

Galatians - Commentaries by James Lampden Harris

Law and Grace: Notes of Lectures on the Epistle to the Galatians, Lecture 6

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another" (Gal. 5:13-15).

There is ever a strong tendency in us to "savor the things of men" in the things of God. We put our construction and draw our own inferences from the thoughts of God, which are not like our thoughts, but infinitely higher and more blessed (see Isa. 55:8, 9), and thus debase them. Look, for example, at liberty; how wide the distinction between the human and divine thought on this very point. Liberty, according to man, is wilfulness - every check taken off from the human will, issuing in the very worst form of corruption and apostasy. The Jews in their worst state of bondage, both temporal and spiritual, had the hardihood to say, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man; how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?"

How solemn the reply of Jesus to these boasters of their freedom.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant [slave] of sin (John 8:34, 35).

The apostle Peter very plainly shows, that in the days in which we live, the loudest boasters of liberty were themselves miserable slaves of corruption (2 Peter 2:18, 19). We are 'called unto liberty,' but not a liberty for the flesh to act, but for us to serve. Christians are often led to connect their worship and their service with their salvation. But the truth is, they are made free by Christ in order to worship, to serve God, and serve their brethren; yea, and to serve all men, so far as they can. The gospel is the law of liberty, the law of love. And how easy and blessed is the law of love: love has 'a constraining' power - the law, rather a restraining power. The law of liberty is not "Thou shalt not," but its language is, "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart." Until the question of our individual acceptance is settled, the heart is not 'enlarged' to serve God. We are made free from sin by the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, in order to become servants of God. Real liberty and true holiness are inseparably connected together.

"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus sets free from the law of sin and death."

When really free ourselves, instead of judging others, we are free to intercede for them, knowing the grace in which we ourselves stand. A legal spirit is ever a fault-finding spirit. If we were more in the region of grace, we should be less in the region of judgment. But the moment we become legal, we bite and devour one another, instead of ministering grace one to another, cheering one another onward, so as to enable us to tread with a lighter step this weary wilderness.

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh (Gal. 5:16).

How important it is for us to have the thoughts of God with respect to 'the Spirit,' as contrasted with 'the flesh.' The true doctrine of the cross, and life in the Spirit, are intimately connected together; so that we cannot truthfully hold the one apart from the other. God's judgment has been passed on 'the flesh' in the cross of Christ, where God "made Christ to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." In consequence of this, life in the Spirit flows forth from the risen and glorified Jesus. The spiritual man is a new order of man, coming forth after death and judgment have passed on the old man. (See ch. 2:21.)

It is according to this new order of man that we should walk. The Spirit makes us alive to new thoughts, new affections, new interests. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above." The spiritual man finds everything of the world antagonistic to him. He cannot feel at home in the world. His interests are in another sphere. He worships in an unseen temple, and has an unseen altar and priesthood - all is spiritual, and it is only by walking according to this order that we shall be kept from fulfilling the lusts of the flesh. If we would avoid bad company, the best way is to keep good company. And it requires but a small amount of Christian experience to trace our most grievous failures to walking in the flesh; we forget from what we have been redeemed, and at what a price. If we walk not in the Spirit, having our desires, thoughts, and interests in heaven, we shall often fall even below the world's standard of righteousness; because we have not the restraints which the world is forced to put on the flesh, to conceal its real character. When Israel ceased to regard their peculiar privilege of having Jehovah for their king, and desired to be as the nations among whom they were 'not to be reckoned,' they speedily became worse than the nations. If Christians settle down into conventional righteousness, they make the cross only a safe-guard from punishment, and know it not as a mighty separating power, even as that which separates between oneself and oneself, and as that which delivers from the world. Hence lowness of walk; because the only real safeguard against fulfilling the lusts of the flesh is to walk in the Spirit.

"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 cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law" (Gal. 5:17, 18).

A great truth is here brought out in strong relief. There is hardly a Christian who has not practically attempted to contradict the assertion, that the flesh and the Spirit are contrary the one to the other. The doctrine of 'progressive sanctification' virtually denies this truth. We are sanctified unto the obedience, as well as the wrinking, of the blood of Jesus Christ {1 Peter 1:2};

but the flesh, even in the believer, is unchangeably the same, and he is made very experimentally to know that 'the flesh' is enmity against God, and to find his power against it in the cross of Christ. It is the presence of the Spirit which makes us know the evil of the flesh. We become disappointed in ourselves and in others; but this should teach us the unchangeable character of the flesh, whether regarded morally, intellectually, or religiously. We are surrounded by religious flesh -flesh in its most dangerous form, because it uses the name of Christ to sanction itself. But still the word remains unrepealed: "All flesh is grass." But the apostle does not make a one-sided statement, so as to allow us to use the knowledge of what the flesh really is, to sanction its workings. The flesh is hindered by the counter working of the Spirit, so that it cannot carry out its own tendencies. It is still flesh, ever the same, so that the most advanced Christian cannot put off his armor as though it were subdued. He knows it better, and is more watchful against its subtle wiles, and understands how to meet it by looking to the cross of Christ. And when the flesh would say, 'Spare thyself,' it is met by the word of the Master, 'Take up thy cross.'

It is an important thing to be led of the Spirit. The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And the Spirit leads us also into conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil; but the Spirit also leads us unto Jesus, and guides us into all truth, and shows us where our strength is -not in legal endeavors, but in receiving out of the fullness of Jesus. "If ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the 12 law." "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulation, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like: 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" (Gal. 5:19-21).

What a dark catalog of the works of the flesh which are manifest. There are other workings of the flesh which are not open and palpable, and which can only be judged by those who are spiritual. There is 'the fleshly mind' (Col. 2:18), and 'the flesh' in its religious aspect, in which Paul could have no confidence (Phil. 3:3, 4). But even in the works of the flesh {It may be well to point out that the meaning of 1 Peter 1:2 is that Christ's obedience is the character of the Christian's obedience. Our obedience is to have the character of the obedience of Christ. That is the standard.}

({Notice in JND's translation: "not under law," rather than not under the law"; i.e., not under such a principle as law, whether it take the form of the law of Moses, or the form of a legal mind being before God.})

which are manifest, while some are morally offensive to us, others are not so, but are equally offensive to God. We draw distinctions between these works which the apostle classes together. While outward sensuality and libertinism is reprobated as fearfully evil and injurious to human society; `variance, emulations, wrath, strife, heresies,' are not regarded in so dark a light; and yet they prove equally, that there is no fear of God as an influential principle, and they equally exclude from 'the kingdom of God. "Emulation' is the work of the flesh. It is the principle on which most of us have been educated; but it is in its spirit the most opposite to the Spirit of Him "who did not strive, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street." 'Emulation,' as rivalry, or competition, is the life of the world; it is honored and respected; but it is but "the pot-herd striving with the potsherd of the earth," to the utter forgetfulness of the real condition of man before God, as a lost and ruined sinner, and real greatness in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:1-7). `Envyings and murders' are grouped together, even as they came into the world together in Cain. 'Drunkenness and revelings' are found together; and 'such like' comprises all those exciting and refined amusements, for which men are content to pay so dearly. The world is glad to restrain some of the more gross works of the flesh for its own sake, while they encourage, as necessary and even advantageous, 'emulations, "revelings, and such like.' Herod heard John gladly up to a certain point; but when John plainly touched his conscience, by saying, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife," he put John in prison. 'Seditious and heresies,' party-spirit in the State, and party-spirit in the Church, for such is heresy, may often be found combined together against the truth of God. In this epistle, while the apostle presents us with a rich exhibition of the grace of God, he comes in with a most unsparing hand against the flesh, its lusts, its affections, and its works. Stern as the apostle is against the corrupters of the grace of the gospel, he is no less stern in his denunciation of practical ungodliness. "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." "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:22-24).

