

Galatians - Commentaries by Charles Stanley

Things New and Old: Volume 30, Paul's Defence of the Gospel: No. 7 (6:12)

We now come to the close of Paul's earnest defense of the gospel which he had received by revelation from the Lord. He says, "As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ."

What a common principle this is in man's religious nature. He wants numbers, to make a fair show in the flesh. He will give his wealth—even, he will toil, he will allow almost anything, if it will only make proselytes and swell the party to which he belongs. He may do all this, and be a stranger to Christ. And then the circumcision, that is Judaism, had peculiar-claims. In the midst of the darkness of this whole world, it only had the knowledge and testimony of the one God. It only had the oracles of God. Surely here was much for man to boast of, and they did boast, and bitterly hated and stirred up persecution against anything that intrenched upon it. To incorporate then believers with this ancient system by circumcision, was the way sought to stop persecution, and wipe away the reproach of the cross.

Is there nothing like this in our day? The great desire is to make a fair show in the flesh, to increase the proselytes, to swell the numbers of the ancient systems for the improvement of the flesh.

But is the evil nature of man improved? It may be held in check, but has it improved by the law for 1,500 years? The apostle says not. "For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but they desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh." What a boast this would be. If the multitudes of the churches in Galatia would all become proselytes by being circumcised, all professing to be under the law, what a fair show in the flesh. This is the spirit of conformity as set up by Nebuchadnezzar. Oh, how men do long for this outward show. How beautiful such a scene! All circumcised, that is, proselytized; all keeping the sabbath; all swelling the vast assemblies of worshippers. No dissent, and therefore, no persecution. How wonderfully improved, you say, is society. Is not this enough to make a man boast? Not Paul.

Paul says, "But God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." What a man this Paul is. This beautiful scene of religious show in the flesh, though all men be conformed to it, has positively no charms for him. He says, I will take my stand outside of it all with that crucified Man, I will boast of Him, and Him alone. That cross has proved to me what you are, oh world of Jews and Gentiles. I have seen an end of this fair show in the flesh. It is forever judged, crucified to me. I will boast of the cross, the place you have given my Lord. Yes, this is the end of all human pretensions: man has proved himself utterly vile and at enmity with God. He has shown his hatred to God in the shameful death of the Son of God. There all united; the Gentile man with his philosophy and learning, and the Jew with all his pretensions to righteousness. On that cross the world is proved guilty, judged, and crucified; and I am crucified to the world. There is the true discerning of my old self as a child of Adam.

I accept the cross, it is my just desert; I will boast of the One that thus died for me.

Now Paul sums up in a few words, his grand and inspired defense of the gospel. How little we have understood these words, and yet they present to us the very foundation truth of Christianity. He says, "For [in Christ Jesus] neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature," or "new creation."

What can these words mean? What was the thought the Jew had as to circumcision, and being under the law? That it improved him, and made him a worshipper of the true God in His temple or house on earth, as, Paul himself had done, seeking to establish his own righteousness, being exceedingly zealous of the tradition of his fathers.

He had found it of no avail, of no use; for when the crucified One appeared to him in glory, he found out that he was the chief of sinners, blaspheming and persecuting the Lord of glory. If the law could have availed for any man, it must have done so for religious Saul. It was no doubt gain, to him before men, but for righteousness before God he treated all that was gain to him as dung. It was the test whether, the old man could be improved. Nay, further, when God gave His Son, man under law would not have Him, but cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him."

Now as to the uncircumcision, the whole Gentile world without the law, yet having a conscience knowing good and evil—with all its moral teaching and schools of philosophy, of which men were very proud, all seeking to improve man sunk in sin—did it avail? See the answer in Rom. 1:18-32. And that lawless world was fairly represented by Pilate. For once there was uniformity, but it was to reject and crucify the Son of God, Pilate, Herod and the Jews are: friends!

We now come to the grave inquiry, Has Christendom fallen into the fatal Galatian heresy? Is it the mixture of the truth, or the attempt to mix up the law and the gospel, and for what purpose? Is it not to improve man—man fallen and sinful? Is it to restore him? Has the Christianity of centuries been a mixture of christian truth, the law, and, heathenism, having for its object the improvement of fallen humanity? —the saving of what scripture calls the old man, our fallen humanity as derived from the first Adam?

If this is our object, according to this epistle we are laboring under a total mistake. Yes, a mistake which is the cause of endless sorrow and disappointment. A child is baptized, confirmed, takes the sacrament, observes heathen feast days under Christian names, reads prayers, observes ceremonies, seeks to keep the law, tries hard to be religious. And for what purpose? To improve his sinful nature. Does it avail anything? Nothing: he finds his evil nature as bad as ever. The words of Jesus are true, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh."

