

Galatians - Commentaries by George Christopher Willis

Meditations on the Epistle to the Galatians: Beautiful Grace, Galatians 6:11-18: Boasting in the Cross

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“See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand. As many as are wishing to have a good appearance in (the) flesh, these are compelling you to receive circumcision, only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of the Christ. For neither the ones having already received circumcision, do themselves observe law, but they are wishing you to receive circumcision in order that they may boast in your flesh. But for me, far be it to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom to me (the) world is crucified, and I to (the) world. For neither circumcision is anything, nor uncircumcision, but new creation. And as many as shall walk in line [or, in step] by this rule, peace on them and mercy, even on the Israel of God.

“For the rest, let no one cause troubles to me, for I am carrying in my body the brands of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (be) with your spirit, brothers. Amen.” vss. 11-18.

“See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand.” We must remember that Paul was a highly educated man, both in Greek learning at Tarsus (his native place), and in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel, who was one of the wisest and most famous of the Jewish Rabbis. See Acts 22:3; 5:34. But now, perhaps, the “hands” (Acts 20:34) of Paul had become more accustomed to tent-making than to handling a pen; but it seems clear from these words just quoted that the Apostle wrote the whole epistle to the Galatians with his own hand. Probably this is the only epistle Paul wrote himself. He generally used a friend to write for him, while he dictated what he wished to say. (For example, in Rom. 16:22 we read: “I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord.” That means that while Paul dictated, Tertius wrote down the words for him.) With regard to the epistle to the Galatians, we cannot be quite sure that Paul wrote the whole epistle, as it may mean that he only wrote the last part of the epistle, quoted above. Paul usually wrote with his own hand a few words at the end of each epistle, as a guarantee that the epistle was genuine, for evidently there were those who forged the Apostle’s name, and sent out letters that pretended to be from him, but were not genuine. See 2 Thess. 2:2— “Be not soon shaken in mind... nor by word, nor by letter as [if it were] from us.”

These words we are now considering may be his usual personal ending written by his own hand in large letters; but on the other hand it seems more probably that it means that Paul wrote the whole epistle. As far as I know, it is not possible to be quite certain which is the meaning. If it means the whole letter was written by Paul, we can very well understand that in a matter that was so urgent as these Christians giving up the faith of Christ to go to the Jewish law, the Apostle may have felt that he could not have anyone come between himself and these dear wandering sheep; and so his own hand must write every word. There were two styles of writing in use at the time Paul wrote this epistle. One style used large letters each one separate from the other like printed letters; the other style was more like our hand-writing, the letters were small and joined together. Paul evidently used the large bold letters; and that style was very suitable, for the subject is of such fundamental importance, and the large bold letters suited this. May God grant that this whole epistle should be written in our hearts with such great, large, bold letters, that we may never forget or lose sight of them.

“As many as are wishing to have a good appearance in (the) flesh, these are compelling you to receive circumcision, only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.” The words “are compelling” mean they were trying hard at that time, as they had tried with Titus, to force the Galatians to be circumcised; but these words do not mean they had succeeded. They did not succeed with Titus. You remember that in our last chapter, we considered v.8: “The one sowing unto his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption.” Now we read of those who are trying to make a good appearance in the flesh. These were sowing to the flesh, and the harvest would be corruption. The ones who were seeking to compel the Galatians to be circumcised were only doing it to make a good appearance, and to escape persecution. It was the Jews who kept stirring up the persecution as we have seen. But why would the Jews persecute anybody who was making himself like a Jew? Why persecute anybody who was upholding and spreading the Jewish law and the Jewish ceremonies? We in China know how easy it is for us to do something that will help us to escape persecution. None of us likes persecution, and the Galatian Christians were no different from us in this matter. In their hearts perhaps they said, Circumcision is a small affair, and if it helps me to escape persecution, I will receive circumcision. But they forgot that the one who received circumcision put himself on the ground of being a Jew, and he was now responsible to keep the whole law, and if he did not do so, then he must perish. Christ must be all, or nothing. No man can have Christ and circumcision; no man can be saved by Christ and the law. Every man must choose, and if he chooses Christ, then he must forever turn away from the law and from circumcision. These men teaching the law did not really seek God’s glory, or the blessing of the Galatians, but only their own safety. “For even the ones having (already) received circumcision [or, the circumcision party], they themselves do not observe the law, but they are wishing you to receive circumcision in order that they may boast in your flesh.” The Galatians had only to watch these teachers of the law to see that they themselves did not observe the law; why then should the Galatians follow them? For the law could only curse anyone who did not keep it. But if these law teachers could write back to Jerusalem and tell the Jews there that so many Galatian Gentiles had received circumcision through their labors, it would bring much fleshly glory to them. In this way they were boasting in the flesh of the Galatians, but what a miserable boast it was! It was for a Gentile to turn Jew, to take on a load that no Jew had ever been able to bear, to put himself under a curse that did not belong to him! But more than this, we may see through all these words that these law teachers were not honest, truthful, upright men. They knew they did not keep the law, and they knew the Galatians could not keep it; yet they were doing all in their power to bind this burden, that they knew they could not bear, upon them. They were just like the Pharisees in the time of our Lord— hypocrites. (Matt. 23:4-15.)

It is remarkable that we find the same thing today; those who are law teachers, whether they teach the law of Moses, or whether they are seeking to make the Lord's people subject to rules and regulations and traditions of men; such teachers are nearly always dishonest and untruthful. If you look at 1 Tim. 4:1-6, you will see that there we read of deceiving spirits and teachings of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, cauterized as to their own conscience, forbidding to marry, (bidding) to abstain from meats. These law teachers in Galatia were very much like this; indeed the Spirit of God may have had just such men before Him, as He wrote these words. Those who teach the law today, do not keep the law, any more than the law teachers in Galatia kept it. This professing what they do not carry out makes a man dishonest, makes him a hypocrite; he pretends to be what he is not. He is deceiving himself, as we read in vs. 7, and as he continues to deceive himself, his conscience gradually becomes dead, cauterized, as with a hot iron, so that it no longer has any feeling; and without shame they can stand up and teach what they know is not the truth. This was true in Galatia and it is equally true today. In Eph. 4:18, 19 we read of men's hearts becoming callous, so they no longer feel pain when they commit sin. Notice that "law" is without the article. It does not refer only to the law of Moses, but also to the principle of law in general. They were careless even with regard to matters they should have observed.

"But for me, far be it to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom [or, through which] to me (the) world is crucified, and I to (the) world." These law teachers were boasting in the proselytes they were making among the Galatian Christians. They were boasting over each one who received circumcision. They were boasting in the flesh. Paul had only one boast— the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ! (See 1 Cor. 1:17-24.) To most people today His cross is still a shame and a scandal. (ch. 5:11.) Even most Christians today are ashamed to mention His cross as they go about their daily labors. To Paul, it was all his glory, it was all his boast. Paul could exclaim: "The Son of God loved me, and gave Himself for me!" (ch. 2:20). Paul could cry: Yes, gave Himself for me, to die on a Roman gibbet, like the lowest and worst criminal; and all because He took my place. That was the cross! It is not the cross as we see it so often printed and painted, or made up in gold or silver or wood ornaments. That was not the cross in which Paul boasted, but the cruel, rough, wicked murder of God's only begotten Son, who went to that cross willingly, for Paul's sake, and for my sake. Is that not enough to make me boast in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ? Could I ever be ashamed of His cross when I remember that He went to that cross for me? May God help us to follow Paul in this blessed verse.

I. Watts

To seek a good appearance, or even a religious appearance before the world, is to seek the honor of the world which has dishonored Christ— not only dishonored Him, but rejected Him and nailed Him on a cross. That cross is to me salvation. It is the wonderful proof of the love of God, and of the love of His only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. But that cross was, to Him, shame, dishonor, suffering that no tongue can ever tell. "Thou hast known My reproach, and My shame, and My dishonor.... Reproach hath broken My heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave Me also gall for My meat; and in My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink." Psa. 69:19-21. "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Mark 15:34). (See also Matt. 27:46.) Who can ever tell, to all eternity, the unfathomable depths of sorrow in these words? That is the cross. He bore it for me, for you, for Paul! O reader, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow, which is done unto Me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted Me in the day of His fierce anger" (Lam. 1:12). If we have in any small measure entered into that sorrow, surely we must cry with Paul, "By whom the world to me is crucified, and I to (the) world." Or it may be just as truly read: "By it [the cross] the world to me is crucified."

Paul did not want the honor of a world which at that cross dishonored Paul's Lord. He would boast in that cross, but that was his only boast. He would not boast in his sufferings or his labors or his revelations— only in the cross. Paul, at the cross, identified himself with Christ. He was crucified to the world which had crucified His Master, and likewise the world was crucified to him. They had nothing in common. There was no friendship between them. The world spurned Paul, as Paul spurned the world. They were crucified to each other. The world has shown by the cross what it really is. We must choose whether to go on with the world that crucified Christ, or whether we shall boast in the cross on which that world nailed Him. "The friendship of the world is enmity with God. Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4). "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).

"For neither circumcision is anything, nor uncircumcision, but new creation." In the cross these old outward forms and ceremonies all passed away. They were nothing. In themselves they were absolutely useless. As a sign of trusting to the law, they could only bring the law's curse. But actually they were nothing. In ch. 5:6 we had already read almost the same words: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision has any power, nor uncircumcision; but faith working through love." Circumcision has no power, and is nothing. But what does matter is new creation. This word "new" means something fresh, that we have not had before. Old things have passed away at the cross; for the believer, all is new.

We have now:

A new covenant (Matt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 11:25).

A new commandment (John 13:34).

A new doctrine (Acts 17:19).

A new creation (Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17).

A new Man (after the pattern of Christ; Eph. 4:24).

We shall have hereafter:

A new name, the believer's (Rev. 2:17).

A new name, the Lord's (Rev. 3:12).

The new Jerusalem (Rev. 3:12; 21:2).

