

Galatians - Commentaries by Hugh Henry Snell

Crumbs for the Lord's Little Ones: Volume 5 (1857), Epistle to the Galatians., The (5:16-18)

(Notes Taken of Lectures.)

Chap. 5:16 to the end.

IT is very important to have the thoughts of God with respect to "the Spirit" as contrasted with "the flesh," In the Apostle's teaching, we find the doctrine of the Cross and life in the Spirit intimately connected. We cannot truthfully hold the one without the other. The Cross of Christ entirely sets the flesh aside. God's judgment has been passed upon the flesh, by making "Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin;" and then life in the Spirit, flowing from the risen and glorified Jesus, comes out in the proper place. 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.)

Ver. 16. "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."

Walk according to the new principle which those who are quickened by the Spirit of God have received from Him. 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 here antagonistic to him. He cannot be at home in the world. All his interests are in another sphere. He worships in an unseen temple, and has an unseen altar and priesthood—all is spiritual—and only if we walk according to this order shall we be kept from fulfilling the lusts of the flesh. It is a very intelligible principle that the best way to keep out of bad company is to keep good company. And it requires but a small amount of Christian experience to trace our most grievous faults and failures to walking in the flesh; we forget what we have been redeemed from, 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 God 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 a conventional righteousness, they make the Cross only a safeguard from punishment, and know it not as a mighty separating power, as that which separates between oneself and oneself, and as that which delivers from the world. Hence their low walk; for the only real safeguard against fulfilling the lusts of the flesh is to walk in the Spirit.

Ver. 17-26. Another great truth is here brought out in strong relief. There is hardly a Christian who has not practically attempted to contradict the Apostle's assertion, that the flesh and the Spirit are contrary the one to the other. If the doctrine of "progressive sanctification" were true, then would the flesh become gradually annihilated, and the contrariety would necessarily cease, because there would be no flesh to lust against the Spirit. But the Apostle's doctrine is not so. It sets forth the judgment of the flesh in the Cross of Christ, and leads the Christian very experimentally to know that the flesh is enmity against God, by its constant lusting against the Spirit. We find ourselves constantly disappointed in ourselves and in others; but this only tends to teach us the unchangeable character of the flesh, whether regarded morally, intellectually, or religiously. Christendom is full of religious flesh; the worst kind of flesh, because it uses the name of Christ to sanction itself. But the Apostle does not make a one-sided statement, as if the flesh only lusted against the Spirit—that would be Antinomianism. But the flesh is hindered by a counter lust of the Spirit, so that it cannot carry out its own enormities. The flesh is still the flesh; and we can never put off our armor as though it would not rise up against us. There is nothing which is our safeguard so much as keeping our eye fixed on the Cross of Christ, and regarding ourselves as crucified with Christ; and then, however, the flesh would say, "Spare thyself," we shall give it no quarter, but take up our cross. It is an important thing to be led of the Spirit. Where did the Spirit lead Jesus? Into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil. The Spirit leads, and leads, too, into conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil; but the Spirit ever leads unto Jesus, and guides 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 law."

Ver. 19-26. Here we have a catalog of the works of the flesh; while some are morally offensive to us, others are not so, but are equally offensive to God. "Emulation" is a work of the flesh; but it is the principle on which most of us have been educated, and in its spirit the most opposite to 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 potsherd 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. "Envy's and murders" are grouped together, even as they came into the world together in Cain. "Drunkenness and reveling's" are grouped together, and are very often found together. "Reveling's and such like" comprise all the exciting amusements, for which men are wont to pay so extravagantly, stage-plays, operas, &c. The world is glad to restrain some of the more gross works of the flesh for its own sake—drunkenness, for example; but would any associate together to reclaim men from "emulations, reveling's, and such like." By no means. Herod heard John gladly, and did many things; but when he touched his conscience, by saying, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife," he put John in prison. "Sedition and heresies" go together, party spirit sacrificing the good of the State to support or benefit a few; and party spirit, for such is heresy, preferring one's own will to the good of the Church. How many of the works of the flesh are unholy sanctioned by the name of Christ! But in this Epistle, while the Apostle presents us with the richest exhibition of the grace of God, he also comes in with a most unsparing hand against the flesh, its lusts, its affections, and its works. "The grace of God, which bringeth salvation, teaches us to deny ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."

There is a happy contrast between "the works of the flesh" and "the fruit of the Spirit." Where the Holy Spirit is, it works and produces not a single fruit, but a rich cluster of fruits— "love, joy, peace, &c." Against such there is no law. The law restrained the works of the flesh, the

Spirit produces fruit. Here, again, we find the fruit of the Spirit in close connection with the doctrine of the Cross. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts."

How little of present spiritual joy do even real Christians know. They look forward to happiness to be enjoyed in heaven at some future time. But, says the Apostle, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit;" and not attempt the impossibility of serving God and Mammon. This is the root of the misery of so many Christians; they desire to know present safety and security; but they "walk as men," and think of eternal life only in the dim and distant future. But if "we live in the Spirit," we enter on "eternal life" now, and taste of its joys.

"Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another." This is legalism. The moment I become legal, I say in my heart, "Thank God, I am not like that Christian." He who lives in the Spirit lives near unto God, and being severe in judging himself, has little heart to judge another. He sees the beam in his own eye, and therefore is not quick to discern the mote in the eye of his brother. A legal spirit is a judging spirit.

Chap. 6:1-5. There is a restoring power in the grace of the gospel, of which the law was incapable. The law—the law of the land, for example—can find one guilty and condemn, but it has no power to restore. How legality comes out! A Christian has gone wrong, and brought dishonor on the name of Christ, and on the name of other Christians, and how often do we judge without any thought of restoration. The spiritual man knows how to restore, a power of which the natural man is ignorant; he can convict, but not restore. And in nothing do real Christians walk more as men than in judging others, instead of considering themselves lest they also be tempted. How wonderfully consistent is the doctrine of Scripture. "Considering thyself." 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, in a sense of the unchanging evil of the flesh, to rest humbly, yet confidently on the faithfulness of God. Every Christian must know his own personal need of restoring grace, and to that should we look for the restoration of a fallen brother.

Christ has borne our burdens, even our sins; and His law is, "That ye love one another even as I have loved you." We should go before God and make our brother's sins our own, just as Daniel did, identifying himself with the sin of all Israel. "We have sinned, we have committed iniquity." It is in this way 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 are, leads us into the place of confession, and thus we bear one another's burdens.

How common and easy it is to glory with respect to another, by drawing a comparison between ourselves and another, to our own advantage; but we are not called to give an account of others to God, but of ourselves. "Every man shall bear his own burden;" and therefore "let him prove his own work," and not his neighbors.

Men of the world pay highly for their pleasures; but, says the Apostle, "Let him that is taught in the word communicate to him that teacheth in all good things." Let him show that he appreciates the value of the truth of the gospel, and that he has as much delight in it, as the men of the world appreciate and value their pleasures.

Ver. 7, 8. This is a solemn word to Christians, both as connected with that which immediately precedes it, and as recognizing the solemn truth that "the flesh," although it has received its judgment on the Cross, still puts forth its claims in the Christian, and craves to be satisfied. It is "the flesh" in the Christian. "He that soweth to his (his own) flesh." It is easy to see that those who are in the flesh sow to the flesh, and as they sow so they reap. The Scriptures do not draw artificial distinctions, as we are wont to do; and turn the keen edge of the sword of the living God from off our own conscience, by making it apply only to the unconverted. But if the Christian sow to his flesh, he, a Christian, shall of the flesh reap corruption. "God is not mocked"—the flesh in the Christian is as bad as the flesh in an unconverted person. It is sad when the doctrine of the Cross is attempted to be used selfishly, making us only desirous to know that we are safe, and then to sow to the flesh. It does not require any very lengthened experience to prove to the Christian how every attempt to sow to the flesh has issued in disappointment, if not in disaster and 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 tendency in us all, as in the Galatians, to get off from the true doctrine of the Cross, to turn to ordinances, or to try to please the imagination, or to puff up the intellect; and when 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, stript of everything, are led to the Cross only to be saved by that, and nothing else. But there is an everlastingness in all that is sown in the Spirit. Where the Gospel is received it is everlasting in its effects; and there is an everlastingness in the cup of cold water given in the name of Christ. It is well for us to look to this our sowing time, for whatsoever we sow, that shall we assuredly reap.

Ver. 9, 10. The Lord's ministry seemed to be in vain; but only seemed—it was His sowing time, and what an abundant harvest shall be gathered in from His death—that one corn of wheat fallen into the earth. The ministry of Paul seemed to end in failure, but his labor in the Lord was not in vain, as we are witnesses this day, getting strength, comfort, and refreshment from his instruction. "Let us then not be weary in well doing." This is our time of "opportunity." There are no such "opportunities" in heaven as we have here; no sick to visit, no fatherless, no widows no ignorant to instruct, no vicious to reclaim. Alas! on a retrospect, how many lost opportunities present themselves to our view.

Ver. 11-13. This appears to be the only Epistle which the Apostle wrote with his own hand. In others we find, another wrote at his dictation, as Tertius the Epistle to the Romans, and the Apostle closed with his benediction and signature. The Apostle's spirit was stirred. Everything seemed to be at stake, by the tendency to fleshly religion which might distinguish man from man, without at all bringing his conscience into contact with God; but all fleshly religion, whether it consists in ordinances, or sentiment, or philanthropy, has one object, and that is to nullify the Cross of Christ. The true doctrine of the Cross can never become fashionable or palatable to the tastes of men, because it is unsparing in its declaration of not only the worthlessness of the flesh, but also of its hatred to God. Hence our danger of turning aside from the Cross to other things, which makes ourselves prominent rather than the Cross. The offense of the Cross has not ceased. Various are the devices to supersede or overlay the true doctrine of the Cross; and as it was in the Apostle's day, so is it in our own, a busy activity in social improvement is used to conceal the glory of the gospel, which sets man as a sinner in a new and happy relation to God, the only basis of practical godliness. The prominent spirit of the age is glorying in the flesh.

Ver. 14-17. But the Apostle would only glory in the Cross of Christ. At the close of the second chapter, the Apostle propounds the doctrine of the Cross as separating between himself and himself— “I yet not I.”