And, what is most distressing, the evangelical has precisely the same object as the ritualist—the improvement of the old man. And how often he exclaims, “I am not a bit better.” The longer, he lives, if a Christian, the more he abhors himself; and, the more he tries to improve his old carnal self, the more disappointed he is; the more he fails. No avail, no avail. Oh, what vain efforts to make the flesh better and holy. Yes, there are holiness meetings for this purpose, in order to attain to holiness of the old man, or to eradicate him, and thus be without sin in the flesh. And in the fervor of social intercourse, some may hope they are now perfect, without sin, and their love perfect! But after a time, and when alone, how dreadful to find the flesh still the same. We believe there is a terrible mistake throughout Christendom on this very serious matter. Every effort to improve my old self is utterly in vain. This is not christian truth at all, but the very opposite.

Will you notice, that the apostle not only tells us what will not avail, but also what will. “For.... neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature,” literally “new creation.” Before we examine what avails-before God, just look back at one statement as to the flesh, the old man; “And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the passions and lusts.” (Chap. 5:24) No thought of either improving it or indulging it. It is literally set aside by the cross of Christ, put away from the sight of God on the cross. We thus reckon it dead—my old self dead. I am to treat myself as dead. There now we can look at “new creation.”

Mark, this is the only true scriptural standing of every believer. “Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature [or creation]: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new, and all things are of God,” &c. (2 Cor. 5:17, 18.) Now, “new creation” is not old things improved. “New creation” is not an effort of mine, or a work of man. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” (Eph. 2:10.)

Is not this truth of “new creation” little understood? Do you really understand that all the religion and philosophy of this world cannot either improve the old man, or new-create the new man in Christ Jesus? Oh, how blind we have been; surely we ought to seek to help each other in these things. Just read Eph. 1; 2 What a new creation! How worthy of God. That new creation is suited to God. Every believer is brought into favor in the Beloved. No cobbling of the old man, but it is buried out of sight; and the new creation is the climax of Paul’s defense of the gospel.

One more word as to walk. Many will say after reading this, If Paul takes away the law, or the law mixed with grace, as the believer’s rule of walk, or life, what rule does he give us? Let us read: “Neither circumcision [the law] availeth anything, nor uncircumcision [lawlessness], but new creation. And as many as walk by this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.” What a subject to meditate upon. What a rule for our walk—“new creation.” The natural man knows nothing of this. It is perfect, it is divine, it is all of God. Not (I) now, but Christ. “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

Christ is the beginning, the head, the all, and in all, of the new creation. We are called to walk no longer under the law, which tests the flesh and provokes its corruptions, but as a new creation of God unto good works; works suitable to God, suitable to Christ, Head of the new creation. May He bless these feeble meditations on Paul’s defense of the gospel, and use them for the help and comfort of His children everywhere, and to Him be all the praise. Amen.

Blessed Lord! Keep our eyes fixed on Jesus within the veil. Help us to feed on Him. Teach us to discern between clean and unclean. And, though the world seeth Thee not, may we see Thee.

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Chapter 5:14. Paul now shows that whilst the law availed nothing for a holy life, he fully allows elsewhere that it is holy, just, and good. Now he says, “By love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” This is a well-established fact. “For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.....God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but, after the Spirit.”

This is a glorious part of the gospel Paul defends. We are not only justified from our sins and iniquities, but justified from sin, the root in us, by sin being judged, condemned by the sacrifice for sin, our Jesus bearing this judgment due to us. What a relief when this is really known in the soul! Sin as a root in the flesh is now no hindrance to the Spirit—sin having been judged. Then further, the law of the Spirit is superior to the law of sin and death. I have, as a Christian, a law, or power in the Spirit infinitely superior to my old sinful self. The result is this, that in this totally new place the sinful flesh is set aside as judged, “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us.” But is this by putting our sinful flesh under law again? No, the very opposite, “Who walk not after the flesh.” What, do you not seek to mortify the flesh by long fastings, and prayers, as sincere nuns and monks have done? Do you not seek to chasten and improve the flesh by the various means prescribed by those who take the place of being your guides? Surely you ought to put your evil lusting nature under the restraint of law! No! Paul says, not that way at all. “Who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

We are not now on the question of justification, but of walk. The righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in us who are not under law. We are born of God, have the nature of God, and that is love. The nature of our old man as in the flesh was hatred and enmity to God and man. In that state we were not, and could not be subject to the law of God, which surely requires us to be what we were not. In our old nature, evil was ever present with us. When we would do good, even then evil prevailed. Such was the trial of the flesh.