A new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1).

All things new (Rev. 21:5; 2 Cor. 5:17).

We enter this new creation by the new birth. We must be born again if we would enter here. (John 3.) That is what matters. The new birth brings with it eternal life, salvation, forgiveness of sins, entrance into the Father's family; by it we become children, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. (Rom. 8:17.) Yes, new creation matters. It is truly something, but circumcision and uncircumcision are nothing. Do they want a rule? Must they have a rule to walk by? Very good. This rule, the rule of the new creation, the rule of the new birth, is the rule for us to walk by now. This word means to walk in line. It is the same word as we had in ch. 5:25. We might say, "As many as keep step by this rule"; to them the Apostle says, "Peace on them and mercy, even on the Israel of God." The law can only bring trouble and a curse. In contrast to the trouble these law teachers had brought, the Apostle sends a message of peace to those who walk by the rule of the new creation. "Peace on them and mercy" (vs. 16). Mercy is generally not included in the greetings to an assembly, but only to individuals. (See 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4.) But in Galatia there were the true ones in the assemblies, and in this time of trouble they needed mercy. This is probably the only case where mercy is wished to assemblies.

The law teachers were boasting in the Galatians who had received circumcision, and so outwardly had become Jews. But this did not make them God's people. In ch. 3:7, 9, 29, we find much the same thought. "The ones on the principle of faith, these are the sons of Abraham." So now in contrast to the false teachers making false Jews, the Apostle cries in triumph, these are "the Israel of God" (vs. 16). These who walk by the rule of the new creation are the true Israelites, not those wearing the badge of circumcision. The people of Israel had three names: Hebrews, Jews and Israelites. Jews were especially those of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, though many others had joined them under this name. "Israel" means "prince of God," and was the name given to Jacob by God Himself when he wrestled with the angel and prevailed. "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob [which means cheater], but Israel [a prince of God]: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." Gen. 32:28. This name includes all the descendants of Jacob, all the twelve tribes, not the two tribes only as the name "Jew" means. It is most interesting to notice that this name Israel, is the name chosen by God's earthly people today, as they once again begin to take possession of their own land. But the true Israelites are those "born again" into God's household.

The Apostle has almost finished: "For the rest [which probably means, For the rest of time, from this time forward, or, from henceforth] let no one cause troubles to me, for I am bearing in my body the brands of Jesus." How much trouble, how much anguish of soul, those Galatians had caused to Paul. Now he must say to those who at one time would have plucked out their eyes for him: "Let no man cause trouble to me." It is the same expression that the Lord used in Matt. 26:10 to the disciples about the woman who broke the flask of very precious ointment, while He sat at meat in the house of Simon the leper. These law teachers everywhere were always causing trouble to the Apostle. What brands did they bear as proof of the Master to whom they belonged? None whatever. Circumcision was not "the brand of Jesus" (vs. 17). Circumcision is the brand of the law. But by it, and by preaching circumcision, they escaped the persecution which had covered Paul's body with scars: scars from being stoned, scars from Roman rods, scars from Jewish stripes, weariness and painfulness, watchings and fastings, hunger and thirst, had all left their marks on his body; not to speak of the daily load of care caused by "all the churches" (ch. 1:2). What a load the Galatian churches were! And these all left their mark. (See 2 Cor. 11:25-28.) These were the brands that marked out forever whose he was and whom he served. (Acts 27:23.) Strange, is it not, how few there are today who bear in their body the brands of Jesus? Perhaps it is that we are too much like the law teachers, afraid of persecution for the cross. Paul was not ashamed of these brands. Some of the Jewish refugees from Germany have been branded on their foreheads with "J" (for Jew) and many are ashamed of this brand. Paul gloried in the brands of Jesus that he bore. In the days of old, a Roman master would brand his slaves to show whose they were and whom they served, and a brand was a sign of slavery and disgrace, but not so to Paul. Read the first verse of the epistle to the Romans, the first of Paul's epistles in your Bible: "Paul, slave of Jesus Christ." I love those words. They tell me that the Lord Jesus Christ had bought Paul, body, soul and spirit; he belonged utterly and altogether to Jesus Christ, as much as— indeed more than— any slave in Rome belonged to his Roman master. Paul gloried in those words, "slave of Jesus Christ," and he gloried in the marks he bore, the brands of Jesus.

Very rarely the Apostle uses the holy name of Jesus alone. Perhaps he uses it in this way here to remind us that our Lord Jesus Christ, as the Man, JESUS, also bore brands— the marks of scourging— "His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men" (Isa. 52:14). And in His hands and feet and side, He still bears those marks that we will gaze upon in glory, with wonder, love and adoration.

It would be well if the Christians in China, and in other lands too, would learn a lesson from the Apostle Paul in their use of this holy name. How often one's heart is made sad by the light and careless way in which even Christians use this precious name, without the title that Paul so loves to use, LORD JESUS.

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen."

In ch. 1:3 Paul had wished them grace and peace; now in closing he again wishes them grace. How much we all need grace; without it we must perish. Grace, not law, is what the Galatians needed, and it is what we need. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" (vs. 18). It reminds us of those same words in 2 Cor. 8:9— "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." That is the grace that is to be with our spirits; and if indeed it were so, it would produce in us the mind which was in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 2:5.) With that grace ever with our spirits, and that mind being in us, there would be no fear of the law teachers ever gaining our ear or our hearts. May the Lord keep us— keep our spirits— ever in a deep, deep sense of His own grace.

And the last word of the epistle is "brothers"; it is a most unusual place to put such a word. Was it by accident that this word is the last word of Galatians? No, I am sure it is no accident. It is one of those wonderful touches which makes our inmost hearts know that this Book is inspired by God. The last word tells of love, the love of God's family; it tells of their oneness, it tells of the Father's loving care, of His yearning heart, for these sheep that were being led astray. Brothers! Let this sweet word sink down into our hearts. The law does not make us brothers. No, it is just the new birth of which the Holy Spirit has just reminded us that makes us brothers. The Apostle had been in doubt of them, but that last word brothers takes away the doubt; it carries with it the love which his heart must have so longed to send to them, for you note there is not one message of love or greeting, except the general message of grace with which he begins and closes the epistle.

It has been a sad, stern letter that the Apostle has had to write. The first epistle to the Corinthians cost Paul much affliction and anguish of heart and many tears (2 Cor. 2:4); but this epistle to the Gal. 1 am sure cost him even more. What it cost him, none can say, but what a treasure for us today. It was surely the devil's work to send those law teachers to Galatia, but there was a higher hand, and a heart of love that guided all; and through this attack of the enemy He forged for us a sword of the finest steel that has met the enemy's attacks for nineteen hundred years, and is as fresh and strong as ever it was. May God Himself teach our hands to war and our fingers to fight with it (Psa. 144:1) to His own glory. Amen.

About the Author My father, G. Christopher Willis, was born in Toronto, Canada in 1889. At an early age he accepted the Lord Jesus as His Savior and his whole life was devoted to his Master. As a child he used to read "China's Millions", a magazine published by what was the China Inland Mission. He was greatly influenced by this and from that time he wanted to go to China, to share the good news. He studied engineering at McGill University and was married a few years later. When he proposed to my mother it was not "Will you marry me?" but "Will you go to China with me?"

My parents went to China in 1921 with their three little children. They were "independent" missionaries and things were very hard at first. They moved from South China to Kuling, a beautiful spot in the mountains in Northern China, as the children could not tolerate the weather in the South.

Here my father obtained a job supervising the building of a post-office. Many missionaries used to go to Kuling for their holidays, and here, for the first time, my father met "liberal" Christians. He was so shocked at some of their beliefs, that he wrote to England and bought books to refute their teaching. He used to sell these on the side of the road, in front of the post-office building, during his lunch hour. It was here the idea of a good and sound Christian book shop germinated. In 1924 we moved to Shanghai, where my father opened the Christian Book Room which is still operating.

My parents were both interned by the Japanese during the Second World War and were home in Canada for only a short time before they went back. His whole life was spent serving the Lord and he loved and was dearly loved by the Chinese people.

In all his business he found time to write several books and was often working on illuminated Scripture texts. He operated the Christian Book Room and did a great deal evangelizing. He finally returned to Canada in 1967.

Even in his old age he still wrote and worked on his illuminated texts and spent much time visiting. I remember so well, when he was unable to care for himself, and I looked after him, the thick calouses on his knees from all the time he spent in prayer. It can be truly said of him that even though he is now with the Lord his works still speak.

F.M.W. (1989)

Meditations on the Epistle to the Galatians: Beautiful Grace, Galatians 6:6-10: Sowing and Reaping

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"But let the one being taught the Word, be having fellowship [or, sharing] with the one teaching, in all good things. Do not be misled [or, deceived], God is not scoffed at. For whatever a man may sow, that (very thing) also he shall reap. For the one sowing in the interests of his own flesh, shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one sowing in the interests of the Spirit, shall from the Spirit reap eternal life. But let us not lose heart in doing the right, for in its own time, not relaxing, we shall reap. So then, while we may have time [or, as we may have opportunity], let us labor (doing) the good towards all, but especially towards members of the household of the faith." vss. 6-10.

V.5, which we considered in our last chapter, said: "Each one shall carry his own load." It may be there is a very close connection between this verse and v.6, which we have quoted above. In 1 Cor. 16:1, 2 we read: "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come" (1 Cor. 16:1-2). So we may see that the Apostle had already taught the Galatian Christians the blessed truth of Christian giving, as he later taught the Corinthian Christians. But we find there is no commendation for the generosity of the Galatians as there was for the Corinthian assembly (2 Cor. 9:2), and for the assemblies in Macedonia. "Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; how that in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints." 2 Cor. 8:1-4. In Rom. 15:26, 27 Paul tells us more of this collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem, and of how the Christians in Achaia, which would include Corinth, had joined with the Christians in Macedonia in sending these funds. But we never read of the Galatian Christians ever giving anything. The Galatians loved the law, and the law tells a man not to put his hand in his neighbor's pocket to steal. But grace tells the Christian to use these hands to labor so that he not only may not steal, but, on the contrary, he may put his hand in his own pocket and give to those in need. Legal Christians are not generous Christians. It is grace, not law, that makes a man generous. A legal Christian can always find some good reason for not giving to his brother.

