a night’s fishing, the apostles were repairing their nets “by cleaning, mending and folding them together.”

Paul’s instruction is positive. If someone in our midst were to be doing or practising something seriously wrong, such as an offence or offences contained in Paul’s list in Galatians 5: 19 to 21, we should not stand aside and do nothing on the pretext that it is none of our business and that we do not wish to become involved. Nor should we despise or condemn such a one, or gossip about him or her.

We should “*restore*” him, or as J.B. Phillips wrote, “*set him back on the right path.*” Luther, in his Commentary on page 538 wrote that we should “run into him, and reaching out your hand, raise him up again, comfort him with sweet words, and embrace him with motherly arms.” The Apostle did not tell us precisely how we are to “*restore*” the fallen one, but the Lord Jesus gave us clear instructions recorded in Matthew 18:15 to 17. We must approach the fallen one privately face to face, and if he or she will listen, we have gained and restored that one. The object must be to “*gain*” or “*restore*” the fallen one, as Jesus and Paul have told us.

Who Is To Do It

The restoring is to be done by “*you who are spiritual.*” Paul meant “mature” or “spiritual” Christians, whom he later described more fully in 1 Corinthians 2:12 to 16, and had described already in Galatians 5:16 to 25. “Spiritual” Christians are those “*led by the Spirit*” and who “*walk by the Spirit*” so that “*the fruit of the Spirit*” appears in their lives. It is only the “spiritual” Christian who should attempt to restore a fallen brother or sister.

How It Should Be Done

“*You who are spiritual restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*” (Galatians 6:1) The Greek word translated “*gentleness*” is “*praotes*”, and was used also as a fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:23. Gentleness therefore is a characteristic of true spirituality,

so it follows that only the truly spiritual are sufficiently gentle to attempt the ministry of restoration. Paul added also that the spiritual ones should be watchful in case they too are tempted.

This is surely a warning against any feelings of self-righteousness or superiority. J.B. Phillips translated the sentence *“Not with any feeling of superiority but being yourselves on guard against temptation.”*

In summary, then, we have been instructed that when a member of the congregation is *“overtaken in any trespass,”* that one is to be restored gently and humbly by mature, spiritual believers in accordance with the instructions given by the Lord Jesus and His chosen Apostle Paul.

In Christian congregations there should be *“no provoking of one another”* and *“no envy of one another,”* but rather we should *“bear one another’s burdens.”* This active Christian *“togetherness”* is the expression of Christian brotherhood. Paul addresses the Galatians as *“brethren”*, and in the Greek manuscript the first word of Galatians is *“brethren”* and the last word, except for the final *“Amen”* is also *“brethren”*.

Christians are brethren, and in this section of Galatians, the New Testament answer to Cain’s question *“Am I my brother’s keeper?”* (Genesis 4:9) is seen. If a believer is my brother, then I am his keeper. I am to care for him in love and be concerned for his welfare. I am to love him and serve him, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

CHAPTER 18

SOWING AND REAPING

“Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.

Do not be deceived. God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

- Galatians 6:6 - 10.

The Apostle was nearing the end of his letter. He had expounded his main themes, and then made some final admonitions. At first sight the instructions and exhortations appear to be only loosely connected, but on closer attention we see a connecting link, namely the principle of sowing and reaping, a principle which applies to all life whether material or moral. The Apostle summarised the matter in 6:7, “...*whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.*”

The principle stated in Galatians 6:7 operates in the material, physical sphere and also in the moral and spiritual sphere. It is not the reapers who decide what the harvest will be like, but the sowers. If a person is faithful and conscientious in his sowing, then that person can expect a good harvest. On the contrary, “... *those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same,*” (Job 4:8) or, as Hosea warned his contemporaries, “*For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.*” (Hosea 8:7) The warning from Hosea to Israel meant that by sowing idolatry and disobedience, they would reap God’s judgment of captivity and exile, first by Assyria then by Babylonia.

This principle is surely a divine law, and in order to emphasise it, the Apostle prefaced it with a command, “*Do not be deceived,*” and the statement, “*God is not mocked.*” The possibility of being deceived is mentioned many times in the New Testament.