But now there is this immense difference. We have a totally new nature, and to us a totally new principle of life and power, even the Spirit of life. Now our very nature is love, and “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us.” Thus with the delivered Christian, his new nature delights to do the will of God, and he has the power. Love is the fulfilling of the law.

But, if those who were introducing the law were biting and devouring those who were not circumcised, that was not love: they needed to take heed lest they consumed one another. Well, now, this is the question: If you can never meet the righteous requirements of the law by being under it, and if you have still a nature that can bite and devour, the very opposite of love, how are you to walk in holiness according to the holiness of that which is born of God? In other words, if not under the law, how are you to walk worthy of God, whose very nature is the holiness of love?

Verse 16. "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." Mark, this does not say there is no flesh or evil nature left in you. That is fully admitted. But a distinct remedy is presented, so that you may, as we have said, be superior to the flesh, so as not to fulfill its evil desires. "Walk in the Spirit." This is God's remedy. Take hold of infinite strength and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. And this is further enforced: "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye may not do the things that ye would."

Are you a Christian, that is, are you born again, and have you the Holy Spirit dwelling in you—your sins forgiven you for Christ's sake? You say, Through the mercy of God I can say it is so. I am a Christian. Have you not lusts utterly contrary to the Spirit? You say, That is the very plague of my heart and life. That is exactly what you find here in this scripture. If the first part of this verse is true of you, then the old man is not mended or in the least better. And you find it so. Then what is your remedy? How shall you overcome them? The desires of the Spirit of God are holy and pure. You may read the list below, in verses 19-24. There is the double catalog—what the works of the flesh are, and what the fruits of the Spirit are. There is the black list of what the flesh is capable of doing. And every Christian that knows himself, knows that this is a true bill; this is God's account of what the flesh is. And are not these lusts (worse than savage beasts) to be put under law? No, the law only provoked them into actual transgressions. And the inspired defender of the gospel says, "Of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God," Thus to put believers under law, as the law provoked lust unto sin, would be by placing them under law to shut them out of the kingdom of heaven. This settles the charge that they might sin that grace should abound, or as it is called, antinomianism.

It is not how may we practice these sins? Far from it; but how may we not "do such things?" Let this be seen, and the subject will become clear. You long for practical holiness and righteousness of walk. How is this to be obtained? These Judaizing teachers would put them under law. The scripture plainly declares the flesh does thus lust; but you have the Spirit: yes. Then walk in the Spirit. The only power for a holy walk is real, humble, watchful dependence on the Spirit. You say, Well, I am puzzled that the flesh in a believer is so vile, and that he needs the constant power of the Spirit; and is there no improvement of the flesh? No. What then? "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the passions and lusts." Crucifixion is not improvement, but death, the most painful and ignominious death. Have we really accepted God's judgment of the flesh, mine, yours, on the cross of Christ? There is the end of vile me. My old man is entirely sin; but judged on the cross. He was made sin for us. We can thus reckon ourselves dead unto sin, and alive unto God. Sin has been utterly condemned on the cross. I, my old self, was sin; I therefore have been judged, so as to need judging no more as to my old nature.

Since this is the case, let us then not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another. Surely the deepest humility becomes us. How great then the contrast between the two natures in a believer! What he is as a child of Adam, with a nature so utterly, unmendably vile, but judged and crucified with Christ, his holy, sinless substitute: and the new nature born of God. And how great the contrast between the two administrations, that of law and that of the Spirit. It is not that the holy requirements of God are abolished, but how shall they be accomplished? and the answer is, not by the flesh being placed again under the law, but by being wholly condemned on the cross, and by walking in the Spirit as a child of God, reckoning; my old self dead.

So far from this being antinomianism, it is the only means whereby practical holiness can be accomplished. Indeed, a most solemn warning is given in connection with this very subject, in, further defense of the holiness of the gospel. "Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit,, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

Here is a principle of universal application.

"Whatsoever a man soweth." This is not the same as a fall in a moment of temptation, though the bitter fruit of that may go with a man as long as he lives; but this is not sowing. The most terrible example of sowing to the flesh may be seen in Judas, who sought opportunity to betray the Lord for a little silver. Now if the believer sinks so low through carelessness and want of prayer, as to sow, to seek opportunity to indulge the flesh, there will be no exception to this rule in his case. Oh, what misery may he bring on himself and family, through sowing to the flesh, though saved so as by fire eventually.