There is a happy contrast between "the works of the flesh" and "the fruit of the Spirit." The flesh works, as it were, independently; but the Spirit produces fruit by our abiding in Christ. "From me is thy fruit found." And so we have the connection in this passage between the fruit of the Spirit, and the doctrine of the cross. God, in the Cross of Christ, has passed sentence and executed judgment on the flesh and its works. And so those who are in the Spirit recognize the Cross, and use it practically as their power against the flesh, and its affections and lusts. If the apostle brings in the Cross as a mighty separating power between himself and himself; "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me;" he here brings it to bear in moral power on the affections and lusts of the flesh. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts."

The fruit of the Spirit is but a single cluster, but of beautiful variety; but if we count up the varieties of which the cluster is formed, how they fall numerically below the works of the flesh. Sorrowful truth, but too plain, that which we witness and which make up the outward manifestation of human life, are the works of the flesh, against which the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against which there is law. Many of the samples of the fruit of the Spirit are so unobtrusive, that if we were walking in the Spirit we should be "unknown, yet well known"; passing as pilgrims and strangers through the world, without joining in its restless interest. "The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is of great price in the sight of God" "Against such there is no law." May those who know the liberty wherewith Christ has made them free, so "abide in Him as to bring forth much fruit, that the Father may be glorified." "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the -Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another. Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 5:25, 26, 6:1).

How little of real spiritual joy is known by most of us. Yet surely "the lines are fallen to us in pleasant places," "the Holy Spirit being the earnest of our inheritance." We do not live in the Spirit as we might do. Christ is the object and source of our life; and, as risen with Him, we are called upon to set our affections on things above. If our conversation be not in heaven our walk will not be in the Spirit. It is a present heaven which is now our portion, because Christ is there; "as is the heavenly, such are they that are heavenly"; We are partakers of a heavenly calling. If we only look forward to the enjoyment of heaven at some future time, we shall have no spiritual joy now. And our walk will be according to our condition -a vain attempt to serve God and mammon. If we live in the Spirit, we enter on eternal life now; 'we have

eternal life,' and our walk should correspond to that which we have. A Christian should not only walk before God and with God, but be so occupied with those joys which are spiritual and eternal as to be able to help and gladden others vainly struggling with the many forms of human misery. We are not walking in the Spirit when we are desirous of vain glory. We are come down to a lower level, and draw the comparison between ourselves and others, instead of living in the enjoyment of the heavenly realities which are ours in Christ. He who lives in the Spirit lives near to God, and has need to be severe in judging himself, so that he has little heart to judge another; but a legal spirit always binds us down to the world, and sets us on the judgment-seat, instead of bringing us before the mercy-seat.

There is a restoring power in the grace of the gospel of which the law is incapable. The law can condemn, but it has no power to restore. In nothing do Christians show themselves more legal than in dealing with 'a brother overtaken in a fault.' They judge as they are bound in faithfulness to Christ to do; but is it with a view to restoration? The spiritual man knows how to restore; the natural may convict and pride himself on another's fall, but he cannot restore. And how low are Christians fallen; how do they walk as men in judging others, instead of considering themselves, lest they be also tempted. How wonderfully consistent is the doctrine of Scripture; 'considering thy-self.' Let no Christian consider himself as proof against a fall, however faithful he may be. It is dangerous to presume on our faithfulness, but safe when considering ourselves; because of our sense of the unchanging evil of the flesh to rest humbly, yet confidently, in the faithfulness of God. We all know our personal need of restoring grace, and to that same grace should we look for the restoration of a fallen brother.

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself, But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden" (Gal. 6:2-5).

It is Christ Himself who invites 'the heavy-laden' to come to Him, and that He will give them rest. And He would have us learn of Him in this respect, that we might bear one another's burdens. The Lord of glory Himself, who had no burden of His own to bear, was pleased to put Himself even under our heavy burden of sin, and "to bear it in His own body on the tree; that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes we are healed." How shall we answer this amazing instance of love but by His own new commandment, "that ye love one another, even as I have loved you." We should go before God and make our brother's sins our own in confession, even as Daniel did, identifying himself, though separate from it personally, with the sin of Israel. "We have sinned, we have committed iniquity." It is in this way that we come into the apprehension of the restoring grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The very fall of another, which would naturally lead us to thank God that we are not as other men, should lead us to see that we only stand by faith, and if we become high-minded we shall fall. The moment we think ourselves to be something, we only deceive ourselves; we forget that grace alone maketh us to differ, and like Jerusalem, instead of regarding the perfect comeliness which God has put upon us, we trust in our own beauty (Ezek. 16:14, 15). When this is the case, the real dignity of our standing becomes lost to our apprehension; for our 'nothingness' and Christ's all-sufficiency are necessarily connected together. We cannot hold the one without holding the other. It is both common and easy to glory with respect to another, by drawing a comparison between ourselves and another. But this is to take a low standard. We must look to the perfect example of Christ Himself, and that never fails to cast us on His unfailing grace and His finished work. (See 1 Peter 2:21-25.) We are called upon to prove our own work, not our brother's; to give an account of ourselves to God, and not of others. "Every man shall bear his own burden"; therefore, "let him prove his own work." "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things" (Gal. 6:6).

It had been said of old, "Buy the truth, and sell it not" (Prov. 23:23); but it has ever been found, that few attach much value to 'the truth.' The Lord Himself, 'the truth,' was valued at thirty pieces of silver, a goodly price -the price of a slave; and therefore we must not be surprised to find, that the most inestimable treasure, 'the word of salvation,' is prized at but a low rate. Men of the world pay highly for their pleasures and amusements; and men will also pay for outward religion. But 'the truth,' that which comes from God to show to man his real condition in reference to God, and the way of reconciliation with God, man values not. But the apostle found, that even real Christians did not estimate the value of the ministry of the word at all adequately. And he exhorts the Galatians to prove that they appreciated the value of the gospel, and had as much delight in it as the men of the world appreciate and value their pleasures.

"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" (Gal. 6:7, 8).