The Lord Jesus said that the devil was a liar, "*the father of lies*," and He cautioned His disciples against being led astray. (John 8:44) John warned us in his second letter that "*many deceivers have gone out into the world*." (2 John 7; see also 1 John 2:18 to 27; 4:1 to 6) Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians, "*Let no one deceive you with empty words*." (Ephesians 5:6; see also 1 Corinthians 6:9, 2 Thessalonians 2:3) Already in Galatians, Paul had asked "*who has bewitched*" his readers (3:1) and spoke of the person who "*deceives himself*." (6:3)

Many people, it seems, are deceived into ignoring this law of sowing and reaping. Many sow seeds thoughtlessly and without regard to consequences, and seem blind to the fact that the seeds they sow will produce a corresponding harvest. Or some sow seeds of one kind and expect to receive a harvest of another kind, and imagine that somehow they will succeed or at least get away with it.

This sort of outcome is impossible, so Paul added, "*God is not mocked*." The Greek verb here is "mukterizo", and means literally to "turn the nose up at" somebody, that is, to "sneer at" or "treat with contempt." The NEB translates the word as "fool", while the Arndt-Gingrich lexicon has "outwit".

The Apostle was saying that men may fool themselves or be fooled, but they cannot fool God. They seem to think that they can escape the law of seedtime and harvest (Genesis 8:22), that is, sowing and reaping, but they cannot, for the Scriptures declare that people cannot escape the consequences of their actions.

Paul stated the principle clearly, and then turned to its application. He saw three spheres of Christian experience in which the principle operates: Christian ministry, Christian holiness and Christian well-doing.

Christian Ministry

In Galatians 6:6 Paul wrote, "*Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches*." The Greek words for "*him who is taught the word*" are "ho katechoumenos", that is a person who "*is under instruction in the faith*" as the NEB translates the phrase. This is how Luke described Theophilus in the preface to his Gospel. - Luke 1:4

Whether instruction is given in private, or in a class or group, or to a whole congregation, by means of sermons or interactive presentations, the principle is the same, namely that he (or they) who is (or are) taught the word should help to support the teacher. So a leader who is teaching the word may expect to be supported by the congregation. This is in order because the Scriptures support this principle.

The Lord Jesus said to the seventy men He sent out, *“the labourer is worthy of his hire.”* (Luke 10:7) Paul wrote in this connection, *“Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn ...”* and, *“If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?”* and also *“Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.”* - 1 Corinthians 9:9, 11 and 14

If the principle is properly applied, there should be no doubt of its truth. But, as we are aware, abuses came into the Christian Church, especially the Papal system. Martin Luther in his day realised that the Roman Catholic Church had become wealthy as people poured money into it, and said in his treatise, page 547, *“by this excessive liberality of men, the covetousness of the clergy did increase.”* Nowadays many Churches pay a salary to their ministers or pastors and this leads to the criticism that Christian ministers and pastors are *“on to a good thing”* in a cushy and secure occupation, and that they are *“in it for what they can get out of it.”*

It was to avoid criticism of this sort from the Galatians that Paul renounced his right to material and temporal support, and preached the Gospel free of charge, earning his living as a tent-maker. Nevertheless, the Scriptural principle is clear that a leader or minister should be freed from the need to earn money in order to devote himself to the study and ministry of the Word and to the care of believing brethren. As Luther wrote, on page 552 of his treatise, *“it is impossible for one man both to labour day and night to get a living, and at the same time to give himself to the study of sacred learning as the preaching office requireth.”*

A possible safeguard against abuse by leaders may be contained in 1 Timothy 5:17, *“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching; for the scripture says, “You*

shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain” and “The labourer deserves to be paid.” So if a leader seeks with all his might to understand and apply the Word, and devotes himself wholeheartedly to sow good seed in the minds and hearts of his congregation, then it is in order for him to reap a material livelihood.

A possible abuse, this time by the congregation and not by the leader, is that the congregation may seek to control the leader whom they are supporting financially. They may think that, as they are paying the piper, they should call the tune; and have their leader say only what they want to hear and not preach to them messages with which they might be unhappy.

The right relationship between teacher and those being taught is one of “koinonia”, “fellowship” or “partnership”. So Paul wrote, *“Let him who is taught the word share (koinoneito) in all good things with him who teaches.”* The leader shares spiritual things with the congregation, and they share material things in their support of him. A bishop, Stephen Neill, in his book *“Paul to the Galatians”* wrote on page 71, “This is not to be regarded as a payment. The word “shared” is a rich Christian word, which is used of our fellowship in the Holy Spirit.”