Does not all this prove that though we should reckon the flesh, our old selves dead, and treat the flesh as dead, yet our old self is not actually dead, not even improved in the least. There is still in us the flesh, and if we live to it, walk in it, sow to it, the government of God, of our Father, must take its course; we must reap here what we sow. And at this point, let a man take care lest he is deceiving himself altogether. If he continues sowing to the flesh—doing that which is evil, and seeking to do it, let him beware lest he at last hear those awful words, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Remember the words of Jesus, "Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name" &c. (Matt. 7:22.)

All this is assuredly true. How many sad instances we see, and how fearful often the conflict in the true believer; yet, it is equally true, "he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." We do not ask if you are infatuated with the delusion that your old nature is changed, or sin or lust is eradicated. This is all delusion, and may find you off your guard in an hour of temptation. But which characterizes your walk? Sowing to the flesh? Or are you quite sure you are sowing to the Spirit? It is in the word of God alone you learn what is of the Spirit. You will find very much, highly esteemed amongst men, that is not of the Spirit, but of the flesh, and its end corruption.

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GALATIANS.

Chapter 4. The Jews had been slaves under the bondage of the law. They had a nature utterly opposed to the law they were commanded to obey. The Gentiles had also been slaves to demons, which by nature are no gods. And now they were saved—known of God—why should they go back to slavery and be in bondage?— “Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.” On this account, Paul says, “I am afraid of you.” Is it not terrible that the old feast days to demons have been turned into fasts and feasts of so-called saints? How Paul does mourn over such in the tenderness of the bowels of Christ!

He, however, turns to his defense of the Gospel. Verse 21. “Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? Mark, they were professing Christians—they had no thought of giving up Christ or justification by faith, but they desired to have both principles, or both Christ and the law—exactly like great numbers now, who have no thought of giving up the principle of justification by faith, but having entered in by that wicket-gate, they now desire to have the law as a rule of life; or, in plain words, they desire to have both the principle of faith and the principle of law. May the Lord enable us to help rather than offend such. You that do thus desire to be under law, do ye not hear the law? Turn to Genesis, and read the history of Ishmael and Isaac. The son of the bondwoman, and the son of the free woman: these are the types of the two principles, the flesh under bondage, and the child and heir of promise—the principle of law, and the principle of faith. The apostle, in his defense, shows justly, that these two could not be allowed to co-exist. The bondwoman and her son must be cast out. The one should not be heir with the other.

And as it was then, just as the son of the bondwoman persecuted him that was born of the free, so it is now. “But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the spirit, even so it is now.” Has not this been the experience of all the centuries since these words were written? How strange then, that not only the ministers of Satan want to displace Christ and faith by the principle of law and works, but many true Christians are so misled as to desire to have the principle of law and Christ!

Let us examine this great mistake a little further. Many have the thought, that to give up the law, as Ishmael was given up, would be to become lawless, or Antinomians. But, if so, how could the Spirit, through Paul, thus show us it must be given up, just as Ishmael was cast out? Are you quite sure you have by faith in Christ the salvation of your soul, and that that salvation is eternal? No doubt these Galatians had thus received the gospel as Paul had preached it to them—the very gospel he had received from Christ. It was a great matter to have seen and heard the man that received his gospel from Christ—one who had, in spirit, seen Him and heard Him. Then what did they want with the law? And what do you want with it?

Chapter v. will show us they wanted the law for walk, just as you want it for walk. You find you have still an evil nature, called in scripture, “the flesh,” or, sin in the flesh. You find this lusts after evil things, and is a source of great distress to you. Further, you say that evil, vile nature, flesh, must be put under restraint of law, or responsibility to keep the law, or it will break out in iniquity. This looks very plausible, and it is the object of the Spirit to utterly disprove all this false reasoning in this very chapter.

We cannot give Ishmael the least room in the house without its being an offense to Isaac. We cannot allow the principles of law an atom, but, in like proportion, we displace Christ. Thus it is strongly stated: “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.... Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.”

You say, Yes, that is strong language, but we are not seeking to be justified by law. What then? To walk by law? Yes, you find the flesh still in you, and it lusts to do evil things, and you want to put that evil nature or flesh under the law, so that you may walk in righteousness, or, in other words, that you may attain to righteousness of walk. Is not this the thin end of Satan’s wedge? Will it not surely betray us into seeking justification by works of law? The whole thing is a mistake.