This is a very solemn word to Christians. It is connected with the word which immediately precedes it; "God is not mocked." He regards our objects, our interests, our very tastes. What are they? Is it our object to know so much of Christ only as we think needful for our salvation, and then to sink down into decent worldliness; so that the very men of the world can perceive that we are as eager in the pursuit of this world as they themselves are? Let us not be deceived; for God is not mocked. And the wisdom of God has laid down the rule, that where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also. 'The flesh' in a Christian, although it be his privilege to recognize its judgment in the cross, will be found putting forth its claims, and craving to be satisfied. It is specially spoken to the Christian: "He that soweth to his flesh." It is easy to see that those who are in the flesh can only sow to the flesh. But there is in the Christian another principle, 'the Spirit.' The contrast is not without meaning, 'his flesh,' the Spirit. There is a way of avoiding the keen edge of the Word of God-the sword of the Spirit-by turning it against the unconverted, instead of allowing us to probe our own consciences. Therefore, says the apostle to us, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked." If the Christian sow to his flesh, he shall reap what he sows, even corruption. Nor does it require any very lengthened experience to prove to the Christian how every result of sowing to the flesh has issued in disappointment, if not in deadness of soul, or positive corruption. But there is a peculiar form of 'the flesh' to which the Christian is liable to sow, and that is to religious flesh, in some shape or other. There is the same tendency in us as in the Galatians, to turn aside from the true doctrine of the cross to ordinances, or to seek to please the imagination, or puff up the intellect; and where this kind of sowing takes place, what a harvest of corruption do Christians reap. And, oh! what a mercy, however smart the discipline, if all their works are now burnt up, and they, stripped of everything, are led to the Cross of Christ to be saved by that, and nothing else. There is another contrast here, in the respective harvests to be reaped -'corruption' -'everlasting life.' There is an everlastingness in all that is sown to the Spirit. When the Lord speaks of fruit resulting from abiding in Him, it is fruit which should remain. Where the gospel is received, it is everlasting in its effects. There will be no forgetfulness, when in heaven, as to how we came there. That way will be had in everlasting remembrance, in the never-tiring new song, "Thou art worthy, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood."

Nothing done in reference to Christ, His cause, His people, will be forgotten, be it small or great; the cup of cold water given in the name of Christ, will have an everlastingness in it. It is well for us now to look to this our sowing time; for our harvest will be as our sowing is, whether to our flesh, or to the Spirit.

"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them which are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:9, 10).

There was such a blessedness in the gospel, when the Galatians first heard it (Gal. 4:15), that no self-sacrifice was thought too great, so that they might testify their value for it. But when they listened to those who would pervert the gospel, and dim their perception of its rich grace, weariness supervened. They became busied about ordinances and their own salvation, and thus became weary in well-doing. They needed to have the great doctrines of grace again ministered to them to stir up their earlier zeal. Scripture and experience alike show the tendency in the believer to "leave his first love." When first the light of the gospel bursts on the soul, it is so blessed that hardly anything appears a sacrifice. Little does he know the deadening influence of all around him, or the deceitfulness of his own heart; and weariness in well-doing ensues. Our apostle, in another place, shows us the need of the re-iterated application of the doctrines of grace to the heart and conscience, in order to "maintain good works" (Titus 3:4-8). We may be disappointed in our expectations for the present; "but in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." The Lord's own ministry seemed to be 'in vain' (Isa. 49:4); but it only seemed. He was not discouraged; and now that 'the due season' has come, what an abundant harvest is gathered in from that one "corn of wheat which fell into the ground and died." The ministry of Paul seemed to end in failure (2 Tim. 1:15); but we are witnesses this day that his labor in the Lord was not in vain; while we get strength, comfort, and refreshment from his writings. "Let us, then, not be weary in well-doing." This is our time of 'opportunity.' In heaven we shall have no sick to visit, no widows and fatherless to comfort, no backslider to reclaim. Our hearts should be enlarged to all human suffering, "for our heavenly Father is kind to the unthankful and the evil"; but the "house-hold of faith" has claims on our highest sympathies. And we know, that for the most part it is a tried, tempted, and suffering household. Alas. on a retrospect, how many lost opportunities present themselves to our view. "Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand. 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. For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh" (Gal. 6:11-13).

The epistle to the Galatians appears to be the only one which the apostle wrote with his own hand. Tertius wrote the epistle to the Romans, and the apostle closed it with his benediction and signature. The apostle's spirit was stirred; for the truth of the gospel was at stake, and hence the urgency of the case. He wrote to them with his own hand. Circumcision was the point in the apostle's days, because it was the badge of adherence to that which was established and formal. It served to accredit the flesh, and nothing does the flesh affect more than to invest itself with all the privileges of the Church of God, and at the same time avoid the offense of the cross. How ready a way to this was opened by a system of ordinances. Men were taught that they became Christians, not by living faith in the accomplished work of Christ on the cross, so as to bring them with a purged conscience to serve the living God, but by submitting to an ordinance. And when once this ground was assumed, one ordinance was imposed on another, so that peace with God was rendered impossible. Peace can only be in one way, the divine way. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." And the assertion of this truth has in all ages called forth opposition, if not persecution, from that which is established and ordered, and where man and his works, and not Christ and His cross, are prominent. It is no question of real practical godliness. They who insisted on circumcision did not keep the law; but they would impose it, in order that others might recognize an authority which is not of God.' When once the soul has laid hold on Christ and Him crucified on the testimony of God, it dare not allow any other authority to come in between itself and God. Various are the desires to supercede or overlay the doctrine of the cross. In our day a busy activity in social improvement is used to conceal the glory of the gospel, as being the only power to set man in a right and happy relation to God. "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. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be unto them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. From henceforth let no man trouble you; 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" (Gal. 6:14-18).

Others might desire to glory in fleshly distinctions, but the apostle would only glory in the Cross of Christ, the great leveler of all fleshly distinctions. What was it that had brought the apostle down from his supposed superiority over his co-religionist? (Gal. 1:14). The doctrine of the Cross. What had taught him to take the place of the chief of sinners, seeing he had thought it a religious "duty to do many things contrary, to the name of Jesus of Nazareth"? (Acts 26:9). It was seeing the glory which God had given to Him whom men, religious men, had rejected and crucified. What had taught the apostle the doctrine he so insisted on to others, that where sin had abounded grace had superabounded? The Cross of Christ. 'What had delivered the apostle from the galling yoke of ordinances? The Cross of Christ. (See Col. 2:14, 15.) But the Cross of Christ had done more for him; it had showed him the world in its true character, as that which could not bear the presence of God in it. It had proved that the world's civilization and religion were alike opposed to God; for all the leading authorities in the world, whether those in political power, or the leaders in religion, or the leading minds of the age, had conspired together in the crucifixion of the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8). Then, through the Cross, the world was to the apostle a crucified thing. He could not look on it with complacency, because he saw its real enmity against goodness itself in the person of the Son of God. Is the world so seen by us through the same medium, even the Cross of Christ? "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever." Bring the leading authorities of the age in which we live to this unchangeable test, and it is the same world still -the world which crucified the Lord of glory. But the apostle knew not the Cross apart from the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ; and therefore, associated with Him risen, he could look down on the world as that out of which he had been delivered. We must know the power of Christ's resurrection, in order to form a right estimate of the world (1 John 5:19). And what was the apostle in the world's estimate? 'A pestilent fellow,' 'a babbler,' against whom the wise men of the day directed their wit (Acts 17:32). He was, in fact, a crucified thing -one whom the world could easily spare, and would be glad to be rid of. Paul had left the world behind him, as to its interests and pursuits, and was crucified unto it.