Christian Holiness

“For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap eternal life.” (Galatians 6:8) Paul in these words moved to apply the principles of sowing and reaping to the moral behaviour of Christian people. He raised again the theme of the flesh and the Spirit which he dealt with at some length in Galatians 5:16 to 25. In these verses the Christian’s life was likened to a battleground with the flesh and the Spirit at war with each other constantly. But here in Galatians 6, the Christian’s life was by implication likened to a field in which we as Christians may sow seed, either to the flesh or to the Spirit. The harvest we reap depends on what we sow.

The matter of sowing and reaping is a most important but much neglected principle of holiness. We as Christians are not helpless victims of our nature, our temperament and our environment. What we become depends largely on how we behave. Our characters are shaped by our conduct. Paul has told the Galatians, and us also, that the Christian’s duty is to *“walk by the Spirit”* and to *“sow to the Spirit.”*

Thus the Holy Spirit is likened both to the path along which we walk (Galatians 5), and to the field in which we sow. (Galatians 6) How can we expect to reap the fruit of the Spirit if we do not sow in the field of the Spirit? The old saying is true: "Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny." This is sound Christian teaching.

There are two kinds of sowing that are possible, sowing to the flesh and sowing to the Spirit.

Sowing To The Flesh

As said earlier, our flesh is our lower nature with its passions and desires, and if we yield to these passions and desires, we will do the works of the flesh. This lower nature is in each of us and remains even after conversion and baptism. It is one of the fields in which we may sow.

To "*sow to the flesh*" is to think of fleshly desires and want to yield to them, and even actually do them. The seeds we sow are largely thoughts and deeds. The Apostle has told us about the works of the flesh and listed the main ones in Galatians 5:19 to 21. If we yield to such works, we are sowing to the flesh, and if we continue to yield we will reap corruption and lose our promised inheritance in the kingdom of God. We cannot reap holiness if we sow to the flesh.

Sowing To The Spirit

To "*sow to the Spirit*," is the same as "*to set the mind on the Spirit*" (Romans 8:6) and to "*walk by the Spirit*." (Galatians 5: 16 and 25) The seeds we sow are our thoughts and deeds. We are to "*set our minds on*" the things of God, "*things that are above, not ... things that are on earth.*" (Colossians 3:1, 2) We can "*sow to the Spirit*" in many ways: by the books we read, the company we keep and the leisure occupations in which we engage. We should develop habits of devotion and devoted living in private and in public, in daily prayer and regular Bible study, and in meeting and worshipping with fellow-believers at weekly services. Without such sowing to the Spirit there can be no harvest, no fruit of the Spirit.

Holiness is paramount to the believer. It is not enough for the Christian to be good and be thought of as a good person. It is certainly essential for the Christian to be good, "goodness" being a fruit of the Spirit, but a Christian, to be a child of God,

must also be holy, that is, pure, upright and blameless in his or her life as far as is possible in the fallen state of the human race. The Apostle said, *“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”* (Hebrews 12:14) The need for holiness is mentioned again and again in the New Testament, in Romans, 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, 1 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, Titus and Hebrews.

Paul distinguished between two sowings and two harvests. If we sow to the flesh we shall *“from the flesh reap corruption.”* This means that a process of moral decay will set in. We will go from bad to worse until we finally perish. On the other hand, if we sow to the Spirit, we will *“from the Spirit reap eternal life,”* that is, a process of moral and spiritual growth will begin and develop and will lead by God’s grace to eternal life.

Therefore, if we seek to reap a harvest of holiness, we must avoid sowing to the flesh and keep sowing to the Spirit. We must *“crucify the flesh”* and *“walk by the Spirit.”* There is no other way of growing in holiness.

Christian Well-Doing

“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” - Galatians 6:9 and 10

The Apostle changed the subject from personal holiness to doing good, helping others in the church and in the community generally, still under the metaphor of sowing and reaping. He told us not to grow weary or lose heart, because doing good is like sowing seed. If we persevere in sowing, then *“in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”*

We must be patient and continue to sow like the farmer who *“waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.”* (James 5:7) In other words, we continue to do good, even if we do not see benefits to others right away or even over long periods. We remain patient, knowing the Lord is aware of all our intentions and actions.

The sowing is the doing of good works in the church and the community. But what is the harvest? Paul did not tell us, thus we are left to draw our own conclusions.