In the fifth chapter he propounds the doctrine of the Cross in its great practical bearing. “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.”

But in closing, the Apostle presents to us the doctrine of the Cross in its mighty moral power of separating from the world, its religion, its glory, and its judgment. The world crucified the Lord of Glory; and the place maintained by the early Christians, in relation to the world, was as a crucified thing. And 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 (see ch. 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, “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 the world, 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. The experiment is easy. What place has Jesus and His Cross in the busy interests of men? But better to make the experiment closer. Is the world to ourselves 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, and we in Christ Jesus are of the new creation; and this is the rule of our walk. They alone who see the end of the old creation in the Cross, and Jesus as Head of the new creation in resurrection, can take the place of the Israel of God. They have power with God and man, because the flesh is broken and set aside, and 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 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, have left their marks on my body. Let no man, therefore, trouble me with things indifferent in themselves.

Streams of Refreshing From the Fountain of Life, Gospel Liberty (5:1)

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” (Gal. 5:1).

Those addressed in this epistle had known the liberty of the gospel. A person must first have tasted liberty before he can truly be exhorted to stand fast

in it. You could not say to a poor slave working in chains, Stand fast in liberty. No; he must first be set free. So it is spiritually. Many do not know gospel liberty. Some are so accustomed to the slavery of sin, that they are not conscious of the real bondage they are in; others have, more or less, a feeling sense of the miserable condition of their hearts and ways, and long for deliverance from guilt and fear. Other persons seem only to think of liberty and independence in relation to their fellow-men. Perhaps they have striven for it, and have in some measure realized it; but they know nothing of the glorious liberty of the children of God. The Son of God came down from heaven to make men free. He preached liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. He gave His life a ransom for many.

It is delightful to see Paul’s disinterested, Christ-like love and care for these Galatian saints. When first he went and preached among them, they received him as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus; they felt great blessing through his ministrations, and loved him so much, that if it had been possible, they would have plucked out their own eyes, and have given them to him. They were happy in the Lord. To them Christ was all. But after Paul left, false teachers came in among them — persons who cared not for the people’s souls, but only to propagate certain points of erroneous doctrine. The Galatian converts received them, and were so injured that they counted Paul their enemy. But how did Paul treat them? Did he return evil for evil? No. Like his blessed Master, he only sought their welfare, and cared very little what they thought of him, provided they thought well of Christ. He therefore presented Christ to them in the richest and most attractive way, so that they might be brought to be happy again in the knowledge and enjoyment of Christ’s finished work. Most blessed is it to consider that

salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2:9),

and that God’s only way of meeting man in blessing is by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. We may well pity those who are seeking satisfaction from creature-streams, instead of the Creator’s fullness; or who may be endeavouring to get into favour with God by any other way than by receiving His amazing mercy to sinners in the death of His beloved Son. God’s gracious testimony to man is,

I will have mercy, and not sacrifice (Matt. 9:13);

thus plainly teaching us that the only way by which He can make man happy, and deliver him from eternal condemnation, is by compassionating him in his helplessness and sins, and providing a full and everlasting salvation for him, without money and without price. This, known in the soul, is liberty. This is what the Spirit of God bears witness to; and

where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (2 Cor. 3:17).

This alone gives confidence and substantial comfort. It flows from God to the sinner.

God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8).

It is man, sinful man, God so loves. Man's condition before God is that of a sinner —

all have sinned (Rom. 3:23).

He is a slave of Satan, a servant of sin, a breaker of God's laws, afraid of death; he knows nothing of the holy presence of God, and trembles at the sound of the Lord's return from heaven. Such are we all by nature. In this fallen condition God's pitying eye beheld us, His compassionate heart moved toward us; and knowing that His own Son, sent forth in the likeness of sinful flesh, and making atonement by the death of the cross, was the only way of redeeming man, and bringing him into liberty and blessing, in richest mercy this unspeakable gift was not withheld. God gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Thus Christ went down into the sorrows and death of the cross to exalt sinful man to the heights of eternal glory.

Let us now look into the nature of the liberty the apostle here refers to, when he exhorts the Galatian saints to stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free (Gal. 5:1).

And I think we shall find that Christ has procured liberty from the slavery of Satan, from the guilt and dominion of sin, from the bondage and curse of the law, from the fear of death, and given us liberty in God's presence, the liberty of sonship, and liberty to serve.

1. LIBERTY FROM THE SLAVERY OF SATAN. It is a very humiliating thought, that man is really the slave of Satan; but is it not an undeniable fact, that we are the servants of those to whom we render obedience? Who, then, does man obey? Does he obey God? Certainly not; for the testimony of an inspired prophet is,

All we like sheep have gone astray (Isa. 53:6);

and the testimony of the Holy Ghost by an apostle is,

There is NONE that doeth good, no, not one — they are ALL gone out of the way — there is NONE that seeketh after God, &c. (Rom. 3:11, 12).

Who, then, does the natural man obey? Is it not the prince of this world, who is also called the god of this world? Saddening thought! but, alas! too true;

for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world (1 John 2:16).