The real power of the doctrine of the Cross is, to show the world in its true light as a judged world, out of which the believer has, in God's amazing grace, been rescued (Gal. 1:4). So that if he be true to the doctrine of the Cross, he must be crucified unto the world -not only one who cannot help on its interests and objects, but one who stands in the way of its interests and objects. It may be said, that "Christians are not so; the world both accepts their help, and gives them help in return." And why? Because Christians are not true to the Cross of Christ. They do not look at the world through the medium of the Cross; they do not see it, and all that is in it, to be 'not of the Father'; and,

consequently, as much arrayed against Jesus as Judas, when he betrayed Him with a kiss. Let us be honest, and test ourselves. Is the world to us a crucified thing, because we glory in the Cross of Christ, and from the Cross see into a glory which makes all the glory of this world fall into the shade?

A new creation bursts upon us when we take our stand by the Cross, and see in it the judgment of God on the old creation. He that hanged on the Cross said, "It is finished." And the same blessed One says from the throne, "Behold, I make all things new." "These words are faithful and true." "It is done." The old creation is passed away, the new one introduced, in which "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." This is the new creation which bursts upon us; and we are to walk according to the rule of it (Gal. 6:15, 16). They only who see the end of the old creation in the Cross, and Jesus as the head of the new creation in resurrection, can take the place of the Israel of God. □

And as many as shall walk by this rule, peace upon them and mercy,

and upon the Israel of God. It is clear that there are two classifications in this verse.)

They have power with God and man, because the flesh is broken and set aside; and they have life in the Spirit meeting its supplies out of the fullness which is in Christ Jesus. "They walk after the Spirit." Peace and mercy be on them.

The false teachers insisted much on the outward mark of circumcision; but, says the apostle, I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Scourgings, imprisonments, cold and nakedness, sufferings in preaching the gospel of the grace of God to sinners had left their marks on the body of the apostle. With these marks of suffering for Christ and for the gospel's sake, it was an impertinence to trouble him with the question of circumcision, or other things equally indifferent in themselves.

The apostle knew one remedy to meet their case, and answer, as it were, all their questionings, and this he expresses in his earnest prayer for them: "Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen."

Courtesy of BibleTruthPublishers.com. Most likely this text has not been proofread. Any suggestions for spelling or punctuation corrections would be warmly received. Please email them to: BTPmail@bibletruthpublishers.com.

Law and Grace: Notes of Lectures on the Epistle to the Galatians, Lecture 5

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? (Gal. 4:21).

When once we recognize that God has a purpose, and that, too, an eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, we are prepared to find in the earliest part of God's word those great principles which He intends to illustrate. Among these we find two remarkably connected together; the one, that no flesh shall glory in the presence of the Lord; the other, that he that glorieth must glory only in the Lord. These great principles are copiously illustrated in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. God will show Himself to be God, and it is necessary not only to show that the creature is not God, but, also, that the only proper place of the creature, and his only possible happiness is dependance on God. This great truth illustriously brought out in the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. God and His creature man are thereby set in their proper relation one to the other -God the giver, man the recipient -God, not man, the actor -the creature redeemed, supremely blessed, because God is glorified. This is God's eternal purpose. But how many are the foreshowings and foreactings of this, before it is either fully revealed or will be fully displayed. The book of Genesis, besides being the most ancient historical record extant, has this deep interest -it is a book of great principles. It is to this book that the Lord and His apostles so frequently refer to illustrate their teaching. The Lord Himself refers back to God's original creation of a male and a female, to show the sanctity of the marriage tie in the mind of God. He points to Abel as the righteous sufferer. He refers to the days of Noah and Lot, as illustrative of the unpreparedness of men for the day of the Son of man. He refers to Abraham as rejoicing to see His day, at the same time asserting His own essential Deity in these memorable words, "Before Abraham was, I am." We need not, therefore, be surprised that the apostle, led of the Spirit (for known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world), should find "the law" in the earlier chapters of Genesis, four hundred years before it was actually given from Mount Sinai.

Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?

The apostle finds the law in the history of the father of the faithful. He had before illustrated, by Abraham and his faith in God, his great argument, that blessing from God can only come in the way of faith. He now illustrates, by the failure of Abraham, how insidiously the principle of law had entered in to mar the blessing of the father of the faithful himself, and so disturbed the peace of the family of faith, that there was no rest to Abraham or his family till the law was cast out. How important is it for us to regard the Scriptures in the light in which God has set them forth, even as a revelation of Himself, of His thoughts, and counsels, and intentions. What an immense difference it makes between one man and another as to the place the Bible occupies in their respective estimation; One man regards the Scriptures as a mass of ancient records, out of which he may gather what light he can; as though man, and not God, was both the beginning and end of these various writings. The spiritual man, redeemed to God by the blood of Jesus, finds himself let into the counsels and thoughts of God (Eph. 1:7-9); and able to trace throughout the marvelous volume the counsel and design of God; so that the great point openly discussed by the apostle in this epistle, he finds remarkably illustrated in the history of Abraham.

"For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman.' But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise" (Gal. 4:22, 23).

In the fifteenth chapter of Genesis, the word of the Lord comes to Abraham in a vision; and for the first time is that heaven-born word heard by a sinful man, "Fear not, Abram"; and how strong the ground afforded for taking away all fear: "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." All that which is subsequently unfolded to Abraham is wrapt up in this comprehensive blessing. But how can such a blessing come to Abraham, seeing the circumstances in which he is? "Behold," says Abram, in answer to the announcement thus made, "to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in mine house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness." Abraham believed that God could do that which Abraham could not do. It is this which the gospel presents to us, "That which is impossible with men is possible with God." It is possible for God to make a sinner perfectly righteous, and the way in which He does this, and the ground of His doing it, is the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ; so that no question ought to agitate the mind of the believer as to his complete justification. But there is a kind of hereditary disease in the family of faith, even the disease of unbelief; and we see, in the history of Abraham before us, an early exhibition of it. Faith and patience are necessarily connected together; but unbelief is restless and impatient, and would take things out of God's hands into its own. Abraham had left his country and kindred at the call of God. This act of faith is recorded by the apostle in another place: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went forth, not knowing whither he went." We get deep instruction, not only from the faith, but even from the very failures, of the father of the faithful. After so decided an act of faith on the part of Abraham, even his renouncing everything at the call of God, we are hardly prepared for signal failure. But so it is. The failure of the believer is usually manifested in some instance where it would seem more easy to trust in God, than in instances in which we had previously trusted Him. But habitual dependance on God is always contrary to nature. Abraham and Sarah became impatient, and thought to get, by their own wisdom and strength, that very blessing which God had promised to bestow by His power and grace. Hence the giving of Hagar to Abraham by Sarah (Gen. 16). This was, in reality, an attempt to get the promised blessing in the way of law; and it issued, as all such attempts must issue, in signal and sorrowful failure. The immediate result was, that Sarah was 'despised' by Hagar. The Pharisees, proud of their own righteousness, despised Him by whom came grace and truth. So with respect to ourselves; when we become legal, grace becomes contemptible in our eyes. Hagar bore a son, but he was born after the flesh. The word 'flesh' is here used to denote man's power. If you bring in man's power, and attempt to add it to God's power, there is confusion and trouble. 'Flesh,' the power of man, is here contrasted with promise -with that which God Himself had undertaken to do. Flesh and promise cannot stand together; salvation must be either by the power of man, or by the power of God; and if we refer it to the power of God, we must not bring in the power of man as helping it. God will show Himself to be "the Almighty" -the all-sufficient God -for effectuating His own promises in the case of all the family of faith, as well as in the case of the father of the faithful (Gen. 17:1). "Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Hagar. For this Hagar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not: break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband" (Gal. 4:24-27). We are here taught by the apostle, that these facts in the history of Abraham are intended to teach us a great moral lesson. The Lord Himself has ruled, that "the Scriptures cannot be broken," -meaning the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and that these "Scriptures testify of Him." The apostle in another place lays it down as a general rule, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning." What deep spiritual truth is often couched under an historical fact very simply narrated. When we look back to the garden of Eden, we find the deepest truth (which has only been brought clearly out since the coming down of the Holy Ghost) fore-shadowed, when Adam said, "This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh." "We are members of Christ's body, we are of His flesh and of His bones." And so in this episode in Abraham's history, we find deep spiritual instruction.