Doing good always produces good results. It may bring comfort, relief or assistance to people in need. It may even lead an unbeliever to repentance and salvation. Jesus Himself spoke of this work as sowing and reaping in Matthew 9:37 and John 4:35 to 38. By the doing of good works we may *“let our light shine”* so that others may notice the good works and learn to respect Christianity and God, Who brought about the possibility of salvation through Jesus Christ, and gave us the promise of a new world order in which righteousness will prevail. - Matthew 5:16; 2 Peter 3:13

The Apostle said to do good to all, especially to those of the household of faith. This household consists of our fellow-believers who share with us *“like precious faith,”* (2 Peter 1:1) and so are our brothers and sisters in the family of God. Our brethren therefore must claim our first loyalty, but our Christian charity must not stop there. We are even to love our enemies and do good to them, as Jesus said. (Matthew 5:44) A *“patient continuance in well-doing”* is a characteristic of a committed Christian, and evidence of a saving faith of all those who *“seek glory and honour and immortality, eternal life.”* - Romans 2:7

The three spheres of Christian life to which Paul applied the principle *“whatever a man sows, that he will also reap”* are firstly God’s Word, sown by teachers and leaders in the minds and hearts of their congregations, secondly, the seed sown in our own thoughts and deeds whether in the flesh or the Spirit, and thirdly the seed of good works, sown in the lives of people in the believers’ communities.

In each case, seed-time is followed by harvest. The teacher or leader who sows God’s Word will reap support by the congregation. The sinner who sows to the flesh will reap corruption. The believer who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life. The Christian who sows good works in the community will reap a good crop of grateful recipients, and recognition from the Lord.

In none of these spheres can God be mocked or fooled. We cannot fool or deceive God, and we must take care that we do not fool ourselves. We must accept the law of sowing and reaping and allow it to rule our lives. If we want to reap a good harvest, we must sow and keep sowing good seed, for in due time we shall reap a good harvest and great reward from the Lord.

CHAPTER 19

THE ESSENCE OF CHRISTIANITY

“See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!

As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these try to compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.

For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh. But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.

And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.” - Galatians 6:11 - 18

The Apostle had reached the end of his letter. It seems from verse 11 that someone wrote the message from Paul's dictation, but then Paul took the pen himself and wrote a final message. Evidently he did so with every letter he wrote, as he said in 2 Thessalonians 3:17, *“I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the mark in every letter of mine; it is the way I write.”* (NRSV) Sometimes he would write a final exhortation or grace, but to the Galatians he wrote several closing sentences in his own handwriting.

Various suggestions have been made about the *“large letters”* of Galatians 6:11. Two suggestions seem the most likely understandings. The first is that the *“large letters”* are due to Paul's bad eyesight, the physical infirmity he mentioned in Galatians 4:13 to 15.

In relation to the second suggestion, most commentators consider that Paul used large letters for emphasis, much as we today would use capital letters or underlining to emphasise words or phrases.

J. B. Phillips in his translation added a footnote: "According to centuries-old Eastern usage, this could easily mean, "Note how heavily I have pressed upon the pen in writing this." Then it could be translated, "Notice how heavily I underline these words to you."

If emphasis was the Apostle's intention, then it seems clear that he was emphasising the principal themes of the Christian Gospel. He contrasted himself and the gospel message to the Judaizing teachers and the two religious systems that they were purporting to combine. As he did so, he pinpointed the vital issues. In reading the Apostle's words, we find ourselves taken out of the controversy between Paul and the Judaizers in the first century AD, and brought right into the twenty-first century. We can even think of church history throughout the Gospel Age in which these issues have been continuously debated.

Two questions about the Christian religion are:

Is the Christian religion outward or inward?

Is the Christian religion human or divine?

Is Christianity Outward Or Inward?

We must affirm that Christianity fundamentally is not a religion of external ceremonies, but an experience in individuals that is inward and spiritual, an experience of the mind and heart.

The Judaizers concentrated on something outward, namely, circumcision. In Galatians 6:12 and 13 they were described not only as being themselves circumcised, but as trying to compel the Galatian Christians to be circumcised. They were saying that "*unless you are circumcised you cannot be saved,*" (Acts 15:1) thus denying that salvation came about by faith alone.

Why were they doing this? Paul in response was very outspoken. He said that they desired "*to make a good showing in the flesh,*" (6:12) and that "*they may glory in your flesh.*" (6:13) Circumcision is a fleshly rite, and it is, of course, true that God gave the rite to Abraham as a sign of His covenant. But in and of itself it was of no significance. Yet the Judaizers were elevating it to an ordinance of central importance, insisting that without it nobody could be saved.