The Apostle, inspired by the Holy Spirit, knows these things well, and he knows that persons like the Galatians would be only too glad to use his exhortation, "each one shall carry his own load," to provide an excuse not to share their good things with those who perhaps not only had need of them, but also to whom they should give even in the bonds of duty. Over and over again the Apostle has taught those led to Christ through his labors, that they are responsible to support those who labor for the Lord among them. See, for example, 1 Cor. 9:14— "So hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." Or 1 Tim. 5:17, 18: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The laborer is worthy of his reward." The Apostle Paul himself sought to make it his boast that he did not accept

this “reward,” but rather that he might “make the gospel of Christ without charge” (1 Cor. 9:18). “I seek not yours, but you” (2 Cor. 12:14) he could say on another occasion.

But among the assemblies of the Galatians there was the very serious danger that the selfishness of legality would hinder them from providing for the needs of those who labored among them, teaching them the Word of God. So the Apostle writes: “Let the one being taught the Word, be having fellowship with the one teaching in all good things.” The word used for “teaching” and “begin taught” has the meaning of teaching by word of mouth, and so would suggest those men among themselves who were doing this work. Notice, they taught “the Word,” and not their ideas. It is most important for those who teach to teach the Word. Our thoughts have neither value nor power, but the Word has both; if we stick to the Word, there will surely be a harvest. In another verse or two we will read, “Whatever a man may sow, that very thing also he shall reap.” So let those who teach, teach the Word, and they may then be sure of a good harvest.

“Be having fellowship” really means “be sharing.” Some man has a good business or a good position, and is comfortably off, so that his wife and family have all their needs abundantly supplied. Share, says the Apostle, these good things with those who have given up their business or their position, in order to use their time and ability to teach the Word. This is God’s order and arrangement, and if the Lord’s people would only heed this exhortation, how good it would be both for themselves and for the Lord’s laborers. It is a very sad thing to see many Christians today living in good houses, with money for everything they need, and perhaps the Lord’s work is suffering for want of a share of this money that the Christians are using for themselves. Strange as it may seem, it is generally the poor, like those in Macedonia, who are the most generous givers.

Let us each remember that these things are not our own, and that the reckoning day is not far off, when we must give an account of how we have used these “good things” that the Lord has given to us.

It is possible that this word “be having fellowship” goes much further than merely sharing in the good things of this life, but that it goes on to every part of our lives, including spiritual things. Some persons use the word “to have fellowship with,” (1 Cor. 10:20) or to be “in fellowship,” as meaning those who break bread at the Lord’s Table. This may, however, be a wrong way to use this expression, for alas, there are those breaking bread who are not “in fellowship,” and there are those “in fellowship” who are not breaking bread. It is sweet indeed to the hearts of both teacher and taught, when they can truly enjoy together that precious heart fellowship, as well as sharing in temporal things.

If you would lay down this book and take your Bible and read 2 Cor. 9, you would find that the Apostle takes a whole chapter there for the subject of Christian giving. He tells how he could boast of the “forwardness” of the Corinthian Christians, and he compares this giving to sowing and reaping. In speaking of giving, he says: “He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” (2 Cor. 9:6). Now as he speaks of the same subject of giving to the Galatians (though notice he does not once use this word, or tell them plainly they are selfish and miserly), he goes on: “Do not be misled!” This is the literal meaning of what the Apostle says, but it has come to mean: “Do not be deceived! God is not scoffed at.” The word means to turn up our noses at God. The Apostle writes to the Galatians to share with their teachers, but as they listen to this command, Paul knows there are those who will turn up their noses and say, “Why should we listen to this man Paul? We have our new teachers from Jerusalem. Let us hear them.” It is not Paul you are turning up your noses at. Far from it. Paul is only God’s messenger, bringing you God’s message. It is at God you are turning up your noses, when you refuse to heed His Word: and do not be misled, do not be deceived; if you turn up your nose at God and His Word, the harvest for you will be very, very bitter.

“Do not be misled, God is not scoffed at. For whatever a man may sow, that very thing also he shall reap.” What solemn words are these. If a man sows rice, he reaps rice. If a man sows turnips, he reaps turnips. Day by day we are sowing— sowing what? We are sowing thoughts, words, deeds! What shall we reap? What will the harvest be?

There are three things the Apostle brings to our notice about sowing: What we sow: “Whatever a man soweth, that very thing he shall also reap.”

Where we sow: “The one sowing unto [or, in the interests of] the flesh... the one sowing unto [or, in the interests of] the Spirit.”

How we sow: “He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” (2 Cor. 9:6).

We have been reading of the fruit of the Spirit. Fruit comes to us “in its own time” (1 Tim. 2:6) as the result of sowing. If we sow unto the Spirit, then the fruit that we reap will be the fruit of the Spirit. But if we sow to the flesh, the harvest that we will receive will be according to the “works of the flesh” (ch. 2:16). Notice also that the Word says: “The one sowing in the interests of his own flesh.” That extra word, “his own,” that the Spirit of God has added here, tells us more of the selfishness which we thought we could see in the previous verses. It is “my own flesh” that I have before me. It is “myself” I am thinking about, and thinking about myself always makes me selfish. That is the natural result of the law, because the law makes me think about myself.

There was an infidel who once said: “Most things in the Bible I do not believe, but one verse I am compelled to believe; it is, ‘Whatever a man soweth, that very thing he shall reap.’ I know this is true.”

Perhaps here the Spirit of God has the subject of giving chiefly before us; yet the sowing goes very much further than that. If I spend my time and my money on myself, the harvest will be the fruit of selfishness. Those who sow to the flesh by drinking or smoking or drugs will also reap a harvest, and a very bitter harvest it may be. These two harvests are set before us: corruption or eternal life. Reader, choose today: What, where, and how will you sow?

Perhaps we should add a word about these two harvests. “Corruption” is spoken of in the Scriptures as death and decay (Rom. 8:21; 1 Cor. 15:42, 50), to which every child of Adam is subject. It is also used of the moral decay and wickedness in this world: “Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:4). (See also 2 Peter 2:19, “servants of corruption.”) In Col. 2:22, the same word is translated “perish,” and in 2 Peter 2:12 it is used twice, once translated “destroyed,” and once “corruption.” We see that the harvest of sowing to the flesh is one of death and corruption for both body and soul.

We find that Scripture looks at eternal life in two ways: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting [or, eternal] life" (John 3:36). We have this eternal life now, and we may enjoy it now and we may know now that we have it. But the Scriptures also look at eternal life as that which we receive at the end of our journey when we reach home. Then we reap the harvest of sowing down here, and for the one who has sown to the Spirit, that harvest will be eternal life. We find it used in this way in Rom. 6:22— "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." Here is the "sowing to the Spirit" once again, and the fruit is holiness, and the final fruit, when we reach home, eternal life. But the next verse shows us eternal life in the other aspect: "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). We accept God's gift now, and now we have eternal life. It is most important for us to remember that Scripture looks at eternal life in these two ways, or there will be many verses we cannot understand.

One thing more we must notice before we leave "the harvest": we may always expect to reap more than we sow. We read in the gospels of those who reaped some "a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold" (Matt. 13:8). This is true whether the seed be good or bad, and whether the ground be good or bad. Jacob deceived his old father and stole his brother's birthright. That was bad sowing, but he did not expect the harvest he received. Laban deceived him about his wife, and he had to work another seven years in order to win her. Nor was this all the harvest. Laban changed his wages ten times in his efforts to cheat him. That was only part of the harvest. He had twenty years of bitter labor in Syria. Then his own sons deceived him about Joseph, and he spent twenty-two years in bitter sorrow, mourning him as dead. This was part of the harvest of his own sowing. David committed adultery with Bathsheba, but he never expected the harvest would come as it did; his own son defiled his sister. David murdered Bathsheba's husband, but he never expected the harvest this brought; his son Amnon was murdered by his brother, his baby died, and his son Absalom was killed in battle, without the hope of ever seeing him again in the world to come. And finally Solomon the king puts his older brother to death for what was really conspiracy. Yes, reader, we reap more than we sow, and we reap that very thing we sow. These are most solemn thoughts, and should make every one of us "consider" our "ways." Hag. 1:5, 7. Even by a thought we may sow to the flesh. How many books, pictures and magazines in these days sow to the flesh, and will bring forth a harvest unto corruption. "Consider your ways!" (Hag. 1:7).

I remember a child whose father gave her a little garden, and she sowed beans in it. She waited for a day or two to see the beans grow up, but she soon "lost heart," and one morning I found her digging up the beans to see if they were growing. So the Apostle, well knowing our hearts, adds: "Let us not lose heart in doing the right." It is a different word from the "good things" we read of in v.6. It is often translated "beautiful." These are truly good things beautiful things, noble things, honorable things; these are the things every one of us may do every day. We call them little things very often; perhaps giving a drink of cold water to someone who is thirsty. But that deed will get its reward; it will have a harvest. Most of our lives are filled up with little things— often we think useless little things that are of little profit, but that have to be done— meals have to be cooked, dishes have to be washed, children have to be cared for, our business or our daily job has to be done, and often we long for something "bigger and better," as we suppose, to do for our Lord. Brother, sister, these little, daily duties may be the good, the noble, the honorable thing, "the right thing" (Rom. 10:5) for you to be doing. The Lord says to you two things: Do not lose heart; do not relax. We first lose heart, it all seems to be so useless. Perhaps you teach a Sunday school class, but the children are not converted. Do not lose heart, do not relax; in its own time you shall reap. It is God's own promise, and it must be true.