The changeable fashions, the fascinating pleasures, and carnal gratifications of the day, in whatever garb they may be clothed, are of the world, and therefore in direct connection with the deceiver of the world, the adversary of souls — the wicked one, in whom the whole world lieth. The lusts and passions of fallen man easily submit to his subtle suggestions, and those who yield often find present sensual recompense. But this arch-enemy deceives and blinds, lest the glorious gospel should shine into their hearts. Jesus, however, came to destroy the works of the devil, to free men from this vile service, to redeem His people from all iniquity, to ransom them from the power of the grave, to destroy death, and him that hath the power of death, that is, the devil. Man had fallen into allegiance to Satan, and he was fast bound by his chains; but a stronger than Satan came to his help; the Almighty Savior came forth from the Father to his rescue, and by His death, and resurrection from the dead, He led captivity captive, and triumphed over principalities and powers. Thus Christ, by one offering, which He once offered, ransomed His people. As nothing less than His precious blood could redeem them from the dreadful bondage they were in, Jesus paid that amazing price for them. All who believe in His name are made free. Christ has procured their liberty from the slavery of Satan. They now love and serve Him.

2. LIBERTY FROM THE GUILT AND DOMINION OF SIN. Some people say, they are thankful that they never felt a guilty conscience; but I pity such. It is the clearest proof of their being still in their sins. I thank God that I have felt the plague of a guilty conscience, dreadful as the experience of it was; but I can also say that I have a cleansed conscience by the blood of Christ. How can any one know pardon and peace, who never felt condemnation and guilt? The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. Why do not persons feel guilt? Because they do not consider what they are in God's sight. They have, therefore, wrong thoughts about sin. They say that many things are not sin which really are. They do not believe that, from the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness, and that there is none that doeth good, no, not one; but whatever be man's thought of himself, the Divine sentence has gone forth, that all the world stand

guilty before God (Rom. 3:19).

Now, Jesus came to give us deliverance from this dreadful guilt, and this He did by the death of the cross. There God made Him to be sin for us; our old man was crucified with Him; there our iniquities were laid upon Him; He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; there all the waves and billows of Jehovah's wrath passed over Him; thus Christ, by the infinite efficacy of His one sacrifice, hath freed us from the guilt of sin. Not only have our sins been judged on Him on the tree, but

our old man (Rom. 6:6)

too — the nature that did the sins — the corrupt tree, as well as its fruits.

Thus, through Christ, we have power over sin. Before a sinner has beheld the Lamb of God slain on Calvary, sin has dominion over him. He makes resolutions; but he breaks them again and again. He reforms outwardly in various ways; but he only exchanges one class of sins for another. He is without strength. He cannot live without sinning. But when his guilty conscience is brought by the Holy Spirit before the cross of Christ, his heart melts, the thorns and briars of self-righteousness are burned up, his icy affections thaw before the burning love of Immanuel, and he is humbled before God, broken down under a sense of His love. By considering the deep agonies of the Sin-bearer, he hates sin, he loathes himself, loves the Savior, and cries out, with gratitude of soul —

Thus, by faith in the Son of God, who died for the ungodly, we have liberty from the dominion of sin; and the Divine assurance is,

Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14).

3. LIBERTY FROM THE BONDAGE AND CURSE OF THE LAW. The law of Moses is described by Peter as a yoke of bondage, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear. It made righteous and holy demands on fallen, helpless sinners. It gave no liberty, but the spirit of fear and bondage. It was the ministration of condemnation and death. There was remembrance of sin, but no remission. Man needs power, and he needs life; then obedience readily flows into its proper channel. Jesus by His death bore the curse of a broken law, and put away sin; hence the gospel proclaims full forgiveness; and the testimony of God now is,

Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more (Heb. 10:17).

By Christ all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses (see Acts 13:39).

This is liberty indeed! But who could attentively contemplate God's law without being conscious of having broken it, of having come short of His holy standard, and therefore of being 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 (Gal. 3:10).

Who can bear to weigh himself in this balance? This makes it clear that all are under sin. Hence the apostle declares, that as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse (Gal. 3:10).

We have all, then, merited God's curse by breaking His law; but Jesus, the Redeemer, came forth and rescued us:

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 (Gal. 3:13).

Thus we have full liberty and redemption from the bondage and curse of the law by the cross of Christ.

4. LIBERTY FROM THE FEAR OF DEATH. Man trembles at death; his bones shake, the joints of his back are loosed, and his countenance becomes ghastly, when he sees death enter the room, and feels its chilly grasp. There is only one thing that enables the soul to triumph in death; it is knowing that Christ died for our sins, and that He who is now in the glory is our life. It is only beholding Christ who was on the cross that will enable any one to say, that death is but the opening of the golden gates that admit him into the celestial glory. Nothing can remove the fear of death, and enable us to meet it with composure and peace, but the sheltering power of the blood of the Lamb, the blessed knowledge that we have passed from death unto life, and the assurance, that though the mortal body may fall asleep in Jesus, death can have no claim upon us, because Jesus hath borne death and judgment instead of us. So that the true language of faith is,

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:55-57).

Thus we have liberty from the fear of death.