We realise and understand that an outward rite performed on the flesh cannot possibly secure salvation or be an indispensable condition of salvation. The teaching is ridiculous.

This same mistake is made today by some who declare that the ceremony of baptism, whether by sprinkling or immersion, is essential to salvation. It is our understanding that the ceremony of baptism by immersion is important, but only as a public witness to the commitment of a Christian person's intention to follow Christ and obey His commands for life. The Scriptures certainly contain commandments to believers to be baptised in water as a witness to others that their minds and hearts are centred on Jesus and on God through Jesus, and that this commitment is to be lifelong. But the ceremony of baptism is an outward and bodily act, and under the Christian Gospel, salvation is gained by faith and obedience, and not by any rites or ceremonies.

So what then is the issue, the matter of central importance? The Apostle gave us the answer in Galatians 6:15, *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.”*

What matters primarily is not whether a person has been baptised in water or circumcised, but whether he or she has been born anew and has become a new creation. In Romans 2:29 the Apostle wrote of circumcision of the heart, thus using fleshly circumcision as a symbol of the new creation, just as the ceremony of baptism in water is a symbol of the change to a person's life. It is a serious mistake to substitute the sign for the thing signified. Circumcision and baptism in water are things of the flesh, outward and visible rites or ceremonies performed by people, whereas the new creation is a birth of and in the Spirit, an inward and invisible change brought about by God within the heart and mind of a believer.

Throughout Israel's history, the Israelites made an outward, superficial show of their religion, and even turned to the worship of idols and false gods. God repeatedly sent His messengers to reprove them and recall them to a spiritual and inward religion. These failings were a great fault of the nation of Israel in the eighth and seventh centuries BC, so that God through His prophets complained, *“this people draw near with their mouth and honour me with their lips, while their hearts are*

far from me." (Isaiah 29:13) Jesus applied this Scripture to the Scribes and Pharisees of His day and exposed their hypocrisy.
- Mark 7:6 and 7

Religious formalism marked the medieval church before the Reformation, as was also the case with the Anglican Church in the eighteenth century, until Wesley and Whitefield brought some of the Gospel truths to light once more. Even today, some churches are largely dependent on external show. Indeed, it seems natural for fallen people to ignore and turn from the real, the inward and the spiritual, and create a substitute religion which is easy and comfortable because its demands are external and ceremonial only.

Outward things, however, matter little or not at all in comparison to the new creation and the new birth. The essence of Christianity is inward; outward forms are valueless if inward reality is lacking.

Is Christianity Human Or Divine?

Is Christianity a matter of what we do for God or a matter of what God has done for us?

In their concentration on circumcision, the Judaisers made a serious mistake. Circumcision was a human work performed by one human being on another. Furthermore, circumcision as a religious symbol committed people to keep the Mosaic Law. *"It is necessary"* the Judaisers said, *"to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses."*
- Acts 15:5

They insisted upon obedience to the Law because they believed that salvation depended upon it. They held that faith in the death of Christ was insufficient, and that people had to earn the favour and forgiveness of God by their own good works. This belief meant that the Judaisers' religion was a human religion. It began with circumcision, a human work, and continued with obedience to the Mosaic Law, which was more human work.

Paul vigorously challenged this teaching. He even called in question the motives of the Judaisers. He argued that the Judaisers could not seriously believe that salvation was a reward for obedience to the Law because they did *"not themselves keep the law."* - Galatians 6:13

They must have realised that salvation could not be earned, so why did they insist on works of merit to gain salvation? Paul said that they insisted on circumcision to escape "*persecution for the cross of Christ.*" - Galatians 6:12 and also 5:11

When we speak of the cross, we understand it to mean the sacrifice Christ has given, whereby we can gain eternal life by faith in that sacrifice.

What is there about the cross of Christ which puts people off and even angers them and stirs them to persecute those who preach it? It is this: Christ died on the cross for us sinners and became a curse for us. (Galatians 3:13) The cross tells us some very unpalatable truths about ourselves, namely, that we are sinners alienated from God and under His curse, and are unable to save ourselves. Christ bore our sin and curse because there is no other way that we can gain release from sin and God's curse.