The word "relax" is what happens to a bow string if it becomes loose; and then the bow is useless. The bow is only useful while the string is tight. So if I relax in my work for the Lord, I become useless also; and remember in "its own time" (and that may be a long time, for seeds do not all grow quickly), we shall reap if we do not relax.

"So then, while we have time [or it may be translated, as we have opportunity, but the word 'time' is the same as in the sentence before], let us labor (doing) good towards all." The word for "labor" makes us think of the hard work that is needed. And if we are to do good towards all, it does require hard work. You remember we saw in ch. 5:13 that we were to be slaves to one another in love. Here we see the hard work we are to do for one another. The word "towards all" may indicate our daily contact with others, when we have opportunity to speak a word, or give a tract or booklet. I know a very earnest Christian man who has meetings in his shop. He was first led towards Christ through a boy, only a child, who used to go to his shop to buy things, and often gave him a tract or spoke a word to him. He laughed at the boy, but he told me years afterward that this was what really made him come to Christ. And it is only as we have time! "But this I say, brethren, the time is short!" (1 Cor. 7:29). Soon our opportunities will be gone. Soon it will be too late. We will not have the opportunities in heaven to do good towards all as we have now down here. And notice the word is to "all men," saved and unsaved, as wide as God's love to the world. (Compare John 3:16.) May God help us each to give heed to this urgent call: "So then, while we have time, let us labor doing good towards all."

But there is one more little word added to that exhortation: "Especially towards the household of the faith." How often we have had the word brothers in this little epistle. Now we have the whole household: brothers and sisters, father and mother, and little children. We find them all in 1 John 2. Here we find them again, with the command to labor, especially doing good towards these: the household of the faith. "The faith" is a term which tells us of the faith in Christ Jesus, and the household of faith includes every believer. May we remember that we all belong to the same household. Man may build walls, with sects and societies that shut out other believers, but in God's eyes we all belong to the same household: the household of faith. In Eph. 2:19 it is called "the household of God," (Eph. 2:19) and in Eph. 3:15 we read of "the family of God" (Job 32:2). Let not our thoughts become narrow, to think of only one small part of that household, one group, one company in that household. May God help us always to have hearts that take in every blood-bought child of God, and may He give us grace to labor for them all, doing good (the same word as in v.6) towards them all, and towards all men.

Meditations on the Epistle to the Galatians: Beautiful Grace, Galatians 6:2-5: Burdens

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

"Be ever bearing one another's burdens, and thus fill up to the full the law of Christ. For if anyone is reputed to be something, being nothing, he is by fancies deceiving himself. But let each one test his own work, and then he will have his boast only with regard to himself, and not with regard to the other. For each shall carry his own load." vss. 2-5.

We saw in our last chapter that the Apostle changes from the plural to the singular while he says: "Paying attention to thyself, lest thou also be tempted." Now in the next words (which we have quoted above), he returns to the plural. It is such a very personal thing, to pay attention to myself, to look to myself, that the plural there would not be suitable; and I do well to turn my eyes away from my fallen brother to look to the beam that may be in my own eye, before I begin to cast the mote out of his eye. (See Matt. 7:3-5.)

Now we go back to the plural again: "Make it your habit to be bearing the burdens of one another." The Galatian Christians were very anxious to take up the burden of the law. This burden, you remember, Peter said was one which "neither our fathers nor we were able to bear" (Acts 15:10); yet the Galatians were keen to bear this burden. No, says the Apostle, I will show you a better burden for you to bear than that. Bear one another's burdens. And do not do it only now and then, but make it your habit, day by day, to be ever bearing the burdens of your brothers and your sisters. You remember in the last chapter, after the Apostle told them once again of their liberty, he immediately adds: "But by love let it be your habit to be slaves to one another." ch. 5:13. Now he tells them to make a habit of bearing each other's burdens. How many heavy burdens there are all around us, sin and sorrow, poverty and care, sighing and suffering. Here are burdens waiting for you to take up, burdens that are so heavy they will drive you with them to the great Burden Bearer, the One who says, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord" (Psa. 55:22). But the burden of law, with which most Christians today are burdening themselves, is not for us; we are free from the law— free, so we may take up the burdens of one another. "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things" (Acts 15:28). Then why do we everywhere see the people of the Lord making burdens for themselves with rules and regulations that are not at all a part of "these necessary things" (Acts 15:28)? And even worse than this, we find them following the example of the Pharisees: "For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders" (Matt. 23:4). How different is this to the way of Christ, that we find in this verse in Galatians! Instead of binding on one another the heavy burdens, now it is our joy to lift them off and carry them ourselves.

You want a law, says the Apostle, here is just the law for you! The law of the Christ! How different is the law of the Christ from the law the Galatians were wishing to bear. Turn your eyes upon Christ. Has He not borne your heavy burden of sin for you? Can you not sing from the very depths of your heart:

Are you not one of the "many" whose sins He bore? (Isa. 53:12.) It is true that that is a load He bore all alone. None can share that burden with Him; none can take the sin of another. But how many other burdens has He borne for you and for me! "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows" (Isa. 53:4). That is the burden, dear fellow Christian, for you and for me to bear— the griefs and the sorrows of one another around us. So will we be walking in the steps of our Master; so will we be filling up to the full the law of the Christ. Yes, that is the law for us to fulfill— not the "law of commandments" (Eph. 2:15) or one of our own making. May the Lord Himself give us grace so to do!

But I believe we must not forget the connection between v.1 and v.2. In v.1 The Apostle speaks of the fall of a brother who sins, and commands the spiritual ones to set him to rights. In days of old, in the service of the law, in the tabernacle and the temple, it was the duty of the priests to deal with the sins of the nation. When a man sinned, he must take his offering to the priest "and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his sin" (Lev. 5:6). It was the death of the offering (pointing forward to the death of Christ, the Lamb of God) that made the atonement, but the priest acts for the fallen one in standing between God and the sinner. The Lord said to Aaron, "Thou and thy sons... with thee... shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood" (Num. 18:1). The priest that offered the sin offering "for sin shall eat it: in the holy place shall it be eaten" (Lev. 6:26). When we eat a thing we make it our own; it becomes part of us, and so the priest must deal with the sin offering of the one who had sinned. I believe that the second verse of Gal. 6 is perhaps connected with the first verse in just this way. God has made us to be priests unto Himself. (1 Peter 2:5; Rev. 1:6.) And when we are seeking to restore, to set to rights, a fallen brother, we are doing the work of a priest, and we must "eat the sin offering" (Ezek. 45:17) in the holy place. This is not a thing that we may do lightly. It is no light matter "to eat the sin offering" (Ezek. 45:17); for that sin offering has taken upon it the sin of the fallen brother, and now I make it my own. It is the offering that makes atonement; the priest has no share in that work, but he does have a share in bringing the erring one to God, and in doing so, he must eat the sin offering. That is, perhaps, the most difficult burden of all for us to bear for one another. That requires grace and humility that most of us do not possess; and though we have our great High Priest from whom we may freely draw, most of us seem to know very little of eating the sin offering for my fallen brother.

I think in v.1 The Apostle had used the words, "You, the spiritual ones," in sarcasm. Those who put themselves under law are always occupied with themselves and thinking of themselves, and so are either conceited, thinking themselves to be very spiritual, or else cast down as they see the truth that they are really complete failures. But the work of bearing the burdens of one another is not a work that a conceited man may take up; so the Apostle continues: "If anyone is reputed to be something, being nothing, he is by fancies deceiving himself." These law teachers were reputed to be very good and holy men. They were men probably from Jerusalem, probably with a famous reputation and a great name; so the Galatians had received them according to this reputation. These were the men who were walking in the steps of the Pharisees, binding on the Galatian Christians heavy burdens, but they knew nothing of bearing the burdens of one another. They knew nothing of the mind of Christ, who made Himself of no reputation. So the Apostle continues: "If anyone is reputed to be something, being nothing, he is by fancies deceiving himself." This word, "he is by fancies deceiving," is all one word in Greek and means, literally, "he is deceiving his own mind." This is the only place in the New Testament we find this word, though the adjective like it is in Titus 1:10, where again it refers especially to this same sort of people who love to teach the law.

There are many today with a reputation; let such beware lest they are by fancies deceiving themselves. Wood and hay and stubble seem to be much more than gold and silver and precious stones. (See 1 Cor. 3:12.) The word we have translated "reputed to be something" might be better translated "seem to be something," only we have had it before in ch. 2:2, 6, 9. We may be making a great show to those around us, but will it stand the fire that must test it? And so the Apostle exhorts us: "But let each one test his own work." How this reminds us of the passage in 1 Cor. 3, to which we have just referred: "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try [or, test] every man's work of what sort it is" (1 Cor. 3:13). I remember many years ago a friend of mine had a box of silver dollars that got burned in a fire. When the fire was out, my friend found the silver dollars had all stood the test. Among them was one made of lead but with a silver face, and the fire declared it. The fire revealed it was only lead, though before nobody knew it was false. So in the coming day, the work of every one of us will be made manifest. Everything we do now will be tested then. This testing time is called in Scripture, "the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:10). And "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ."

We must clearly understand that this is very different from “the great white throne” of judgment in Rev. 20:11 where the unsaved must all appear. There only those appear who have refused Christ and trusted in their own works. They are judged according to their works, and their terrible end is that they are cast into the lake of fire. But at the judgment seat of Christ, only those who belong to Christ appear. It is like prize day at a school, when the work of the year will all be reviewed; for the examinations have tested the students, and their work has been made manifest of what sort it is. “If any man’s work abide... he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” 1 Cor. 3:14, 15. We read of some who will give an account with groaning. (See Heb. 13:17.) This will be a most solemn time for every one of us. I fear we will have some terribly bitter regrets and groans as we give our account, and as we see what we had thought was a great pile of work for the Lord all consumed by the fire. We can deceive one another now and we can deceive our own minds now, but we cannot deceive Christ, and that testing fire will try all. What about the rules and regulations that we have made? What about the heavy burdens of law that we have taken upon ourselves, and bound upon others, so that there was no time or strength for the work the Lord would have given us to do for Him? All will be burned; the law cannot stand the fire. The work of these law teachers must all perish then, and be manifested at its true worth. Little wonder the Holy Spirit by the Apostle exhorts the Galatians, yes, exhorts us, “Let each one test his own work.” It is the very same word “test” as we find in 1 Cor. 3:13. Oh brother, sister, oh my reader, may God give to me and to you the grace we need to do that testing now as His Word exhorts us; then I may have my boast with regard to myself, not with regard to another.