For first, the flesh or carnal mind “is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” (Rom. 8:6-9.) It had been tried for 1,500 years. The root of this mistake we are dwelling upon, is ignorance of, or denial of the total ruin of man in sin. And though the flesh is still in us, we are not in the flesh; we are not on that ground. There is no improvement of the flesh thought of in the gospel, any more than a gardener thinks of improving the old briar on a stock rose.

Secondly, the flesh is utterly disallowed, and judged on the cross of Christ. That which the law could not do, God has, “sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” (Rom. 8:3.) We are not to cultivate it by the law, for the only effect of law on our sinful flesh is to provoke transgressions. (Rom. 7:2-25.)

We always find it so. To place our sinful nature under law, can only prove what it is—utter enmity against God—and thus bring us into bondage and misery. Surely, the result of man being placed on the principle of works of law, as seen in the Jews rejecting and killing the Lord Jesus Christ, ought to have been enough to show the Galatians the utter uselessness of going back to it, for even righteousness of walk.

And is it not so again with those who take the place of Jews, and are not, just in proportion as the principle of seeking salvation by works, and observance of days, and pretended holy sacraments—nay, in proportion as the principle of law is held for righteousness—in that proportion are the true living Person of Christ, and eternal salvation, rejected? And where there is power, He is still persecuted, and killed in His members.

Verse 6. This is a very important verse, “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.” Man is so bad, that for justification, neither the principle of law nor lawlessness can make him a bit better or worse. He is concluded already, under sin and judgment. Mark this well, if you are still in your sins, and in sin. You cannot be better or worse as to justification before God. But, if in Christ, your justification cannot be one whit more or less. If in the flesh, you are completely lost. If in Christ, ye are complete in Him. Nothing can add to your completeness in Christ. Have you this faith?

Now, faith must have an object, and the object of faith, true faith, is Christ. Is He the object of our faith? Then we shall be transformed by the object, and changed into His blessed likeness, soon to be like Him. But what is He? The perfect expression of love: for God is love, and thus

faith worketh by love.

Here, then, we have the two principles fairly brought out, even as to walk, or a holy life. The principle of law availeth nothing, either for justification, or holiness of life. What is holiness-but likeness to Christ, to walk as He walked, down here? Here, then, is a fact: the law, so pressed by deceivers in our day, and by many sincere persons, but deceived, has no power to work or produce a holy life, or a walk like Christ. Faith has power, for it is wholly occupied with Christ, and the more we do simply believe Him, as God speaking to us—the more we study Him—the more we are like Him. Let us, then, reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin, and alive unto God through Jesus Christ. And then also that life and new nature, we, as believers, have in Him, has now the capacity to enjoy Him.

This scripture, then, gives us this defense of the gospel, that the law is of no avail whatever, any more than license or lawlessness, circumcision or uncircumcision, for a holy life; but that other principle is, which Christ had taught His servant Paul, “Faith which worketh by love.”

Now, since Christ had taught Paul the one principle, He could not possibly have taught these deceivers the opposite. “This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you.” Thus we learn that the leaven of Judaism in this day, is not of Christ. If it be not Christ, then, that is leading men, in our day, to ritual and legality, who is it? Who is it that is seeking to leaven the whole lump again with Romish salvation on the principle of works? Can there be a question that it is Satan now, as then, seeking to destroy your soul by leading you from Christ and eternal salvation in Him, and a holy life by faith in Him, working by love?

However gorgeous and unscriptural the ritual, however sweet the music or eloquent the tongue of men, however much dancing, bazaars, and worldly pleasure he may bait his hook with, remember, it is the eternal damnation of your soul he seeks. Nay, do we need to say it is Romish? Is it not all fast becoming alike? As to complete and eternal salvation in Christ, who knows this, and enjoys it, on the mixed principles of these days? As to holiness, where do you find it? Can you talk of likeness to Christ, and mix up with the world, go to balls or dancing, cricketering, football, and bazaars, as now carried on? Would Christ be found in such places?

All these are allowed and practiced in these days, thus utterly denying that which is so prominent in this epistle—the Cross. I am crucified to the world. What has the law, then, to say to a crucified man? And what are the sports of the world to such an one? To be circumcised, or to adopt the principle of law, was to set aside the Cross, and its offense would be gone. What fools Satan can make of men and women! They will wear a cross, and utterly reject the complete salvation wrought by Christ, and will seek to be saved by works of law, as directed by men!