If we could have been forgiven by good works, by being circumcised and keeping the Law, there would have been no need for the cross as Paul indicated in Galatians 2:21. We can each of us say and should say, Christ has died because of me, it is my sin that Christ has borne, my curse that Christ has taken away, my debt that Christ has paid in full, and my death that Christ has died instead of me.

Nothing in history, or anywhere in the universe for that matter has humbled us and cut us down to size, as it were, like the cross. Most of us, perhaps all of us, tend to have inflated views of ourselves, and carry within us a tendency to self-righteousness. But at Calvary, at the feet of the cross, we realise that we are in fact fallen human beings under condemnation to death, and that we cannot save ourselves.

People by and large do not like this. They resent the humiliation of seeing themselves as God sees them and as they really are. Some Christians prefer comfortable illusions, turning aside from the cross, and fabricate a Christianity without reference to the cross, or at most without any emphasis on the cross, and rely on their own works and not on those of Jesus Christ. The reason for steering clear of the cross is probably pride and the wounds that the cross inflicts on some people's pride.

The attitude of the Apostle was totally at variance with such views. He wrote in Galatians 6:14 *“But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”* For Paul, the cross was not something to escape, but the object of his glorying. The truth is that we cannot glory or boast in ourselves and in the cross simultaneously. We must make a choice to humble ourselves as sinners and turn to the cross for salvation, and glory only in the cross all the rest of our lives.

We and the world have really parted company. The world at large consists of unbelievers who have no interest in the cross and Christian faith. We should see ourselves as condemned sinners and Christ crucified as our deliverer, and should not be concerned about what the world may think of us or do to us. The Apostle wrote that in Christ *“the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”* - Galatians 6:14

At this stage in his letter, Paul had contrasted incorrect and correct doctrine. On the one hand was circumcision, standing for the outward and the human, a formal external religion and our own efforts to save ourselves. On the other hand is the cross of Christ and the new creation, the finished work of Christ on the cross to redeem us and the inward work of the Spirit in our hearts to restore and sanctify us. These latter features are the fundamental truths of the Gospel.

To understand the Gospel, we must grasp that Christianity is firstly inward and spiritual, and secondly a divine work and manifestation of grace. These two principles of the Gospel are always and everywhere the same, not only in first century Galatia, but in the whole church at all times and in all places.

Paul wrote, *“And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.”* (Galatians 6:16) Those who *“walk by this rule”* and *“the Israel of God”* are not two groups, but one. The connecting Greek particle *“kai”* should be translated *“even”* (not *“and”*) or be omitted altogether as in the RSV.

The Christian Church enjoys a direct continuity with God's people in the Old Testament in that God has purposed to have His Israel, but not as a disobedient nation, rather a faithful and obedient people in Christ.

Those who are in Christ today are “*the true circumcision,*” (Philippians 3:3) “*Abraham’s seed,*” (Galatians 3:29) and the “*Israel of God.*” - Galatians 6:16

What is the rule of Galatians 6:16 by which Christians are to walk? The Greek word for “rule” is “kanon”, which means a measuring rod or rule, the carpenter’s or surveyor’s line by which a direction is taken. This rule is the canon of Scripture, the doctrine of the Apostles, faith in the cross of Christ and the experience and achievement of the new creation within individual believers. This is the rule or canon by which the Church must walk.

Only by walking according to this rule can the Church enjoy God’s blessing, and experience peace and unity. Neglect of this rule will deprive the Church of God’s mercy and consequently the benefits of peace, unity and harmony within the organisation.

Paul continued, in Galatians 6:17, “*From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.*” The Greek word for “marks” is “stigmata”. Some people believe, as medieval churchmen believed, that the “stigmata” are the scars in Jesus’ hands, feet and side that became manifest in Christians who contemplated and meditated on the sufferings of Christ. Up to the beginning of the twentieth century, some 321 claims to “stigmatisation” had been made, in some of which additional marks were said to have appeared on the forehead, where Christ wore the crown of thorns, on the shoulder, where He bore the cross, and on the back, where He was scourged. Such claims will not be considered here, but there is a book by B.B. Warfield entitled “*Miracles, Yesterday and Today*” in which claims to stigmatisation are discussed.

It is most unlikely that the marks or stigmata of Jesus which Paul bore on his body were of this kind. They were rather the wounds which he had received while being persecuted for Jesus’ sake. According to 2 Corinthians 11:23 to 25 he had received “*countless beatings*” with the lash and with rods, and was also the victim of stoning.