And what work will stand the fire? Only that which is according to the Word of God: “If a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully” (2 Tim. 2:5). He must strive according to the rules of the contest and not according to his own ideas; the rules for us are the Word of God. How much there is all around us, and perhaps much in our own lives, that is not according to that Word. Let us test our work. Let us test it now. The Lord’s exhortation to us comes most solemnly: “Let each one test his own work, and then he will have his boast only with regard to himself, and not with regard to the other.”

The Apostle closes this little section with the brief words, joined closely to those we have just been considering: “For each one shall bear his own load.” In the second verse we were exhorted to bear one another’s burdens. But I am not to expect that my brother should bear my burden for me, whatever I may do for him: “For each one shall bear his own load.” The word for “bear” is just the same as in the second verse, but the word for load is quite different. The word in v.2 means a heavy burden; it is used of troubles, of faults, and of responsibilities in ordinary Greek, and if it refers to the sin of the brother who had a fall in v.1, then we know that every sin and every fall must be a very heavy burden, when we come to realize what we have done. The load in v.5 is the same word as the “light burden” that Christ speaks of in Matt. 11:30. It really means “something carried,” whether it be heavy or light, and it is often used for a soldier’s “pack.”

You know in an army each soldier has his own pack, and he himself is responsible to carry that. Perhaps here, the Apostle is thinking of those individual packs which he had so often seen the Roman soldiers carrying; so he says, as it were, the Christian soldier also has his own pack, and we must each one of us carry that. Some soldiers put their own private things into their packs and make them heavy, but Christ’s pack that He gives to each one of us is light. If we fill it up with gold, or even with books, or some other thing that in our eyes is quite innocent and harmless, we will soon find that our “load” has become very heavy. One of the best Christian soldiers that I ever knew used to say: “My life motto is, ‘Travel light!’” Do not put anything in that pack except what the Captain of our salvation has put in it, and then we may be sure our load will be, as He promised, “light.”

That soldier of Jesus Christ, of whom I have just spoken, had learned to travel with a very light pack, and perhaps that was the reason that she (for she was a lady-soldier) was able to bear more of the burdens of her sisters and brothers than any other person I ever knew. If we have filled up our own private load that we have to bear for ourselves with all sorts of things of our own, then we cannot expect to bear one another’s burdens. We spoke of some burdens from which we are set free— our sins and the law— but there is another burden that is never meant for the shoulders of a Christian, and that is the heavy, heavy burden of anxiety. The Lord says: “Be careful [or, anxious] for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Phil. 4:6, 7. He tells us also what to do with anxiety when it comes, as it so often does, trying to take possession of our hearts: “Casting all your anxiety upon Him, for it matters to Him about you.” 1 Peter 5:7. But the word for “casting” here is not the ordinary word to throw or cast or put; it means to hurl it away, as something we do not want to have anything to do with. It is the word used for the thirty pieces of silver, that became so terrible to Judas that he hurled them back to the chief priests into the inner temple. The Lord invites us to hurl our anxiety upon Him, for it matters to Him about us. If we fill up our pack with anxiety, we will never have any strength left to bear the burdens of one another. Christ is the great Burden Bearer: our sins, our griefs, our sorrows, our anxieties, our every burden, we may cast on Him. May we then learn from Him to make a habit, on the one hand, of ever bearing one another’s burdens and, on the other hand, to always bear my own load. In Heb. 10:35 we are told of something we are not to “cast away” (a different word) and that is our “confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.” Another has remarked that too often “we cast away our confidence, and carry all our care.”

Meditations on the Epistle to the Galatians: Beautiful Grace, Galatians 6:1: The Brother Who Falls

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

“Brothers, if haply a man should even be overtaken by some fall [or, misdeed], you, the spiritual ones, you set to rights such an one, in a spirit of meekness, looking to thyself [or, paying attention to thyself], lest even thou shouldest be tempted.” vs. 1.

I suppose the first thing we notice as we read this last chapter of Galatians together is that the first word and the last word (except for “Amen”) are the same: “Brothers!” Brother tells of the same family. Brother tells of the same Father, and of the same home, and of the near and dear relationship one to the other. Brother speaks of love.

We had read in ch. 2:4 of false brethren, and in 1 Cor. 5:11 we read of those who were called brothers, but were behaving so badly that they had lost the right to that blessed name, and were turned away from the family table. In 2 Thess. 3:15, we read of those who did not hear the

Apostle's warning in the epistle; the brothers of such a man were to keep no company with him that he might be ashamed, but they were not to count him an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. And in Rom. 16:17 we are told to avoid those who cause divisions and offenses. It is a very great honor to have the right to this name brother, and the privileges of the family that go with it. We do well to value it very highly and to seek grace from God to walk worthy of it. (See Eph. 4:1.) Nine times in this epistle he calls them brothers. And so, though perhaps they did not deserve it, the Apostle showers upon these naughty saints this sweet name, "Brothers!" It is love that begets love, and perhaps the love that burst from that word "brothers" helped to draw their wandering hearts back to Christ, as much as the scolding that they deserved so much.

The Apostle had said before, "I stand in doubt of you" (ch. 4:20). Now with his heart overflowing with love, as he prepares to end his letter, he exclaims, "Brothers!" How near, and how dear to each other, does this word bring these Galatian Christians, to whom he has had to write so severely. In our last chapter we have seen the works of the flesh, and Paul has most solemnly warned them that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But alas, which of us dare to say that in our walk down here we have not fallen, and too often have we done some of the works of the flesh. It is with shame we have to confess it, but sad to say, it is true. But it is one thing to fall by the way even into these sins, and another thing to make a practice of doing them.

Paul knew that the teaching of the law which these Galatians had been receiving had made them hard and bitter towards one another. He knew how easy it is to fall by the way; so he writes, "Brothers, if haply a man should even be overtaken by some fall." In our last chapter the Apostle had told them to "walk by the Spirit," (ch. 5:25) and "to keep step by the Spirit" (vv. 16, 25), as well as speaking of being "led by the Spirit" (Eph. 3:5). Now he sees some brother fall in this walk. What is to be done to him? How is he to be treated? That is the question with which this chapter begins.

Before we answer this question, let us look a little at that word "fall." "If haply a man should even be overtaken by some fall." There are many words in the New Testament to describe sin. God looks at sin in many different ways.

He sees it like a man who:

Misses the mark when he shoots at a target;

Crosses a line he should not cross;

Disobeys a voice;

Is ignorant, when he should have known;

Gives less than full measure;

Does not obey the law;

Falls, when he should have walked uprightly.

In all these ways, and more, God sees our sins. Each has its own name in the Greek language, and each tells of a different aspect of sin. In ch. 5 we have been reading of our "walk." This chapter follows straight on, and tells us of a man who falls in that walk.

And please notice the way Paul introduces this subject. He does not suggest that it is necessary to fall, for it is not. But he says, "Brothers, if haply a man should even be overtaken by a fall." It is as if he said, I do not suppose it will really happen, but even if it should... What grace, what kindness there is in these words. It reminds us of David's words in Psa. 103:8, "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy." Who knew better than David the Lord's mercy? David had, indeed, been overtaken by a most terrible fall, which caused him to commit adultery and murder. A worse fall could not have overtaken David; yet that is his testimony: "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy" (Psa. 103:8). Those of us who have fallen by the way learn to love these words. Mercy is what we need, and mercy is what we find in the heart of God.

Notice it does not say, "Even if haply a brother should be overtaken by a fall." It is a word that means man or woman, boy or girl, old or young. We all are liable to fall by the way, and besides, it is not the proper thing for a brother to do, to fall down. Notice also, this sin "overtakes" the man. If we are not watchful, the devil will surely trip us up with some sin and make us fall. We must always "watch and pray."

But even if a person should fall down, what then? You, the spiritual ones, are to set him to rights. It seems that the Galatians boasted about their spirituality; just as in these days, the people who put themselves under law, and try to put others under law, are apt to feel that they are more holy than others. "You," says the Apostle, "you who are so spiritual, you restore this one who has fallen by the way, you set him to rights, and put him back on his path again." That is God's test as to whether a man is spiritual or not. Are you one whom God can use to set at rights the fallen? If not, you are not a spiritual man in God's sight. The word "set to rights" is first used in the New Testament in Matt. 4:21 where the Lord found James and John with their father in a ship, mending their nets— "putting them to rights." In Heb. 11:3 we read that the worlds were "set to rights" by the Word of God. It is also used for setting a broken bone, putting it to rights. So, even if a man should fall, you, you the spiritual ones, set him to rights. We find another mark of spiritual ones in 1 Cor. 14:37.

Is it that in these days there are no spiritual ones? For alas, how rare it is to see one who has had a fall, put to rights, put back on the road again, to go right on with the walk! Remember, dear brothers, the responsibility lies with us. It does not say, let the one who had the fall put himself to rights and climb back to the road. No, the responsibility for the fallen brother lies with those who are spiritual. And let us remember that those who fall, and for very shame, turn their faces away from their brethren; let us remember that their hearts will soon grow accustomed to estrangement. At first it may be, even though outwardly we cannot see it, that within there is a sore and wounded heart, broken perhaps, at the thought of how he has dishonored the One he loves.