The apostle could wish that those who made so much of circumcision, would really circumcise themselves, so to speak: “I would they would cut themselves off that trouble you.” But faith alone can understand how really reckoning ourselves to be dead, can be one great step towards practical holiness. Let us next look at facts.

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Galatians.

Chapter 3:19. “Wherefore then serveth the law?” Why was it given? If God gave the promise to Abraham as an act of free favor, why was the law given afterward? “It was added because of transgressions [or, “for the sake of transgressions”], till the seed should come to whom the promise was made. We are told also: “Moreover, the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” (Rom. 5:20.) Thus, by the giving of the law, all were proved guilty before God. When men had broken the known law of God, there could be no question left of their guilt, and need of a Savior. The law could have nothing to do with Abraham’s justification. For he had been reckoned righteous 430 years before the law was given.

Verse 21. “Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.” Man was dead in sins. The law could only condemn him; it could not give him life. He was guilty; it could not give him righteousness, as we have said. Neither life, nor righteousness can be acquired by the law, that is God’s conclusion; on the contrary, “But the scripture hath concluded all under sin.” Yes, after man has been tried in every way, this is the conclusion. Have you accepted God’s conclusion? or have you been seeking righteousness by keeping the law? Well, this is God’s conclusion—you are under sin. Is this, however, that you may be condemned? No; but “that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.” Thus the law did bring out sin in open transgression, that grace might abound. Yes; the promise with all its eternal results, is given to them that believe. What a defense of the gospel is the principle of faith!

Now we see how the Jews were shut up, kept under law, until faith in Christ was revealed. They were, like children at school, learning what sin was, by open transgression. This was the purpose of God in it all. “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.” How often this scripture is perverted, as though it meant that Christians are under the law as a schoolmaster. So far from this being the case, it is the very opposite; indeed, it is the strongest contrast. Thus to put the Christian under law as a schoolmaster, would be to give up entirely Paul’s defense of the gospel. It would be a mark of those who say they are Jews and are not. (Rev. 3:9.)

No; the apostle says distinctly, that after faith is come, or the principle of faith, we Christians are no longer under a schoolmaster, but are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. And as such, ye are baptized into Christ, have put on Christ, and are one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, what can ye want more? “Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

Let us seek to understand this part of Paul’s defense. Man with a heart, or nature, utterly at enmity against God, placed under the law of God, would be like a slave or servant in bondage told to do a task he had no heart to do, and, in fact, could not do: see Rom. 7:5, 7-21. The very law of his nature is sin, and the law only brings out that sin in transgression. In contrast with this, here is introduced a delivered soul, a child

of God—having the holy nature of God, a nature or new being which delights to do the will of God. “Children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” Such an one is no longer under the yoke of bondage, the old schoolmaster; but is baptized into Christ, has put on Christ. All that he was, whether Jew or Greek, is put off. He is a new creature, a son and heir of God.

Let us carefully pursue this contrast. The schoolmaster, the law, could only condemn the acts or transgressions of man in his carnal, evil nature. It could only, if alone, kill man. Man in that state could neither acquire life nor righteousness by the deeds of the law; for he is guilty before God. The conclusion is, that he is shut up under sin. And then comes death and judgment. Oh, how gracious of our God to give the promise 430 years before this testing of man came in!

But now Christ, the object of faith, the fulfillment of promise, is come. What a change! We are no longer under that schoolmaster. No longer is our sinful nature tried by law. No longer are we seeking life and righteousness by works of law: but are children of God, by faith in Jesus Christ. We now have, not are seeking, life and righteousness for evermore. And are we to give all up, and go back under the old schoolmaster?

Chapter 4. It is fully admitted that the Jews, the natural descendants of Abraham, were in bondage under the elements or first principles of the schoolmaster. “But, when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

The great truth of redemption is now brought into the defense. Redemption from Egypt was a picture of this redemption. The Israelites were in bondage, bitter bondage under Pharaoh.

Nothing could give them deliverance until the blood of the lamb was shed. They were then brought out of bondage; they passed through the water of the Red Sea, as a figure of death; and then, through the Jordan, they entered the land. All this was of God. Now was this accomplished that they might serve Jehovah in the land of liberty, or that they might go back to the slavery of Egypt’s brick kilns?

If God sent Moses to affect that great deliverance, has He not sent His Son to effect the greater, the eternal redemption of His people, of His sons, by the blood of the Lamb? Now, is it that these sons are to serve the Father in holy liberty, or to go back to the slavery of the old man, under the old schoolmaster, the law? For Israel to have gone back to Egypt’s slavery would have been to give up their redemption. They could not be in Egypt and in Canaan.