Hagar represents Mount Sinai and its covenant, under which Jerusalem was at the time of the apostle's writing, 10 and from which she refused to be delivered by the gospel of grace. To this covenant of bondage the Galatians were being turned -"they desired to be under law." Hagar, in the presence of Sarah, could never forget that she was a bondwoman. And the law in its spirit must always guide unto bondage. It was, as Peter says, "a yoke which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear." The Galatians were tempted to exchange "the easy yoke" of Jesus for the heavy yoke of the law. How strange, yet how true, that we should prefer spiritual bondage to spiritual freedom. But the reason is plain; if set free, it must be entirely owing to the grace of God; and our proud hearts refuse to submit to this.

Yes; men refuse to be saved as lost and ruined sinners, from first to last, by the grace of God, through the precious blood of Christ. They will not "submit to the righteousness of God"; but, like Jerusalem in the text, bind their chains more closely round them; and, not content with this, seek to bring others into bondage with themselves. When Christians lost their sense of their heavenly and unworldly calling, as the keen eye of the apostle saw the Galatians beginning to do, they looked to Hagar, not to Sarah. They took as their pattern "the Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children." And the result would be, and actually is, a religious system as truly bondage as Judaism itself. Christ did not come into the world to institute a religion, but to save sinners, and so to save them as to "deliver them out of this present evil world," and to make them citizens of a heavenly Jerusalem, even Jerusalem which is above, and which is free. And where do we find freedom, but by being introduced into the presence of the Father through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus? Worldly religion hinders access with confidence through the faith of Jesus to the Father. The law -Jerusalem which now is -could never lead any under it to cry, Abba, Father. This is the result of accomplished redemption, and one of the richest gifts that comes down from above -even from the Jerusalem which is above, and is free. True, we take our place as servants now; but still it is as sons, even as the Son of God Himself took His place as servant here; and, hence, our very service is liberty. The whole Jewish system was necessarily one of bondage; Jerusalem that now is -Jerusalem not knowing redemption. But, through faith, "we are come to the Mount Zion, and to the heavenly Jerusalem"; and, therefore, have "the garment of praise, instead of the spirit of heaviness."

The apostle quotes Isa. 54:1, in illustration of the Jerusalem above being the happy mother of free-born children. Hagar, when she conceived, despised her mistress; but laughter from God was not to be connected with her son; but with Isaac, the son of Sarah.

10. The cross ended the standing of the mosaic covenant. However, at the time of Paul's writing the system had not been governmentally set aside as it was in AD 70 when the temple was destroyed by the Romans.}

"Rejoice, thou barren (Sarah, not Hagar) that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not; for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband."

How blessedly does this follow immediately on the details of Christ's suffering for us in the previous chapter of the prophet. We should read the chapters together, to see even the present glory following those sufferings, in enabling "the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children." This is a true type of grace. The law knew nothing of praise. Hagar's son was born of the flesh. Sarah's child was the child of God's grace and power. So it was with Hannah subsequently. The barren woman bearing can only find utterance in praise. Outward greatness and glory may be connected with bondage; for men are either slaves of sin, or of the law, or of the world, till they know redemption. Ishmael was great in the presence of his brethren, while Isaac was in obscurity; so it was with Esau while Jacob was serving; and so now professing Christians may be great and glorious, because they are lovers of their own selves. But they know not the liberty of truth; they know not grace, and praise cannot burst forth. "When the work of Christ was finished on the Cross, and presented as the object to faith; to those who saw it and believed in it, nothing remained but praise. "Rejoice, O barren, that bearest not." "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice." "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it, is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free-woman" (Gal. 4:28-30).

How constantly are we reminded, that all error is to be traced up to the departure from a very few fundamental principles. What was the Galatian error? What is Christendom of the present day but the practical denial "that a man must be born again"? Was Isaac the child of natural or supernatural power? We all say that after God had stamped death, both upon Abraham and Sarah (see Rom. 4:19), as to all expectation of having a child, then God, according to His promise and power, gave them Isaac. "Now we, brethren," says the apostle, "as Isaac was, are the children of promise"; "born of the Spirit"; "born of the incorruptible seed of the Word"; of God's "own will, begotten by the word of truth"; "born of God." And if there be faith in our hearts, it is the result of the like mighty power of God which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead. (See Eph. 1:19.) Now, it is against such a power as this being needed by man, to enable him to "see" and "enter into the kingdom of God," so as to have to do with God in mercy and salvation, that man frets and kicks. And the professing body have ignored the truth, some one way and some another, that "we must be born again."

Ishmael and Isaac cannot live in the same house, or go on peaceably together. When Isaac, Sarah's son, is weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the occasion, Ishmael, Hagar's son, 'mocks.' He looks at Isaac as despicable and insignificant; mocks at the old age of Sarah, compared with the vigor and comeliness of Hagar. "Even so it is now." There is nothing man more instinctively dislikes than grace. He cannot endure the thought that God should make one to differ from another, and that the difference is not made by man himself. Man naturally frets more against the grace, than he does against the holiness of God. He presumes that he can, by some means or other of his own devising, meet the holiness of God; but grace is God's ability to meet man in his utmost need, and unspeakably to bless him. The oft-repeated story of religious persecution is but the story of Ishmael and Isaac here pointed out by the apostle. And the peculiar form of Ishmael's opposition to Isaac, even mocking, is very characteristic of the day in which we live; for the more man comes to glory in the greatness of his own powers, the greater will be his antagonism to "the gospel of the grace of God." The unrelenting word comes to Abraham, "Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." 'Grievous' indeed was it to Abraham to cast them out; it went against his feelings and affections to do so; but it was not more 'grievous' to Abraham to do so, than it is for us to turn the law out of doors. It cleaves so fast to us. It seems so grievous to us to give up the works of our own hands, and to renounce that on which we have most prided ourselves. But until Hagar is gone, there is and can be no peace in the house of Abraham. Until the law, and all expectation from it, is thoroughly renounced, there is no peace in the soul. "Being justified by faith, we have peace."