Where is the one who, at such a time, is by his side, to set him to rights? Generally, there is nobody. We generally leave the fallen brother where he is, giving thanks, perhaps, that we are not guilty of such a shameful fall. That is God's proof that we are not spiritual. And what is a spiritual man? I suppose a spiritual man is one who is walking by the Spirit, one who is led by the Spirit. It may be our mouths would fear to boast that we are such, yet how often in our hearts we congratulate ourselves that I am walking by the Spirit, I am led by the Spirit, I am a spiritual man. Let us test ourselves with God's own test. How many of the fallen brothers and sisters have I set to rights? This is God's test. I know many who are proud of their spirituality, but I do not know one who can go to a fallen brother and put him to rights.

Why is there this sad dearth of truly spiritual men? Perhaps because so few are truly led of the Spirit. And there is a test for this also, that we would do well to use on ourselves: "If you are led of the Spirit, you are not under law." ch. 5:18. The rules and regulations that we make to govern our walk, and the walk and the ways of our brethren, even though they may be unwritten, are nothing more than witnesses that stand with accusing fingers pointed at our own selves to prove that we are not led by the Spirit. The law understands about a broken law, or broken tables of stone, but the law knows absolutely nothing whatever about putting to rights. This is not its business, and this it cannot do. The law knows all about a fall, and is ready to condemn and curse the one who is down; but to come where he is, to lift him up, to restore him, and set him on the road again, of all this the law knows nothing whatever.

I remember a man who was overtaken by a bad fall on the road. He fell among thieves who robbed him, took his clothes away, and left him naked, wounded and half dead. I watched the law come by chance down that way, and waited to see the law go and pick up the poor wounded man and set him on the road again; but the law, although it saw him, only passed by on the other side. Then I watched the Jewish temple service, sacrifices and feasts (of which the Galatians were so fond). They came and even stopped and looked at him. I thought I heard them say, "Poor man, poor man, be more careful next time," and then they passed by on the other side, like the law. Neither of them seemed able to do a thing for the fallen man. Indeed they did not seem to care very much about him. Then came my Master. It was this that made Him my Master, for I was the poor man who fell among the thieves. He came all the way from heaven, right to where I was. He got down in the dust on the road, and bound up my wounds, pouring in oil and wine; He put me on His own beast, put His arm around me to hold me so I would not fall, and took me to an inn. The name of the inn was, "The place that receives all," and the name of the innkeeper was, "The One who receives all." (How different from the inn where my Master was born; there was no room for Him there, so He was born in the stable.) My Master paid for my keep, and left word with the innkeeper, "Take care of him". There was no fear of spending too much on me, for my Master said, "Whatever you spend more, when I come again, I will repay you." So now, I am waiting and looking for my Master to come again. (See Luke 10:30-37.)

Readers, brothers, that is the only way to deal with a fallen brother. You cannot pick him up from the other side of the road. You cannot help him while you stand beside him. You have to come where he is. You have to get down on your knees in the dust beside him, and then there is some hope that you may be able to put him to rights. And I wonder, do we carry the oil and the wine with us, ready for the wounds there are all around us? The oil would speak of the Holy Spirit and His power— His healing, restoring power. The wine would speak of joy, the joy that was lost with the fall— joy, the second fruit of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle goes on to tell the brothers who have undertaken the work of setting to rights the fallen ones that it must be done in a spirit of meekness, or gentleness, or tenderness. There is no other way to treat a wound or a fracture. We must be gentle, or we cannot restore it at all; and what skill is needed. But not half so much skill as is required to restore the fallen one of vs. 1. A hard and legal spirit will never restore such an one, but only drive him further away. Alas, I have watched, with anguish of soul, one of these soul doctors as he undertook to put to rights a fallen brother, and I have seen him drive him far away; instead of picking him up, he knocked him further down. I have heard more than one, who has fallen, cry with tears: "They drove me away!" I knew it was true and I thought of Ezek. 34 and the shepherds there: "Ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd.... Yea, My flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them." Ezek. 34:3-6. How we need some true shepherds today. "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city" (Prov. 18:19).

But there is a very urgent reason for using a spirit of meekness, and the Apostle tells us why: "Looking to [or, paying attention to] thyself, lest even thou shouldest be tempted." Notice the sudden change from plural to singular here. I am apt to forget that I am just as likely to fall as my brother who is down. So I, personally (each individual one of us), need to pay attention to myself. Do you remember Peter? He passed the death sentence on Ananias and Sapphira because they did not walk straightforwardly but lied to the Holy Ghost. (Acts 5:1-11.) Doubtless the Holy Ghost dictated this sentence, but as Peter passed it on to the guilty ones, he never thought that he could do such a thing. I rather fear he did not pass that sentence in the spirit of meekness, but in the spirit of righteousness. But it was not many years later when Paul was compelled to rebuke Peter before all because he, like Ananias, did not walk straightforwardly. There is not one of us who can venture to say to another: "I would not do what you have done." Better far not to go near our fallen brother, than to go in any spirit but the gentle spirit of meekness, paying attention to myself, lest I also should be tested in the same way, and like my brother I also should fall.

There are assemblies of Christians who feel that those who have fallen and have been put away from the Lord's Table are witnesses to the purity and the holiness of the assembly. No, brothers, not so. They might be witnesses to your lack of spirituality, and had there been even one spiritual brother in that assembly these fallen ones might long since have been put to rights, restored, and brought back. Do you remember how that skillful workman, Paul, wrote to the Corinthians: first, to put the fallen man away (1 Cor. 5)? They obeyed, and the fallen, brokenhearted man was likely to be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow; and the very one who had commanded them to put him away now hastens to write that they should restore him. (2 Cor. 2:7.) Oh, that there were such a heart, such a yearning heart of love, for the sheep of Christ today!

But we cannot close this subject without turning to Jude 24,25: "Now unto Him that is able to keep you from stumbling [it is not even a question here of a fall; it is only a stumble that might lead to a fall, and there is One who is able to keep us even from stumbling], and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

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“For you, to freedom you were called, brothers; only (do) not (turn) that freedom into a base of operations for the flesh, but by means of love, (let it be your habit to) be slaves to one another. For the entire law is filled to the full in one word, in the (word) thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. But if you keep on biting and devouring one another, beware lest you should be consumed by one another. But I say, Walk by the Spirit, and you shall not at all give effect to the passionate cravings [or, desires] of (the) flesh. For the flesh is passionately opposed to the Spirit, and the Spirit opposed to the flesh, for these keep resisting one another, in order that you might not do these things which you are wishing (to do). But if you are led by (the) Spirit you are not under law. But the works of the flesh are manifest, which are fornication, uncleanness, indecency [luxury], idol worship, witchcraft [sorcery], enmities, quarreling, jealousy, (outbursts of) anger, self-seeking [rivalries], contentions, divisions, sects [schools of opinion], envyings, drunkenness’s, revelings, and the things like these, as to which things, I am telling you beforehand even as I said before, that the ones practicing such things, shall not inherit God’s kingdom. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control: against such things there is no law. But the ones of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the emotions and the passionate cravings. If we live by (the) Spirit, by (the) Spirit also let us keep in step. Let us not become vain-glorious, challenging [or, provoking] one another, envying one another.” vss. 13-26.

The last verse of Gal. 4 and the first verse of Gal. 5 read as follows: “Wherefore, brothers, we are not handmaid’s children, but (on the contrary, children) of the freewoman. With (this) freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast, therefore, and do not be entangled again by a yoke of slavery.” We considered these verses in ch. 18 of our book; and the verses following, Gal. 5:2-12, form a parenthesis, partly of warning, partly of encouragement. We looked at these verses in our last chapter. Now we return to the verses just quoted at the end of Gal. 4 and the beginning of Gal. 5. “With this freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast, therefore, and do not be entangled again by a yoke of slavery.... For you, to freedom you were called, brothers.” Let these words ring through our hearts like glad bells ringing out the glorious message that we are free. The Jews were slaves to “the principles of the world” (ch. 4:3), which tell of the law. In Rom. 7:1, we read that the law is lord of the man as long as he lives. The Gentiles, or nations, were slaves to idols. (Gal. 4:8.) We all were slaves of sin (Rom. 6:6, 17), but “Christ has set us free” (vs. 1). Free from the law (Rom. 7:4), free from all the idols, free from sin! (Rom. 6:7, 22.) What a wonderful freedom is this! And in Rom. 8:2, we read: “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” Yes, brothers, the Christian is a free man: Christ has set us free; “stand firm, therefore, and do not be entangled again by a yoke of slavery.... For you, to freedom you were called, brothers!”

There are many today, alas, who are trying to bring the Lord’s people back to slavery. How many are teaching the law, some as a way of salvation, others as a rule of life. In either case, it is slavery once again. Every sect of Christendom has its own rules and regulations; and these all bring the Christian into slavery once more.

Even when there are no written laws or rules or regulations, how often do we find unwritten traditions that bind the saint of God with mighty chains, and drag him down once more to slavery.

O my friends, if this little book could but help to burn into your hearts these blessed words, “Christ has set us free,” (vs. 1) it would not be in vain. Stand firm, brothers! You will meet on every hand those who wish to make you slaves once more; and some of their excuses, or “reasons” as they would call them, sound very good; but stand firm, and do not be entangled again by a yoke of slavery. Remember, you who read these words, you Christians in China, in America, in Canada, you have been called to freedom.

But a warning follows this glorious message of freedom. “Only do not turn that freedom into a base of operations for the flesh.” When an enemy wishes to attack a country, he seeks first to gain possession of a small part of that country as “a base of operations,” and from that small bit, soon the enemy has conquered all the country. We need to see to it that the small bit of country is not first yielded to the enemy for a base; then the whole country is safe. So, the flesh will always be seeking to use our freedom for itself and turn this blessing from God to the advantage of the enemy. Here is a Christian man who says: “I am called unto freedom, and so I am free to use the Lord’s day as I wish.” He keeps his shop open on that day, to the dishonor of his Master. Here is a Christian student who says: “I am free, I need not attend the meetings; I can use the time for study; I am called to freedom.” Here is a Christian girl: She says, “I am free, I may wear what I please,” and she puts on clothing that she knows the Scriptures condemn. Each of us has his own weakness which requires purpose of heart and self-judgment to keep from being brought under its power—“the sin which doth so easily beset us” (Heb. 12:1). Each of us knows “the plague of his own heart” (1 Kings 8:38). How we need to watch in these cases that our freedom does not become a base of operations for the flesh, our bitter enemy.