For the Christian to go back under law is to deny his full redemption; and hence you never find a soul under law able to say he has and enjoys the known fact of redemption through the blood of Jesus, the forgiveness of sins. It is impossible to be on the two principles of law and of faith in Christ at the same time. Let it be remembered that every teacher, be he who he may, that seeks to lead souls under law, undermines the great foundation truth of redemption. It may seem strange, but it is no less true, that the truth of redemption was well nigh lost for many centuries. How could such prayers have been adopted, if redemption had been known? If a reader of these lines thinks this too strong let him find us a page in all the so-called Fathers, before the Reformation, that distinctly teaches what redemption is, as found in the scriptures. Or, if you do not know the Fathers, sit down and write two pages on redemption, and then compare what you write with the scriptures. Get a concordance, and read what you have written, and compare it with what you find in the word of God. You will find that, if you are under law by the teaching of men, redemption has no true meaning to you.

The Israelites could not possibly understand redemption whilst in the brick kilns of Egypt; neither can we, if still under the bondage of law. It is plain they must be redeemed from Egypt, in order to worship and serve Jehovah in the land of Canaan. It is equally true of us, we must be redeemed and have redemption, in order to worship and serve the Lord in the holiest.

Verse 6. We now come to another powerful argument in Paul’s defense. “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” He had said before, “This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish?”

Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? “God had given this seal on the hearing of faith. And what a seal! But it was on them, not as bond slaves under law, but as sons of God! It was God who had done this, because they were His sons. And mark, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts. Words utterly fail to set forth the superiority of this position or standing of the children of God, with a new nature, and the Spirit of the Son dwelling in our hearts; in contrast with the bondage of being in the fallen, sinful flesh under law. “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” (Rom. 8:2.)

How senseless, then, the charge, that the principle of faith, and deliverance from the law, means liberty to break it! If under it, we do break it, for it can only provoke the evil nature into active transgressions. In contrast with this, see the believer a child of God—as born of God, he delights to do the will of his Father. And more, he has the Spirit of the Son dwelling in his heart. And this characterizes him. He finds now in the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, a law, a principle superior to the law or power of sin in the flesh, so that he is delivered from the old standing he had as a slave. “Wherefore thou art no more a servant [or a slave], but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

What a triumph over the efforts of Satan to get the child of God back under law. Well might the apostle speak with such vehemence: to go back to the law was to give up everything.

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GALATIANS

CHAPTER 3. The apostle having shown how the believing Jews had given up the principle of seeking justification by works of law, that they might be justified in Christ, on the principle of faith; and after proving that if righteousness could be attained on the principle of law, then

Christ is dead in vain; he now exclaims, "O, foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified?" Could anything be more senseless? If the Jews, who had been under law for 1,500 years, had to give it up in order to be justified by faith, why should the believing Gentiles, who professed to be justified by faith in the atoning death of Christ, now go back to that which the Jews had thus given up?

Is it not like a slave who has been set free at great cost by a large ransom, now so senseless as to go back to bondage, in order to try to do what he never can, work out his own freedom? The great redemption price had been distinctly declared to them—"Jesus Christ crucified." Oh, how senseless to reject this redemption, to turn from Christ crucified, to their own vain efforts to keep the law. And are not these words just as applicable now? Oh, senseless England, who hath bewitched thee? Art not thou doing the very thing that the Galatians were doing? Thy forefathers, 300 years ago, were groaning under the bondage of law, and vainly seeking to be justified by works. God heard their groans, and revived the truth of justification on the principle of faith. The great ransom has been set before thee, Jesus Christ crucified. And now thou art so senseless as to think it was all a mistake to believe God, and enjoy salvation? Oh, senseless Christendom! thou art going back to salvation by works, and to ritualism; thou art trying hard to prove that Christ died in vain.

Oh, Protestants, "Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" Think of the sufferings of your fathers for the truth. "Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain." Yes, if you can be justified by sacraments and works; then indeed it was vain for Christ to die to procure the ransom of the slave.

The apostle cites Abraham, in proof that justification before God is not on the principle of law or works. "Even as Abraham believed God, and it [that is, faith] was reckoned to him for righteousness." Faith was reckoned as righteousness. This was a most remarkable ground of defense. The very father of the nation of Hebrews was not justified on the principle of works at all, but on the very principle of faith; which principle Paul had preached, and now defended. He says, Know then that they that are on the principle of faith, these are Abraham's sons. This was a self-evident fact.