5. LIBERTY IN GOD'S PRESENCE. So perfectly have

our old man (Rom. 6:6)

and all our transgressions been judged by God on His beloved Son on the cross, and so completely are we made the righteousness of God in Him risen and ascended, that the believer is enabled, with holy boldness, to draw near to God in the happy liberty of acceptance and favour in His presence. He is now made nigh. Oh, it is wonderful how near to God the believer is brought in Christ Jesus, and by His blood! As near to God as Christ is, because he is in Him. He is invited to come boldly to the throne of grace, both for pity and help, because Christ's all-cleansing blood and His all-prevailing priesthood ever speak there for him. But I must pass on to notice —

6. LIBERTY OF SONSHIP. The Spirit of adoption is one of the most blessed privileges of this dispensation. It seemed necessary that Christ should die before the blessed liberty of sonship could be enjoyed.

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. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father (Gal. 4:4-6).

Thus we see that it is through the death of Christ we are brought into the blessed standing of sons. We realize and enjoy this precious truth by faith.

Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26).

It is a blessing of the highest possible dignity, and is our present portion.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God (1 John 3:2).

It is when this truth is known with power in the soul that we are enabled to serve our heavenly Father acceptably. It will not be from slavish fear, like the spirit of bondage under the law; but it will be with reverence and filial fear, lest we grieve the heart of our gracious Father. How blessed is this liberty! How full of comfort! How rich in goodness now! How sweet the prospect of standing for ever before the Father in love, as the objects of His choice, adoption, and grace!

7. LIBERTY OF SERVICE. The believer is a servant, because he is a son; and the Lord's service is perfect freedom —

His yoke is easy, and His burden is light (see Matt. 11:30).

He serves God as a redeemed sinner and an adopted child, constrained by the love of Christ. He works not for liberty, but as having liberty; not for life, but from life. This is happy service; it flows from a cheerful heart; it is wrought by a willing spirit; and is often accompanied with present recompense. There are no cares, no burdens, connected with such service; it aims only at one object, namely, to exalt Him who ransomed us with His own blood; and we know that His blood purges our conscience from dead works to serve the living God, and to wait for His Son from heaven.

But more than all this. We have liberty to trust in Him at all times; to cast all our care upon Him; to rejoice in the Lord alway; and to pray without ceasing. We can sit by faith at His pierced feet; we can there seek instruction, and hear His word, in the blessed consciousness that those feet at which we sit tell us of atonement made, and the captive soul set free. We may lean upon His arm, while passing through the wilderness, in the happy remembrance that it was once willingly stretched out for us on Calvary's cross — once bound to that accursed tree, to make us eternally free. We can rest our way-worn hearts by faith upon His wounded bosom, in the sweetest assurance that from His side flowed blood and water — the blessed and certain testimony of the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and of the perfect love and favour of our unchanging God.

As I have said before, all do not enjoy this liberty in their souls; but it is, nevertheless, the privilege of those who believe in the Lord Jesus for salvation, because it is based on what has been already accomplished; it is liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free. The doubting, trembling soul, therefore, need only look to the cross of Christ, and heartily receive God's own account of the value of that work, to be happy. Is there a question in any soul about sin? — the only remedy is the death of Christ. If a sense of having broken God's law oppress the heart, look at the redeeming work of His beloved Son. If the fear of death fetter any spirit, the only delivering power is the death of Jesus on the cross. If the soul feel at a distance from God, the only way of returning to His presence is by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. If a sluggish feeling seem to hinder our going forward in service, the value of the sacrifice of Christ, apprehended by faith, revives and strengthens. If darkness becloud the mind, and a sense of sin lie upon the conscience, communion and peace are restored by confession, and believing what God says about the blood.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9);

and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:9).

Dear Christian reader, what say you to these things? Can you rejoice in this blessed liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free? or are you fearing, and doubting, and trembling as to your eternal prospects? If so, why is it? Have you not long ago renounced all thoughts of creature righteousness? Have you not long felt that you are a vile sinner before God? Do you not often groan over your uncleanness? Have you not fled to Christ alone for salvation? Do you not renounce every other ground of acceptance but in Christ? And do you not trust wholly in his blood? Then why are you fearful, seeing it is such that Christ hath made free? Oh! look away from yourself, and every other object, to Christ crucified, risen, and ascended; believe that He hath done what God declares He has, and be assured that it is because the Spirit hath quickened you that you have been convinced of sin, and been brought as a guilty, needy one to the Savior. Be comforted, then, dear trembling child of God, for it is because the Lord hath loved you with an everlasting love, that with loving-kindness He hath drawn you to Himself through Christ; and the testimony of His word is, that your sins are forgiven, you are justified from all things, you shall not come into condemnation, you have everlasting life — you have passed from death unto life; Christ is your righteousness and life; He ever lives to make intercession for you; and He bids you to be of good cheer, and to go in peace. Rest, then, in God's faithfulness to His own word; for

He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13).

May the Holy Spirit take of these precious things of Christ, and reveal them for much blessing and comfort to your soul.

It is in this

liberty

that the Christian is exhorted to

stand fast,

and to beware of slipping from it into any

yoke of bondage (Gal. 5:1).

There are many fascinating temptations presented by the adversary to induce us to yield, but we must

stand fast.

Our present peace and strength for the Lord's service are connected with our standing fast in this liberty. Abiding in Him, we shall be strong — strong in faith; giving glory to God; strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus; strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Oh, for more of the power and communion of the Holy Ghost, to enable us to

stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free (Gal. 5:1)!