But though we are free, and the Apostle could hardly speak more strongly of our freedom, he urges us to hold it fast; yet in the very next sentence he tells us to make it a habit to be slaves. By means of love, or on account of love, let it be your habit to be slaves to one another. The Galatians had wished to return to slavery. Do so, says the Apostle; make it your habit to be slaves, but slaves to one another—not to the law! Slaves, yet free men! Love, true love, makes slaves of each one of us. We have seen our Lord rise from supper, lay aside His garments, take a towel and gird Himself, and do the work of a slave, for love to His own people. We are to follow His steps; on account of love, we are to serve one another, to serve as slaves. True love delights to do this. Watch a mother serve her husband and her children; she is a slave to them, but free—a slave in the bonds of love. Indeed, as the Apostle points out, the entire law is filled to the full in the one word, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (vs. 14). One who truly loves his neighbor will do his neighbor no wrong, and so he keeps the law towards his neighbor. “He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13:8). But read 1 Cor. 13 and see how far, far beyond the law does love go! The law is filled to the full, and love has only begun her work of being a slave to others. How different is God’s way from man’s way.

It would seem that with the coming of the law teachers, there also came quarreling. The Apostle warns these saints: “If you keep on biting and devouring one another, beware lest you should be consumed by one another.” The law makes men hard; the law knows nothing of love. In that kind of soil the quarrels quickly grow, and the biting and devouring one another may soon be seen. Each thinks that he is standing for

righteousness, when all the time he is only trying to force his own will on his neighbor. Do you remember that Proverbs tells us that the contentions of brothers are like the bars of a castle—cold and straight, each one held firmly away from the other by being embedded in the cold stone? (Prov. 18:19.) That is the result of a heart that puts itself under law. Another translates these words: “If you are perpetually snarling and snapping at one another, beware lest you are destroyed by one another.”

But there is a way in which the Christian may walk through this world, with the enemies on every side, and be in perfect safety. There is a way in which the flesh has no power whatever against the Christian. And what is that way? “Walk by the Spirit, and you shall not at all give effect to the passionate cravings of the flesh.” That is our secret: “Walk by the Spirit” (vs. 25). God has given the Holy Spirit to dwell in each believer, and He does dwell in us, though often we forget Him, or grieve Him (Eph. 4:30), or disregard Him; but He does dwell in you, dear Christian reader, and He is ready to give you power for your walk. Heed His least prompting, obey Him instantly as He brings to your mind the Word of God; so we “walk by the Spirit” (vs. 25). In v.18 we will read of being “led by the Spirit” (Eph. 3:5). That is true; He knows the path we are to walk, and He is a faithful, trusty Guide. If we will but let Him lead us, then we will truly “walk by the Spirit,” (vs. 25) and we will not at all fulfill the passionate cravings of the flesh. How strong the flesh is! What passionate cravings it has! But there is One who is mightier than the flesh, who dwells within each one of us, and all His mighty power is ready to lead us, and to let us walk by the Spirit, so that there is no need for us to give effect at all to these passionate cravings of the flesh. In the Greek it is a double negative; that makes it very strong. “Not at all” do we need to heed the flesh.

Now we find there are two dwelling within us who are utterly opposed to each other. The flesh is passionately opposed to the Spirit, and the Spirit is passionately opposed to the flesh; so I find that within me there is a war going on, more bitter, more determined, and lasting longer than any war on earth. The flesh is always wanting to have its own way, and do its own will; the Holy Spirit who dwells in me is always opposed to my flesh. If I listen to the flesh, and yield my members to it, then the flesh quickly makes itself manifest in me; but if I walk by the Spirit, and let the Spirit lead me, then I will not at all listen to the passionate cravings of the flesh.

There are those who tell us that the flesh in them is dead, or is “burned out,” and will never act again. No, dear reader, the flesh is very much alive, as we will soon see, if we do not heed the Holy Spirit within us. There was a man who insisted that his flesh was dead and that he had no more passionate desires. Someone threw a cup of water in his face, and immediately he lost his temper and became very angry. His flesh was not dead, but was only waiting for an opportunity to manifest itself. Though the flesh is not dead, and will be with us as long as we are down on this earth, yet we may thank God that He has provided a way in which it may be kept in the place of death. So in Rom. 6 we read, “Knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with (Him), that the body of sin might be annulled, that we should no longer serve sin. For he that has died is justified from sin.... So also ye, reckon yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body to obey its lusts. Neither yield your members instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but yield yourselves to God.” Rom. 6:6-13 JnD. But the only way I can put this into practical effect in my life is by walking by the Spirit, letting the Spirit lead me, yielding myself and my members to God to lead me and use me as He pleases. So I live to God, not to the flesh.

This life is produced in us by the work of the Holy Spirit, through the Word of God. The Christian’s walk should show forth this new life, which indeed manifests Christ, for Christ is our life. If we follow this path we shall not at all give effect to the passionate cravings of the flesh. It is thus we avoid sin, not by taking the law to compel us to do what we do not wish to do. The law has no power to compel the flesh to obey, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. (Rom. 8:7.) This new life loves to obey, loves holiness, and Christ is its strength and wisdom by the Holy Spirit. Let us not forget that the flesh is still here, as we find in this chapter in Galatians, and it is passionately opposed to the Spirit, in order to hinder us walking by the Spirit; and the Spirit is opposed to the flesh, in order to prevent the Christian from walking according to the flesh. But if the Spirit leads us, we are not under law. It does not say, “not under the law,” (vs. 18) but not under any law: not under the rules and regulations of man, not under the rules that we love to make for our own life. The Word of God, through the Spirit of God, is our only guide, and by it we are ruled. But we may be sure of this: that the Spirit does not lead us to law, for law gives neither life nor strength.

But led by the Spirit, we are free; we may do the good that the new nature loves. Let us then ever, moment by moment, seek grace to walk by the Spirit, to let Him lead us; so He will enable us to hold the flesh as dead, crucified with Christ; and so we will bring forth the fruit of the Spirit to the glory of our God.

Now the Spirit in our chapter shows us on the one hand the works of the flesh: fifteen different wicked works, all manifesting the flesh. The first three are sexual sins, and how common these are. How easy it is to allow impure thoughts to enter our minds, and even to dwell there. In Matt. 15:19, the Lord tells us what comes out of the heart of man, and the first on the list is “evil thoughts.” We sometimes excuse ourselves by saying we cannot govern our thoughts, that these things will enter our minds unbidden, and that we hate them. However, if we let the Spirit lead us, even evil thoughts can have no power over us; instead, through Him, we may lead “captive every thought into the obedience of the Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).

2 Cor. 10:5 JND. And alas! impurity may not only be in thought, but in word and in deed. How careful we should be! Paul warns us, “It is good for a man not to touch a woman” (1 Cor. 7:1). Every one of us has the flesh in us, and these hateful, filthy sins come first on the list of its works.

The next two on the list are idol worship and witchcraft. How much we see in China of these two works of the flesh. Some people try to tell us these things are not altogether bad; but how much better it is to believe the Word of God, and flee from idolatry. (1 Cor. 10:14.) And remember, the Apostle John’s last words in his first epistle are: “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). For we may make other idols than those we see around us in China. My house may become my idol, or my books, or my study, or even my child. Anything that takes the place that God alone should have is an idol. Do not let us think these words have nothing to say to us. And how many persons there are who are what we call “superstitious.” There are many things they will not do, because they say it will bring them “bad luck.” This all comes under the heading of “witchcraft,” or sorcery, and is one of the works of the flesh. Christ has made us free from all such things; let us stand firm in this freedom.

Then come eight bad works towards my brethren. First, enmities. How easy it is to have a spirit of enmity against a brother. He may have wronged us, and we do not forgive; after the enmities come quarreling. The enmities we may have kept in our heart, but very soon it comes

out in an open quarrel. The fault, we think, is all on his side; but when we were children and we quarreled together, my mother always told us: "It takes two to make a quarrel." We may be certain if we are mixed up in a quarrel, it is because we have yielded to the flesh. "Only by pride cometh contention!" (Prov. 13:10). Then comes jealousy, one of the most common things in the heart of man. Then outbursts of anger. We call it "quick-tempered" or "short-tempered," but it is one of the works of the flesh. In 2 Peter 3:9 we read that the Lord is "long-tempered to us-ward." Then self-seeking. In Phil. 2:21 we read: "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." Nearly all the Christians, even of Paul's day, had fallen under the power of this terrible work of the flesh. There was one young man who was exempt, and that was Timothy; so we might see that there is a way not to put into effect even this work of the flesh.

Then come divisions. Sad, sad word, and how many hearts have been broken by it! Yet there are some who almost boast in divisions and say that they are necessary. Is it necessary to let the flesh act? If so, it is necessary to have divisions. But let him who boasts in divisions remember that God says they are one of the works of the flesh. These divisions came before there was an actual scattering of the sheep.

We may have a division in a company that outwardly seems to go on as one, as in Corinth; but after the division has come in, it will not be long before outward parties are formed. We call them "sects." In Christendom today men say with pride: "I belong to such-and-such a sect." But in God's eyes, this is only another work of the flesh.

Then we have envyings. "Who is able to stand before envy?" Prov. 27:4. This is another very common fault; perhaps much more common than we realize. How often we envy the wealth, or the ability, or the gift, or the holiness of another. This spirit of envy raises in my heart a spirit of enmity against my brother, and a long list of works of the flesh may result; all started from envy. It may be that the brother I am envying has not the least idea that he has been the cause of so much evil in my life; yet the fault was not with him, but entirely with myself, as I allowed the flesh to act in envy.