How little do even real Christians apprehend their present dignity, "Sons and heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ." And so long as they cleave to the law, it is impossible for them to realize their title to "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved for them in heaven." The realizing of this title necessarily puts those who do so into the place of pilgrims and strangers here. To be an heir of all that God can give can never be earned by anything a man can do. The law made those under it servants, not sons; and to be an heir, it is necessary to be a son, even to be born to an inheritance. How impossible is it, until we enter into God's thoughts in giving to us the Scriptures, to read, in what was apparently but a passionate speech of an angry woman, a most profound spiritual truth. "The son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." And so it was historically. "And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac. But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son." Isaac was 'heir' according to God's original promise (Gen. 15:4). Others might have gifts, and flourish; but nothing would satisfy Sarah but the heirship for her son. It is even so now. Men are content with an outward knowledge of Christ, and the many gifts which they get thereby; but they stand entirely apart from the true heirs of God. Born of Him, they can be satisfied with nothing less than God is pleased to give; and if He has given them now the unspeakable gift of Christ, and they have received Him by faith, how will not God with Christ freely give them all things? The children of the concubines receive their gifts, and go their way. So now; all connected with the false Church receive their gifts, and think not of the inheritance, yea, despise it. The present engrosses their minds; and the spirit of the age is strongly set on present blessings, by the development of human powers. Thus, like Esau, they despise the birthright; for what good does it do? They may, indeed, desire the inheritance, when about to be removed from the present scene. But God has inseparably joined together the birthright and the inheritance; and those who despise the birthright will never be heirs. Men despise being born of God; they direct their malice and their wit against those who prize the birthright, and thus despising, as Esau, the birthright, can never possess the inheritance.

So then, brethren, we are not children of the bond-woman, but of the free. Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage (Gal. 4:31, 5:1).

If born of God, we are not children of Hagar, but of Sarah -free-born children of the free-woman, set free by the Son Himself, and therefore free indeed. It is into the liberty of sons that Christ has brought us; and although the glorious liberty of sons be that for which we wait, even to be manifested with Christ the Son in glory; yet, even now, it is a glorious liberty to have access unto the Father with confidence by the Spirit of adoption, instead of having a yoke of bondage imposed on us by those who would tempt God by forcing the law on us. (See Acts 15.) The only one who is free from law, is he who can look at it in all its condemning power, and yet, knows deliverance from it by the Cross of Christ (Rom. 7:4-6). And he alone who is thus delivered from it upholds the law in all its integrity, as "holy, just, and good." What a marvelous liberty is that wherewith Christ has made us free. It is the liberty of truth (John 8:32). We dare to look at things as they really are -to look at the very worst of our condition -to see fully our guilt and helplessness as sinners, and appalling as this is, it is amply met by seeing the grace of God in truth, and the reality of Christ's propitiatory work on the Cross. And what a blessed reality it is, that Christ is "of God made unto us righteousness!" What liberty to be delivered from the vain attempt to find some ground of confidence in ourselves toward God What liberty to

be occupied, not with ourselves, but with the worthiness of the Lamb slain. The apostle's word of command is, "Stand fast in the liberty." And how needed the word; for there are many 'entanglements' to which we are liable, and by means of which we exchange the liberty of Christ for a yoke of, bondage. One of the readiest entanglements is a system of ordinances: this was the danger of the Galatians. But we have our special danger of entanglement from the traditional religion by which we are surrounded. The yoke of traditional religions is grievously galling to the consciences of many real Christians. We all need the word, "Stand fast in the liberty of Christ," -freedom from all condemnation, freedom of nearness to God, freedom of holiness, freedom of service. Bring in the law, and all this freedom is gone, and in its place a heavy yoke placed upon us.

Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from 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 (Gal. 5:2-6).

This is very stern language, but the honor of Christ, as well as the salvation of sinners, was at stake. Christ will not take the place of a helper, to the detriment of His place as a Savior. Any dependance on legal righteousness, moral or ceremonial, renders Christ 'profit-less' unto us. Nothing but salvation meets our need. How often do we hear the phrase, "I know I can do nothing by myself." But this only puts Christ in the place of a helper, and helper indeed He is to thousands who are never saved. The ten lepers were alike helped by Christ, but one only had faith to throw himself at His feet, and thus to get salvation. If you look partly to yourself, and partly to Christ, "Christ shall profit you nothing." What profit is Christ Himself to thousands who bear His name? Well might the apostle, who gave up every advantage for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, ask this question. Christ was truly all to him. Well might he reiterate the testimony, "He that is circumcised is a debtor to do the whole law." The holy majesty of the law, the rich grace of the gospel, and the glory of Christ, alike forbid the vain and senseless attempt to make our own partial obedience, together with Christ, the ground of our salvation. Such an attempt is, in the language of the apostle, to nullify the work of Christ on the Cross, as though it were a needless work, and to fall from grace -to abandon the firm rock of God's grace in Christ Jesus, for the sandy foundation of our own righteousness. It is, indeed, a fearful thing for a Christian to fall into sin; but even for such a one there is provision in the rich grace of the gospel. "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins." But to fall from grace is to reassert confidence in the flesh, and to give up confidence in Christ; it is to turn the gospel into a mere remedial law; so as to produce a religion, which leaves man in his native distance from God, without purging his conscience, or giving him peace with God. Man, as a sinner, needs salvation, and this the grace of God brings to him. To fall from grace is to undermine the certainty of salvation by faith in Christ Jesus, and to leave salvation as a grand uncertainty to be determined at the day of judgment, instead of receiving it now as of God, and on the ground of it rejoicing in peace with God, and nearness to God.

But those who thus 'fall from grace,' not only abandon the truth of the gospel as to present justification before God by faith in Christ, but they surrender also the true Christian hope, by making the attainment of righteousness their hope, instead of making present righteousness, through faith in Jesus, the sure warrant for expecting glory. "We," says the apostle, the name of all believers, "wait not for righteousness, but the hope to which righteousness is entitled." If we tamper with the truth of present acceptance in the Beloved, we undermine the blessed hope for which through the Spirit, we are entitled to wait -even glory. We find many Christians looking to justification, as something in prospect, instead of seeing that they possess it now, and on that ground rejoicing in hope of the glory of God. The Lord Himself is our 'righteousness' and our hope is grounded on that righteousness; and what a glorious hope it is, even that thus those who are "righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

All distinctions in the flesh become lost where there is faith in Christ. Circumcision, the badge in the flesh of Gods Earthly people, `availeth' no more than circumcision. It is a new living principle which is needed. Such is faith wrought in the heart by the Spirit of God. And such faith is an energetic principle; it "worketh by love." The law could give neither life nor righteousness; it might command love to God and man, but was powerless to enforce its own enactment; but faith `worketh' by love to God and man. "Ye did run well; who did binder you that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (Gal. 5:7-9).