Then the language of every heart will be —

But perhaps my reader is a stranger to these precious things of Christ. You are serving Satan by your sins, little thinking it is so, because his service is connected with self-indulgence — he allows you to fulfil the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and that is a sweet morsel to you. But do you ever think that you must give an account of yourself to God? Have you ever considered, that because you are God's creature, He is justly entitled to all your heart, and mind, and strength? Do you not sometimes feel pangs of conscience, telling you that all is not right? Do not thoughts of death and judgment terrify you? Does it never occur to you, that the Son of God came down from heaven, and in wondrous love died for such as you are? Have you not heard again and again that there is salvation in no other name — that He is the only door of escape from wrath — the only way of admission into glory? Then, will you still be careless, still love sin, still choose darkness rather than light, still prefer the bondage of Satan to the liberty of the gospel, still rush onward to the glittering sword of the fiery judgment of the Son of man? Oh, my reader, turn ye, turn ye; why will ye die? The gospel yet proclaims liberty for the captives; cleansing for the vilest, blackest sinner; righteousness for the most profligate and filthy; acceptance and favour with God for the greatest rebel; yea, for whosoever receives Jesus, the Savior whom God hath sent! Can you any longer refuse the blessed tidings? Can you, will you go on in hardness of heart against such unheard-of love? Will you be deaf to the cries, and groans, and agonies of Christ? Will you still refuse to lift up your eyes to Calvary's cross, and read in Christ's death God's love to sinners? Doth your proud heart yet say, I will not have Christ Jesus to reign over me? Or do you begin to think of the value of your soul, and that it is high time to flee from the wrath to come? Oh, that the Spirit of God might graciously fasten these eternally important thoughts upon your conscience, so that the sincere cry of your heart may be —

Crumbs for the Lord's Little Ones: Volume 5 (1857), Epistle to the Galatians., The (3:21-29)

(Notes Taken of Lectures.)

Chap. 3:21-29; 4:1-20.

WE left off the last time at an important point, showing that there was no second party to the covenant into which God entered with Abraham. It was a covenant of promise, of the same character as that which God had established with Noah and "his seed, and every living creature;" a covenant absolute and unconditional, and under which we now sow and reap. The question then arises, "Is the law against the promises of God?" No, says the Apostle, "for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." Righteousness and life are inseparably connected, both in the law and in the gospel. The law pointed to righteousness as the way to life, but it could not give life. Such was man, that the law, instead of being to him the ministry of righteousness, became the ministry of condemnation; instead of the ministry of life, it was the ministry of death. All that the law could do was to show man his impotence, and to force him out of the position of a doer into that of a receiver. "The law was given by Moses," but it could not give; "but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." It is a hard lesson to learn that from beginning to end we are only receivers. We become Christians by what we receive, not by anything that we do. We receive righteousness, eternal life, forgiveness of sins, Christ Himself. Let the uppermost thought in the heart of one Christian be, what have I received? and in that of another, what must I do? surely the one with his heart set at liberty will run the way of God's commandments, and have more true and blessed thoughts of God than the other.

How strong is the language of the Apostle as to the hopeless misery of man had he been left under the law, "the Scripture hath concluded all under sin," shut up as it were in hopelessness, "that the promise faithwise in Christ Jesus, might be given to them that believe." The blessing comes in the way of faith, not in the way of works. The law might serve to make a man conscious of his need, but the gospel meets his actual need in the way of deliverance from it. There is all the difference between being "shut up" and set at liberty.

Ver. 23. "But before faith came we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterward be revealed." This verse remarkably shows the necessary spirit of one quickened by the Spirit, yet in his conscience under the law; his spirit was the spirit of bondage. He was a "prisoner of hope," craving liberty, yet knowing not how to get it. "Before faith came," is evidently that new and wondrous way of righteousness in the way of faith, and not in the way of works, now so clearly and fully manifested. The law kept the saints who were under it as it were in jail. Look at Hezekiah. He was in bondage under fear, of death, shut up in prison unto the faith that was afterward to be revealed. With regard to him and to others, the Lord says to His disciples, "Blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."

Ver. 24-26. "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. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

The Apostle had before regarded the law in the light of a jailer, imprisoning those who were under it; he now changes the figure and presents the law as a schoolmaster, or rather as the confidential servant of the house, who conducted the youths to and from school, and watched over them in their games; and this too till they were emancipated from school, and were able themselves to take the place of men. This place the law had till Christ. It so strictly controlled those who were real saints, that they had no more liberty than the youth under the vigilant and strict care of a tutor. Just in proportion as saints under the law rose above the law looking to the faith, or the Object of faith to be revealed, did they know liberty. Such there were even in the worst times: those who "fearing the Lord spake often one to another, and thought upon His name." Such there were, a faithful remnant, when "the fullness of time was come, and God sent forth His Son"—a Simeon or Anna, waiting for the consolation of Israel, looking for redemption in Jerusalem. But we find in the Lord's own personal disciples, that they never stood in conscious liberty till fully emancipated from the law. How different the state of the same disciples before and after Pentecost. When the Holy Ghost came down from heaven as the witness of Jesus in glory, and of the preciousness of His blood as known in heaven, then they were free, they acted as those who were not servants but sons. Then were they justified by faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus; and were no longer under the rigid or even suspecting care of the tutor. They were grown up, come to man's estate, had attained their majority, and could enter into the enjoyment of their rich heritage. It would have been more forcible, and in keeping with the illustration, had the word rendered "children" (ver. 26) been rendered sons; not infants but sons, those who had come into possession, and not merely into the title of all their privileges. Now, after attaining to this standing and condition, to turn to the law, would it be to turn from the liberty of sons who have