Let us then turn to the history of Abraham at the case to which Paul refers, as an illustration of saving faith, or justifying faith. (Read Gen. 12:1-3.) Abraham was called of God in verse 1. Then God speaks to him. "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." The promise is repeated in reference to his heir in chapter 15. We shall find important details further on. But mark, there are no conditions propounded as at Sinai. God says, "I will bless thee." This is the absolute word and promise of God. Yes, the unconditional word of God. Not a single 'if.' "And he believed in the Lord; and he reckoned it to him for righteousness." This then is the principle of faith, for which Paul contends, believing in the Lord—believing His absolute, unconditional word. Had there been a single condition, Abraham would have had to believe in himself, in his ability and faithfulness to fulfill that condition. This element was entirely excluded. The Lord alone was his object of faith. All depended on Jehovah the promiser and Abraham believed Him. And his faith was reckoned as righteousness.

We will now pass on to the confirmation of the promise by the oath of Jehovah, in chapter 22. Here we get the very picture of how God has confirmed and accomplished His promise, in the offering up of His own Son for sinful men. Isaac the heir is offered up on the altar, and received in figure from the dead. Isaac was spared, and God provided a ram to die in his stead., "And Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son." Then the Lord spake by His angel from heaven, and said, "By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD; for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son; that in blessing I will bless thee.... and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

That all this pointed to Christ there can be no doubt, for the apostle says, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." (Gal. 3:16.)

To Abraham God confirmed His promise by an oath; to us He has confirmed His promise by raising up Christ the new seed from the dead.

Let us return to Gal. 3:8. The scripture, foreseeing that God would justify us poor heathen on the principle of faith, thus preached the gospel to Abraham, saying, "In thee shall all nations be blessed." Then there are two principles still kept before us. They who are of the principle of faith are the children of Abraham; they who are of the principle of the works of the law, are under the curse. Are not these two principles in direct contrast? On one principle, faith in God gives peace with God, as, in Rom. 5:1; whereas the other principle, seeking to attain to righteousness before God by works of law, places those so seeking under the curse. The defender of the gospel makes his position quite clear. "For it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."

We must carefully mark that this is solely the question of justification before God. And we must not confound it with justification before men, as in Jas. 2:14-26. There it is righteousness of walk before men. "Ye see," is the theme of James. "But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident: for the just shall live by faith." The law could not give life, and all were guilty and under condemnation. The law could neither give life nor righteousness to guilty sinners; it could only curse the guilty. The law is not of faith. What a remarkable expression! we shall see more of this further on.

But if those who were seeking righteousness by the law, were still only under the curse, what can meet, or who has met this terrible state of man under the curse? "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Yes, He endured the utmost bitterness of that curse for those who were under the curse of law; and not that alone, but, "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ." Mark, Christ did not die the death of the cross that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through keeping the law. No; but through Jesus Christ. "That we might receive the promise of the Spirit through [or, on the principle of] faith."

It is a most serious question for the reader. Are you seeking righteousness on the principle of law? Then you are putting yourself under its curse. Are you justified on the principle of faith freely through the redemption we have in Christ Jesus? Then you have received the Spirit, the witness and seal of that redemption, through the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of sins. On which principle do you stand before God?

The question is now raised, Can anything alter the promise or covenant of God? Though even it be a man's covenant confirmed, then no man disannulleth or addeth thereto. How much more so of God, who has confirmed His promise in Christ. A very serious statement is then made: "And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect." Now mark this, the unconditional promise of God confirmed in Christ, was given four hundred and thirty years. before the conditional law, or covenant of law, was given on Mount Sinai. The two distinct principles are thus separated by four hundred and thirty years. Blessed for us that the law, given amid the thunderings of Sinai, cannot set aside for a single instant the promise of God.

The apostle waxes bolder and bolder in his defense of the gospel, as given to him direct by the Lord Jesus Himself. He says, "For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise." If the inheritance was given to Abraham by promise four hundred and thirty years before the law was given, then, clearly, the inheritance is not of the law; the law has nothing to say to the principle of unconditional promise. It is the very opposite principle. The principle of law is what man should do as a creature for God. But the figure of Isaac is the entire opposite of this. The promise of God is confirmed in His gift of His only begotten Son, and in that death which He has accomplished, and it is God who has raised that Son from the dead. All is absolutely of God, and therefore nothing can disannul it, or make the promise of none effect. If, then, our eternal salvation is secured on the principle of faith in Christ, wholly apart from the principle of law, for what purpose was the law given. This question may next fairly engage our attention.

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