It is "obedience to the truth" which is now God's test of obedience. It is not man's competence to present himself in moral righteousness to God which is in question; that has been decided already in the negative. But the question is, Will man accept righteousness as a gift from God? will he accept Christ as the righteousness of God, by faith in His name? This is the test. On this turns the judgment; as it is written, "The Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

How many are now making, as the Galatians did, their very imperfect and partial obedience to the law a positive hindrance to obeying the gospel. It might appear a little matter; but the apostle discovered in this legal tendency that leaven which would corrupt the whole gospel, and deprive it of its glory. When the truth of the gospel is at stake, the apostle speaks with stern decision. It is a bad sign when there is not stern contention for the truth of the gospel -when there is more sensitiveness about our own honor than the honor of Christ -the honor of His cross, and His spotless righteousness.

"I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded; but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be. And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offense of the cross ceased. I would they were even cut off which trouble you" (Gal. 5:10-12).

The apostle knew that 'the truth' he set forth would be responded to by the heart and conscience of those who had been quickened by the grace of God, however for the moment that truth had been overlaid by legalism. This was his confidence in them through the Lord. How earnestly and constantly do real Christians need to be "persuaded to continue in the grace of God" (Acts 13:43). It is remarkable to find the concurrent testimony of the apostles to the real character of legalism. It presents itself in such a fair form, -moral, philanthropical, or religious, -that it seems hard to characterize it as the great disturber and troubler. Such was the united testimony of the apostles in their one memorable council recorded in the Acts of the Apostles: "Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law."

And so the apostle here characterizes the legal teacher as a troubler; and while such 'trouble' by their 'words' and teaching, how many Christians are self-tormentors because they look to themselves, instead of looking to Christ. The Apostle will not spare the legal teacher; be he who he may, he shall bear his judgment. Yes, hard as it may appear -uncharitable, as men in our days would say -the apostle hesitates not to say, "I would they were even cut of that trouble you. " The glory of God and His Christ are in question; and such being the case, soft words are not in season.

The apostle knew that the preaching of a modified gospel, so as to mingle God's grace and man's work together, and to give much more prominence to man's work than the work of Christ on the cross, would take away the offense of the cross. And so it has done. Men may preach, and men may say that Christ "died for our sins"; but they hesitate as to the true conclusion, "then are we saved. " The real offense of the cross is, that while it takes away from man every possible ground of confidence in himself, it gives to him, as a known and proved sinner, such a ground of confidence with God, that he can have peace with Him on the ground of His holiness, as well as of His grace. The offense of the Cross still exists, when the Cross is set forth as the verdict of God against man's righteousness, wisdom, and goodness, and the introduction of a new order of things, even Christ and Him crucified, "the wisdom and power of God" to those who are "called of God, and saved by His grace" (1 Cor. 1:18-24).

Law and Grace: Notes of Lectures on the Epistle to the Galatians, Lecture 3

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

"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 among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the bearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain. He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (Gal. 3:1-5).

There is scarcely a more interesting portion in St. Paul's writings than this, because it shows the peculiar fascination of the law on real believers. One form of the corruption of the gospel of the grace of God is the reducing it to a system of ordinances: this tendency showed itself in the Galatian churches, and the correction of it forms the subject of this part of the epistle. The apostle addresses the Galatians, as 'foolish,' just as our Lord did His disciples, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe."

There was folly in looking to the law for righteousness after they had known the grace of the gospel. The grace of the gospel had been presented to them most conspicuously in the doctrine of the Cross of Christ, but there was a 'bewitching' power which drew them off from the Cross, and made them turn to the law for righteousness. It was as though the law had set its eyes on them, like the snake on its victims, so that they were utterly powerless to get away from it. No language can more forcibly present to us what the law really is; whether moral or ceremonial, we need not inquire, for the Scripture regards the law as a whole. Some would fain add their own moral righteousness as a make-weight in the scale of their justification; others have recourse to a system of ordinances, to make up for the defect of moral righteousness; but, in either case, it is the fascinating power of law which prevents them from looking to Jesus Christ, as the object which God proposes for righteousness to every one that believeth. Again, how strong is the expression, "before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you." The publicity and prominence which the apostle gave to the doctrine of the Cross, was that of a proclamation set forth by authority in the most frequented parts of the city. Such appears to be the force of 'set forth.' Had the eye of the Galatians been fixed on the cross of Christ, they would not have turned to law for righteousness. When the doctrine of the Cross is set forth in all its stern truth, it is God's verdict against man's pretensions to wisdom, or righteousness, or strength; and it is this which makes that doctrine still offensive. But at the same time, the doctrine is full of comfort to those who know it; for it is the "making an end of sin, and bringing in everlasting righteousness."

Did you, says the apostle, receive the Spirit, because you kept the law? or because you believed the testimony to the finished work of Christ? The Holy Ghost is the seal of God set on that perfectly finished work, that we may know the value which God has set on it. God will not set such a seal on any imperfect work or righteousness. But if He gave the Holy Ghost to them, it was in consequence of their complete cleansing by the blood of Jesus, and the perfect righteousness in which they stood before God in Him. Beginning in such a blessed standing in the Spirit, they were so foolish as to think to better their standing by some works of their own. This is very instructive, because it so often characterizes a stage in the career of a believer. Ignorantly and unconsciously, it may be, after his first joy in the knowledge of Christ has been blunted, and he has lapsed into worldliness or carelessness, he seeks to recover the sense of security by some energies of his own, instead of seeing that the sense of security can only be had by standing in grace. He begins in the Spirit, acknowledges the true doctrine of the Cross, not only as that in which he finds remission of sins, but as that which has also taught him his own worthlessness; nevertheless, such is the fascinating power of law, he would fain be made perfect by the flesh, as the Galatians were attempting to do.

Again, they had been sufferers; but had they suffered because of their attempts to keep the law? No; but on account of their confession of Christ. Their heathen friends and relatives did not persecute them because they asserted that duties were to be regarded, but because of the exclusiveness of the doctrine of Christ, which would allow no goodness, strength, righteousness, or wisdom, but in His name. As to the apostle himself, had he been putting them under the law? did he minister the Spirit to them upon the ground of legal obedience, or of faith in Christ? He then refers to Abraham.

Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham (Gal. 3:6-9).

In the epistle to the Romans, as well as in this epistle, the apostle refers to the history of Abraham. His history is given us at large in the Scriptures, as God's portrait of a believer. If the history of all believers were written by the Spirit of truth, we should find the same general

outline as in the history of Abraham. "They which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. " Abraham stood before God not as a doer, but as a recipient of blessings, and depository of promises. And thus Abraham becomes the head and pattern of the family of faith. The language which the apostle uses is very remarkable, -"the Scripture fore-seeing. " He here invests the Scriptures of the Old Testament as with an attribute of God; and this shows the place which these Scriptures have in unfolding the counsels of God." "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed."