access to the Father through Jesus, to be under the rigorous and irritating control of a tutor. How clearly does this illustration apply to the condition of many real Christians; still in their conscience they are under law, they are not standing and acting in the liberty of the sons of God. They make salvation a future object, instead of enjoying it at present. And while this is the case there will ever be the tendency to serve God and Mammon, instead of walking in the happy consciousness of an emancipated people.

Verses 27-29. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to promise." How important is the, true doctrine of baptism, and how little understood. It is only those taught of the Spirit who can regard baptism as God regards it, even that the believer in Christ is regarded by God to have died in Christ, to have been buried with Christ, to be raised up with Christ, and to have put on Christ. Surely, if we have put on Christ, we need neither our works nor service to command us to God. The believer appears before God in that which he has put on, even Christ. All differences between one believer and another are merged in this one essential difference between all believers and all others, that they have put on Christ, and therefore are all one in Christ Jesus. This doctrine is full of comfort, the weak believer appears before God as the strong, the one who tremblingly touched the hem of the garment of Jesus, as the Apostle Paul himself. They have alike put on Christ.

But there is a difficulty to be met; the promises were to Abraham and his seed, how then shall a sinner of the Gentiles get connected with Abraham? Here the Judaizer was on strong ground, and might use it to teach the disciples, "except ye be circumcised and keep the law of Moses, ye cannot be saved." It is very natural to insist on any hereditary title to which we can lay claim. On this the Jews insisted in their controversy with the Lord. (John 8) The Lord allows they were the seed of Abraham, but He denied them the title of children of Abraham, because unlike Abraham, they had no faith. The Lord struck at the root of their confidence, not denying anything they truthfully claimed, but chewing them the state of their own hearts in the rejection of Him. The Lord allowed that they were the children of the kingdom, but only to be cast out. (See Matthew 8:12.) Peter addresses them as "the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with Abraham." (Acts 3:25.) Paul gave the Jews the place of hereditary title. "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles." They rested in their hereditary privileges— "much every way"—and despised and rejected Him who was Abraham's Seed, the sum and substance of all promises; the Gentile, sinner of the Gentiles, who had no hereditary claim on God, received Christ, Abraham's Seed, and thus became connected, through his Seed, with Abraham himself. He had the faith of Abraham, by having put on Christ, and thus he became, not through proselytism and the law connected with Abraham, but through Christ. He did not reach Christ through Abraham, but Abraham through Christ; and thus became Abraham's seed, not in the legal but in the promise order— "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to promise."

Chap. 4:1-5. "Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors, until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: but when the fullness of 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." Having mentioned "heirs according to promise," he contrasts that condition with that of heirs under the law. The heir under the law is like an infant under guardians, until either, according to the law of the country, or the arbitrary will of his father, he is of age and competent to act himself. Now all this while he differs nothing from a servant, though he is in title possessor of all the estate, he cannot act even on his own property without the permission of his guardians. This, says the Apostle, aptly represents the condition of those who were heirs under the law. The elements of the world, their much boasted ritual and ordinances, acted the same part towards them as the guardian towards the minor. The ordinances of the law kept the very heirs of God in a state of pupilage and bondage, until God's set time came for sending forth His Son, the promised Seed of the woman, to which the eye of faith had been directed from the moment of the fall; yet, "made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law." "Fullness of time" is a remarkable expression, many preparatory steps were needed, to show to man that he could only stand in blessing in redemption. Redemption, so to speak, was the original thought of God; but it did not come forth in strong relief till Pentecost. Man stood not in innocence; highly favored, he stood not under law, and those who being under law were quickened by the Spirit were waiting for redemption. At last the time came, and God sent forth His Son, made under the law, magnifying it by implicit obedience, He magnified it further by bearing its curse, and thus redeeming from under it even the very heirs, that they might come into their proper place as sons, which they could not do so long as they were under the law, for the law kept them in the position of servants, and they could only have the spirit of servants.