Paul may have endured some of these sufferings by the time he wrote to the Galatians. Certainly he had been stoned in Lystra, one of the Galatian cities, and left for dead (Acts 14:19).

It seems to me that the “*marks of the Lord Jesus*” were the wounds which Paul’s persecutors had inflicted upon him, and the permanent scars they left on his body.

The word “stigmata” was used in secular Greek for the branding of a slave. It is possible that Paul had this in mind, because he was a slave of Jesus, and he received his branding in his persecutions.

Paul’s plea “*From now on let no man trouble me*” is translated by J.B. Lightfoot in his work, “*Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians*” as “let no man question my authority.” (page 225) Paul longed to be left alone by the deceivers who sought to undermine his authority. As a Jew, he had on his body the mark that the Judaisers were emphasising, but he had other marks too, proving that he belonged to Jesus Christ, not to Jewry. He had not avoided persecution for the cross of Christ. On the contrary he carried wounds on his body which designated him as a true slave and faithful follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul concluded his letter with the words, “*Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.*” He had begun his letter with his customary greeting of grace in Galatians 1:3, but had gone on almost immediately to express his amazement that the Galatians were so quickly deserting God Who had called them “*in the grace of Christ.*” (Galatians 1:6) His whole letter expounded the theme of God’s grace, His unmerited favour to sinners, and on that note the letter ended.

Paul bore the marks of the Lord Jesus on his body, and the grace of the Lord Jesus in his spirit. He desired his readers to have the same spirit, for they were his brethren in the family of God.

CHAPTER 20

A SUMMARY OF PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIAN CHURCHES

The main reason why Paul wrote to the Galatian churches was the presence of deceivers who had come among them. Paul made reference to them throughout his letter, either directly or indirectly. They were *“troubling”* the churches. The word translated “troubling” occurs in Galatians 1:7 and 5:10, and means, according to the Arndt-Gingrich lexicon, to “disturb, unsettle, throw into confusion”. The confusion that these Judaising teachers were spreading was caused by their wrong ideas. The Judaisers were perverting the Gospel, and Paul confronted them indignantly.

There were three main points at issue between Paul and the Judaisers who were the teachers of incorrect doctrine. These three main points are still vital issues today. They are:

- The issue of authority.
- The issue of salvation.
- The issue of holiness.

THE ISSUE OF AUTHORITY

Chapters 1 and 2

How do we know what to believe and whom to believe? Paul and Barnabas founded the Galatian churches on their first missionary journey by their preaching and teaching. After their departure, other teachers arrived who claimed to have the authority and support of the Church at Jerusalem, and who began to undermine the teaching of Paul. This caused confusion in the Galatian churches because they were confronted by two sets of teachers, each claiming to be preaching the truth, but each contradicting the other. Who were the Galatians to listen to and believe?

This same situation exists among Christians today, except that instead of a simple choice between two viewpoints, we have a large number of opinions from which to choose.

Many expositors are reputable scholars, many are bishops and theologians, and many are Bible students, ordinary humble people like ourselves. Many comments and opinions diverge or are contradictory one to another. How can we know which to choose and whom to follow?

Paul told us what we should do. He declared and asserted his authority as an Apostle of Jesus Christ. He expected the Galatians to receive the gospel he preached to them because of his superior authority. The Judaising teachers claimed to have authority from the Jerusalem Church, which authority was an ecclesiastical one. Paul insisted that his mission and message came not from the Church, but from Christ Himself.

This is the argument of Galatians 1 and 2, in which Paul stated his claim in no uncertain manner, and then supported it by telling the Galatians of his commission and his subsequent relations with the Jerusalem Apostles. It was Christ Who authorised him and no-one else. However, it must also be said that, although the Jerusalem Apostles had not authorised Paul, they wholeheartedly endorsed his mission and his message, as we are told in Galatians 2:9.

Conscious of his apostolic authority, Paul expected the Galatians to accept it. They had done this on the first missionary journey, receiving him *“as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.”* (Galatians 4:14) When his authority was challenged and his message contradicted, he still expected them to recognise his authority as Christ’s chosen apostle, saying to them, *“I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine.”* (Galatians 5:10) The original message which he had preached to them (Galatians 1:8) and which they had received (Galatians 1:9), was to be the one and only true message. If anyone preached some other message or a contradictory one, the Apostle said *“let him be accursed.”* - Galatians 1:9 and 10

So, in view of the differing teachings in the Christian religion today, how are we to decide whom to follow and believe? The answer is clear. We must examine and test all teachings and beliefs by the teaching of the apostles of Jesus Christ. *“Peace and mercy”* will be on the company of believers who walk *“by this rule.”* - Galatians 6:16

The teaching of Jesus and His apostles is permanently preserved in the New Testament, and must regulate the beliefs and practices of every generation of Christians. The authors of the New Testament writings were commissioned by Christ, and wrote with His authority. Their writings are the word of God, and thus the Scriptures have authority over all the churches and companies of believers, and not vice versa.