A sinner of the Gentiles is justified before God, just in the same way as Abraham was, undertaking nothing, doing nothing, but receiving the testimony of God to what God Himself has done. It was indeed in the case of Abraham as to what God would do; but "the promise which God made to the fathers, He has fulfilled the same, in that he has raised up Christ from the dead. " Abraham believed God, and we believe the same God, who now testifies to what He has done in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The more simply we take God at His word, the more we resemble Abraham. "So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful [that is, with believing] Abraham." "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: 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. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just, shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. 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: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:10-14). But if, instead of taking God at His word, by believing on His Son, and thus setting to our seal that God is true, we have recourse to legal works or legal ordinances for our justification, we immediately get off the ground of blessing, as being recipients of what God gives to us in Christ, as freely as He gave promises to Abraham, and we bring ourselves under the curse. This is a solemn thought; that after hearing of the grace of Christ, any should be so fascinated by law as to bring themselves in so terrible a position. But so it is. That same Scripture which so blessedly preached the gospel to Abraham, as sternly says to all who put themselves under the law, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." This Scripture cannot be broken. But the great professing body {of Christendom} have so modified the grace of the gospel of God, so fettered it with conditions, and at the same time so pared down God's law to the level of human convenience, that they have become almost identified with the Galatian error, and, therefore, under the sentence of these solemn words. The law knows nothing of mercy. It takes its course. It is of no use to say, I believe that God gave the law, or even to approve of it. Have you continued in it? If not, you are under the curse. But the gospel pronounces this great oracle, "The just shall live by faith. " As the apostle himself had said, "I live by the faith of the Son of God. " Those who live on their own graces get into an unhealthy state of soul. Neither our good works nor our graces are Christ. We cannot have faith in them. They may be evidences to others, but not to ourselves, who have the certain evidence of God's testimony to Christ. "The law is not of faith"; it is not answered by believing, but by doing. But you do answer God's testimony to the finished work of His Son; and rest your soul upon it by faith. It is well to notice the "we," "ye," "us," in this epistle. It was not Gentiles, but Israel, who were brought under law at Mount Sinai; and those who were under it needed Christ's work on the Cross to redeem them from under it; and yet these Gentiles were virtually putting themselves under the law. Paul knew what it was to be under the law, and knew the blessedness of deliverance from it. "Christ has 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. " Those who were under the law must needs be rescued from such a position, or they never could have confidence in God. Christ magnified the law, and made it honorable; not to impose it on sinners of the Gentiles, to bar their access to God, but to make a clear way for the outflowing of the riches of God's grace to them, "that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ. " God now meets sinners, not in the way of requirement, as under the law, but in the way of setting forth Christ "as a propitiation through faith in His blood. " God Himself is preaching peace by Jesus Christ; so that the blessing comes as freely to those who believe, as it did to Abraham. There was no promise of the Spirit to those who were under the law; that promise was connected with faith, and was made good in consequence of Christ having glorified the Father, and finished the work He had given Him to do; for the Holy Spirit came down in consequence of the exaltation of Jesus. It was not because they had kept the law, that Paul and other believing Jews received the Spirit, but because they believed in Jesus; they received "the promise of the Spirit through faith. " "Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto. 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. 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. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise" (Gal. 3:15-18).

The apostle proceeds to illustrate his doctrine by reference to an ordinary practice among men. If a man makes a will, and bequeaths certain legacies, absolutely and unconditionally, no one would allow an executor afterward to impose conditions. "Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto."

We usually attach a legal sense to the word covenant; but it was no legal covenant that God made with Abraham, but absolute, unconditional promises, which God Himself covenanted to perform. But God's covenant had respect to Christ, Abraham's special Seed, in whom all the promises of God are yea and amen, unto the glory of God by those who believe. Receiving Christ by faith, therefore, we receive all the promises as absolutely and unconditionally as they were made to Abraham. Now, says the apostle, the law, which was given so long a time after the promises made to Abraham, cannot invalidate these promises: such a thing would not be allowed in a parallel case among men. The legacy, bequeathed absolutely and unconditionally, cannot be disturbed by any thoughts of the executor as to the fitness of the person to receive it. Just so, the New Testament may be regarded as the Will of the Lord Jesus. He gives a legacy, and is the Executor of His own Will, when He says, "Peace be unto you; and He showed the disciples His hands and His feet." He will not allow that which He has freely given to be disturbed by conditions afterward imposed; because it would nullify promise altogether. "For if the inheritance be of law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise." The word 'gave' in the original implies the idea of grace. The blessing, therefore, depends, not on the competence of man, but on the faithfulness of God. Will He who has promised revoke His promise? No; that is impossible. Abraham believed God, and so we, through Christ, believing on God, our faith and hope are in God. "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one" (Gal. 3:19-20). The question necessarily suggests itself, -"Wherefore then the law?" "It was added because of transgressions"; literally, for the sake of transgressions -that is, to make manifest to man himself what the sin was which God knew to be in him (see Rom. 5:20); and to show man, if he had not a faithful promiser to undertake for him, and to fulfill all that was needed, he never could attain to blessing. The law itself proved, that man could not stand under it, and was necessary in order to vindicate the wisdom of God in promising blessing in Abraham's Seed; and was to continue till that "Seed should come to whom the promise was made." Thus, the law, instead of invalidating or superseding, tended to confirm the way of promise made known to Abraham, as the only

possible way in which a sinner was or is capable of being blessed by God. The apostle adds—"It was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one."

This is a passage of confessed difficulty, yet I think the leading thought may be gathered from it, and a blessed thought it is.

God used the ministry of angels in giving the law, putting them between Himself and Israel, as Stephen testified, "who have received the law by the disposition of angels." This was a kind of mediation of distance; and distance from God characterized the giving of the Law from Mount Sinai. All the circumstances were those of terror, and the people were alarmed, and dared not hear the voice of God, but would have Moses receive the words direct from God which he might rehearse to them. There was Moses the mediator, as he tells them: "I stood between the Lord and you that time, to show you the word of the Lord: for ye were afraid by reason of the fire, and went not up into the mount" (Deut. 5:5). The mediation of Moses was to keep the Lord and the people apart -a mediator is not a mediator of one. The people were one party at Mount Sinai, and the Lord the other, and Moses stood between them. Such was the mediator of the law, the very opposite to the Mediator of the New Testament, which is to bring near and bring together, instead of keeping apart. Corrupt Christendom has followed the pattern of Moses, and, by a system of false mediation, whether the Virgin Mary, or angels, or an earthly priesthood, bars nearness of access to God; setting God and man in the same relative distance in which the law set them. Mediation connected with law, and mediation resulting from grace, are as opposite as possible, -distance characterizing the one, and reconciliation the other. There was no terror when the word of the Lord came to Abraham -no terror in the gracious words which proceeded from the lips of Jesus -no terror when the apostles went forth on the ministry of reconciliation, based on the mediation and finished work of Jesus. God is one. It is no longer two parties to be kept at a distance one from the other, lest destruction should ensue; but God preaching peace, God testifying to what He has done in the death and resurrection of Jesus, God Himself in the New Testament {New Covenant with Israel} writing His laws in the heart, putting them in the mind, saying, They shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know Me, from the least to the greatest; for I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. God is one; and therefore there is not a people in the new covenant undertaking to answer the requirements of God. But to turn from the gospel back to the law is to undertake, on our own responsibility, that which God promises to perform according to His own grace and faithfulness. Distance from God must be the necessary consequence. If you look for salvation to anything yet to be done on your part, instead of rejoicing in Christ Jesus and His finished work, you will become as these 'foolish' and 'bewitched' Galatians. In the old covenant, the people undertook; in the new covenant, God Himself hath undertaken. "God is one"; and therefore there can be no failure.

clickbible.org