Ver. 6, 7. "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." The Apostle here contrasts the state of the Gentile believer standing in the full liberty of the gospel, with that of the saint under the law; and thus points out to the Gentile believer the folly of putting himself into the state of the saint of old by going back to the law, when that very saint needed the work of Christ on the Cross to redeem him from under the law, in order to take the place and have the spirit of a son. They were sons, not servants, heirs, they had attained their majority, and had liberty of access, with all confidence, to the Father; would they again go back to a state of pupilage, and only think and act as a child in that state? The argument is very cogent; there is an intended contrast between, "that we might receive the adoption of sons," (Ver. 5,) and "because ye are sons." (Ver. 6.) The Spirit of adoption was not the portion of Old Testament saints, it is the blessed fruit of accomplished redemption, for which even the disciples of the Lord Jesus had to wait till after His ascension. (See Acts 1:4, 8.) The Gentile had never been under law, but had received the promise of the spirit of faith. The Spirit of adoption may not be realized by Gentile Christians, because of their Galatian state; but when realized, it makes the believer say, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, yea, I have a goodly heritage." And this is the portion of him who knows the Father, and has the Spirit of adoption. Little cares, little trials, little perplexities, make up the sum and substance of our little lives; to meet these we need the Spirit of adoption, for we need a parent's care and a parent's heart, and it sufficeth us to be shown "the Father." We lose much holy joy, because we so little know the Father. How would the thought, My heavenly Father knoweth what things I have need of, deliver us from being cumbered with many things! Rarely do we find Christians going as children to their Father, telling Him the little things that try and vex them, sure of a Father's heart. Many are strict and busy in public acts of worship, but it is in the closet where we specially have to do with the Father, and to tell Him our own private necessities in secret. Legality obscures the sense of the relationship of God, as the Father. It makes us think of legal adoption, instead of real relationship. Legal adoption must needs be accompanied with the spirit of a servant, such was Israel, and yet turned out; but if the Son makes free, then are we free indeed. It is well to dwell on the confidential nearness to the Father into which grace brings us through Jesus. Through Jesus we have access by the Spirit unto the Father. Legalism effectually bars this access. No wonder, therefore, at the strength of the Apostle's language, when he saw God's own children debasing themselves as the Galatians were, by putting themselves under law.

Ver. 8-11. "Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain." I delight in that turn here, "or rather are known of God." At the best, our knowledge of God is imperfect, but He thoroughly knows us, and He who knows the worst of us is the very God who has "justified us freely by His grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." What strong language! God's own legal ordinances are here said to be "weak and beggarly elements;" beautiful and excellent in their time and place, but they sink into weakness and beggary before Jesus Christ and Him crucified, the one grand ordinance of God. They are not only profitless, they are hindrances; yea, says the Apostle to these bewitched Galatians, you are going back again to your old idolatrous ways, and dealing with the living God as you did with your dumb idols, by observing days, months, and years. And all my labor in preaching to you the gospel of the grace of God appears to be thrown away. How applicable is all this to the Christianity of the present day. How painful to see many, who once seemed to love evangelical truth, bowed down under a system of ordinances, observing days and months, to the obscuring of their own vision of the one Object which God sets before us, even His blessed Son, in the glory of His humiliation and the glory of His exaltation.

Ver. 12-20. "Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are; ye have not injured me at all. Ye know how through the infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me. Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth? They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them. But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you. My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you."

The Apostle here, as at the beginning, argues from his own case. "I am as ye are." I take no vantage ground over you, because I was, "touching the righteousness in the law, blameless;" no, I come down from that to your level, and take the same ground, as a sinner of the Gentiles. So does Peter. "We (Jews) believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved even as they." It is not for Gentiles to come on our ground, but for us Jews to take yours. The Apostle reminds them that he held out no attractions to them, but the attractiveness of the Cross of Christ to the really awakened sinner. (See John 12:32.) They had overlooked his personal infirmity, in receiving the blessed message of which he was the bearer; and as the bearer of such a message they had received him as "an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus." But what was the blessedness they spake of? Did it make them happy to hear Paul propound to them the words of law as the ground of their acceptance with God, or a system of ordinances as the ground of their approach to God? No; he had set forth before them the Cross of Christ, and through that the law abolished, "sin made an end of," and "everlasting righteousness brought in;" and, in consequence, such nearness to God as may be faintly known in the confidence of a child in the love of his father. Other teachers tried to set them against the Apostle and his doctrine; and all their love for the Apostle, and zeal for the truth he had preached, vanished away when the Apostle left them.

Let us not be surprised at seeing a return to ordinances. We may trace it up to that legality which is in all our hearts. The reason that real Christians know so little happiness is that they are legal; and when they are so, they try to make others as miserable as themselves; for legal Christians always try to measure other Christians by themselves; judging alike those who are above and those who are below their standard. The only antidote to legality is to have "Christ formed in us." This is the special office of the Holy Ghost, who glorifies Christ, taking us away from the law unto its real end and object, even righteousness, —and "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth."

'The more spiritual our occupation is, so much the greater is our danger of resting in it, and stopping short of God Himself.'

Crumbs for the Lord's Little Ones: Volume 5 (1857), Epistle to the Galatians., The (3:1-20)

(Notes Taken of Lectures.)

Chap. 3:1-20.

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."

Ver. 1. 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 everyone 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 up 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."

Ver. 2-4. Did you, says the apostle, receive the Spirit, because you had kept the law? No, but 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 now 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.

Ver. 5. 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.

Ver. 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 foreseeing." 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 is 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 ease 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."

Ver. 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 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 attend to the pronouns in this epistle, "we," "ye," "us." 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."

Ver. 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. "Peace be unto you; and He spewed 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.

Ver. 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 Mn 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 from God and rehearse them to them. There was Moses the mediator, as he tells them: "I stood between the Lord and you at 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 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 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 iniquities will I remember no more." God is one; and there is in the new covenant no people undertaking to answer the requirements of God, so that 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 these can be no failure.