THE ISSUE OF SALVATION

Chapters 3 and 4

How can we be justified, that is, be considered righteous by God, have our sins forgiven, and be restored to His favour and fellowship as His children?

Paul's answer was straightforward. Salvation is possible only by faith in the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Paul's letter refers time and again to the cross. Why was the cross, as a symbol of Christ's sacrifice, the subject of his preaching and the object of his glorying? What did Christ achieve by dying on the cross? Consider three statements in Galatians:

He *"gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age"* (Galatians 1:4);

"The Son of God ... loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20);

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us." (Galatians 3:13)

These statements tell us that Christ gave Himself for our sins and became a curse for us. God's curse is His righteous displeasure and judgment which rests on all who disobey Him. This displeasure and judgment were transferred to Christ on the cross as we are told in Galatians 3:13. Christ bore our curse so that we might receive the blessing promised to Abraham, as Paul has explained in Galatians 3:14 and 29.

So what must we do to be saved? The Lord Jesus has done everything for us by His death on the cross. All we have to do is to believe in and commit to Jesus and trust Him to receive us as we apply to ourselves the benefits of His death for us and all people.

Paul wrote *“a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.”* (Galatians 2:16) In Christ we receive justification, adoption and the gift of the Spirit.

The life of Christ and his death on the cross is a sufficient sacrifice for sin, and nothing whatever can be or needs to be added to it. Salvation is a gift freely bestowed on the basis of Christ's death, and to Christ's death we can contribute or add precisely nothing.

The Church is *“the household of faith.”* (Galatians 6:10) Faith is the chief mark of God's children. Faith unites God's people of every place and age.

If we believe, we then are children of Abraham (Galatians 3: 7 and 29), for we are justified by faith just as he was (Galatians 3:6). In Christ we inherit Abraham's blessing (Galatians 3:14). Thus it is faith which unites the Old and New Testaments, and gives to the Bible its overall unity.

Paul wrote in Galatians 3:26 and 28 *“For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* This shows to us that if we are in Christ by faith we are both *“sons of God”* and *“all one.”* External distinctions of race, rank and gender are all rendered null and void. All that matters is to be *“in Christ”*, that is, to be committed to him. There is no place among Christians for ecclesiastical, social or racial discrimination. Faith in Christ unites true believers and makes all of equal value in God's sight.

THE ISSUE OF HOLINESS

Chapters 5 and 6

How can we control the sinful desires of our fallen human nature and live a life of righteousness, purity and love? How is it possible to become holy?

Paul, in Galatians 5, described the inner conflict between *“the flesh”* and *“the spirit”* and the way of victory by the Spirit overcoming the desires of the flesh. Those who belong to Christ, said the Apostle, *“have crucified the flesh”* and rejected completely its evil *“passions and desires.”* - Galatians 5:24

Such a way of life is part of our repentance. It began at our conversion, and we need to keep it in mind always and renew it daily.

The people of Christ strive to be *“led by the Spirit”* (5:18), follow its line (5:25), and sow in its *“field.”* (6:8) We strive to do these things by disciplined habits of thinking and living, so that the *“fruit of the Spirit”* will appear in our lives and govern our conduct. This is the Christian way of holiness.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God and also of Christ which dwells in every believer. One of the greatest works of the Holy Spirit is to conform us to the image of Christ, to form Christ in us and bring forth in our lives the fruit of Christlikeness.

So we have Christ and His apostles to teach us, Christ through His death on the cross to save us, and Christ through His Spirit to sanctify us. This is the message of Paul’s letter to the Galatians and indeed of Christianity itself. It is all included in the Apostle’s final message: *“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.”*



PRODUCED AND DISTRIBUTED BY
New Covenant Fellowship
ACN 004 108 589

First printed 2010

ISBN 0 9587116 5 8

www.newcovenantfellowship.org.au

info@newcovenantfellowship.org.au