Last come drunkenness's and revelings: sad and shameful works to be seen in a Christian; yet, alas, we do see them at times. Not by signing the pledge, but by walking by the Spirit can we conquer the works of the flesh.

May God help us, as we ponder this horrible list (and it does not include all the works of this flesh of mine, for the Apostle adds, "and the things like these" (Acts 14:15)), to remember that there is only one way to be kept from any of these terrible sins; that way is God's way: to walk by the Spirit. We may make rules against them, but rules have no power over the flesh. How much sorrow we will miss if only we will give heed to God's Word in these verses!

Then comes the "fruit of the Spirit" (vs. 22); not works, as of the flesh, not even fruits, in the plural; but, as it were, one lovely bunch of nine fruits, like a bunch of beautiful grapes for the Master.

The nine fruits are one in God's sight, but they may be divided into three groups of three each. The first three are the hidden fruits, seen by the eye of God: love, joy, peace. But it is these three hidden fruits that give birth to the next three, towards my brethren: long-suffering, kindness, goodness. What a contrast to the eight works of the flesh that had to do with our brethren! Lastly come faithfulness (or, it might be, faith), meekness and self-control.

Love comes first in the list; for as we have seen above, love fills to the full all the law. Love to God, and love to my neighbor; love to the poor perishing world around me, and love to my brethren. This love is the first of the fruits of the Spirit. But we must read 1 Cor. 13 if we would know more what love means. Do we not see there a description of the love of Christ? To whom else can it truly apply?

And then comes joy. The joy of the Lord is my strength. (Neh. 8:10.) If my heart is filled with the Lord's joy, nothing can cast me down. As we read the epistle to the Philippians, how much we find about joy; and yet that letter was written from a Roman prison, and outside the prison Paul's enemies were seeking to add afflictions to his bonds. (Phil. 1:16.) Yet he writes: "I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice" (Phil. 1:18). Also see Hab. 3:17-19.

Then comes peace. That deep, calm peace, amid the turmoil and strife of this world; this is the fruit of the Spirit peace that passeth all understanding, the peace of God to guard our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:7.)

It is remarkable that our Lord Jesus bequeathed these three sweet fruits to us before He left this world. In John 14:27 we read: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you." In John 15:11 we read: "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." And in John 17:26 our Lord prays: "That the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them". His peace, His joy, His love. What a legacy! All is made good to us by the Holy Spirit, if we "walk by the Spirit" (vs. 25).

It is remarkable that the first of the fruits of the Spirit towards our brethren is "long-suffering." We are sure to suffer from our brethren. So often they do not understand. So often they pain us, and blame us, and perhaps scold us, for things that they do not really comprehend at all. When we remember this, and when we have suffered long from our brethren, perhaps then we may truly understand what this word "long-suffering" means; then how wonderful to find that in Ex. 34:6, God Himself is described as "long-suffering." In Eph. 4:1-3 the Apostle exhorts the beloved Ephesian Christians to walk worthy of the calling wherewith they were called, "with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." What is the difference between lowliness and meekness? Lowliness does not give offense, and meekness does not take offense. Both are needed if we are not to quarrel with our brethren.

And then comes long-suffering, as we have here in Galatians; and, fourth, "forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4:2). You will notice that all four of these qualities are to enable us to live at peace with our brethren, and provide for suffering on our part from them. Only so can we hope to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Kindness comes from a lovely Greek word, "chreestos." Christ in Greek is "Christos." The sound is almost the same. In the old days, the people used to say that "Christians" (from the name Christ which we bear) were also "Chreestians" (from chreestos, meaning kind), because the Christians were known for their kindness to others. This is just as it should be; and I hope that every one of us may be Chreestians, as

well as Christians. This is the word, translated “easy,” used by our Lord to describe His yoke. We use “easy” in this sense for the comfort of an old, well-fitting shoe, that does not hurt the foot in any part; so should the Christian be to those with whom he has to do.

Then comes goodness. You will notice that righteousness is not said to be a fruit of the Spirit. You remember the Word says, “Scarcely for a righteous man would one die: yet perhaps for a good man some would even dare to die.” Rom. 5:7. So it is goodness, not righteousness, that is a fruit of the Spirit. The Christian is, of course, to be righteous as well as good. In Eph. 5:9 JND, we have the “fruit of the light (is) in all goodness and righteousness and truth” (Eph. 5:9).

Faithfulness may be the meaning of the next fruit, which tells of one who can be trusted—who is faithful in all his ways; or it may have the meaning of one who rests entirely in God, knowing that certainly God is working all things together for good for those who love Him. (Rom. 8:28.) Or it may be simply the faith that every Christian has in Christ for his salvation. Perhaps all these meanings are included, for surely each one is a fruit of the Spirit.

Meekness. We have already spoken of this most precious fruit, suggesting that it would not take offense. There are some persons towards whom one must be unusually careful because they take offense so easily. Such persons have very little meekness. This fruit seems to be especially valuable in the sight of God; for He tells the Christian women to wear the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. (1 Peter 3:4.) I knew one lady who feared to pray for meekness, because she felt sure that such a prayer would bring many trials to teach her this lesson. But she prayed that the Lord would make her willing to pray for meekness, and soon she found that she was asking the Lord to make her meek. Let us remember that our Lord Jesus says: “I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29).

Finally we come to self-control. This is translated “temperance” in the English Bible, but it really means to have mastery, and the one over whom we are to have master is ourselves. I fear that this is a very rare, but very precious fruit. How few there are who truly have mastery over their own bodies, and their own minds and thoughts. Paul could say of himself: “I keep under my body, and lead it away a slave.” 1 Cor. 9:27. That is true self-control. Paul had mastery over himself. Let us remember that this is a fruit of the Spirit, and only God’s Spirit can give this self-control.

Before we leave this subject we must notice the difference between works and fruit. Works make us think of our own doing; fruit makes us think of another power within that draws its strength from the sunshine, the ground, the air, and forms these things into the “precious fruit of the earth” (James 5:7). So it is that by turning our eyes away from the things of earth and looking off unto Jesus, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Cor. 3:18.) And the fruit grows, without noise or labor on our part, by an unseen power within.

There is very much in the New Testament about fruit and fruit-bearing, but we may not stop now to look further at this lovely subject; but in closing may we ask our readers to look for themselves at Titus 3:14 and Phil. 4:17 to see another kind of fruit that is also well-pleasing to our Lord.

Those who love to teach the law must confess that there is no law against the nine lovely fruits we have just been considering. Furthermore they must confess that not only can they never by the law bring forth such fruit as these, but that even if one could fully keep the law, the result still could not compare to the beauty and preciousness of the fruit of the Spirit.

Before we leave this lovely subject we must notice that it gives us a wonderful picture of our Lord Jesus Christ. None other but He has ever brought forth these fruits in their perfection. And so we gaze on His love, His joy, His peace, His long-suffering (how we have proved it!), His kindness, His goodness (“The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him,” Nah. 1:7), His faithfulness (“God, the faithful God,” (Deut. 7:9); “Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds,” (Psa. 36:5)), His meekness (“I... beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ,” (2 Cor. 10:1)), and His self-control (gaze upon Him as He went from the garden to the cross!). How this picture stirs our hearts, as we consider Him, who is the chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely One. (Sol. 5:10,16.)

“But the ones of Jesus Christ have crucified the flesh with the emotions and passionate cravings.” “The ones of Jesus Christ” remind us of Gal. 3:29. “But if you (are) of Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed.” We noticed that the expression “of Christ” meant more than “belonging to Christ.” It has also the meaning of being a part of Christ, members of Christ, not merely the property of Christ. So here, “those of Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:2) would be those who are His members, those who are truly part of Himself. These have crucified the flesh, as we have already seen in Rom. 6, with the emotions and the passionate cravings. Now, as we walk by the Spirit, the Spirit keeps the flesh in this place of death; but if we walk carelessly, and do our own will, and listen to the flesh, then the works of the flesh will be manifest in our lives. The Christian does not have to die. Christ died for us, and we hold ourselves for dead, having died with Him, as though we ourselves had died upon the cross, since it was for us He suffered. Now I have this new life, and I do not acknowledge the flesh as “I” at all, but as sin which dwells in me, which I hold to be crucified. We may realize this moment by moment. God says we are dead, and our life is hid with Christ in God. (Col. 3:3.) Faith thankfully believes what God says, and so holds the flesh, the old man, to be dead, as we have seen in Rom. 6. If the Christian is faithful, then by the Holy Spirit he applies the cross in a practical way to the flesh, so that it may not act. (2 Cor. 4:10-12.)

If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also keep in step. We live by the Spirit. We walk by the Spirit. We are led by the Spirit, and by the Spirit we keep in step. The word means to walk in a line, as a line of soldiers. If each soldier went his own way, and only walked where he chose, there would be no line at all. But the soldiers are under authority, and obedience to that authority produces the line of soldiers and all must keep in step. The Holy Spirit has authority over us; if we hear and heed Him, then we will walk in line—we will keep step.

“Let us not become vainglorious, challenging [or, provoking] one another, envying one another.” We usually call vainglory “conceit.” The law makes us more vainglorious or conceited than we were before, instead of destroying our vainglory, because the law makes me think of myself. Though as we have seen, if we use the law in the right way it is most useful, for when I think of myself and see how bad I am—when I see how far short of the righteous demands of the law I come—then the law helps to compel me to own myself a lost sinner. But the law, as we have seen, never can produce righteousness.

And the law cannot produce holiness either. The law is not the rule of life for the Christian. Even the Christian's flesh is not subject to the law, and so the law cannot produce holiness in it. But God has given us a new life and the Holy Spirit dwells in us to produce fruits which are well-pleasing to God.

Strengthened by the Holy Spirit, living by Him, walking by Him, led by Him, taught by Him from the Word of God, the Bible, let us each one by Him seek to walk in line, to keep step, to walk in the footsteps of Christ. (1 Peter 2:21.) If we keep step, we are likely also to "keep rank." 1 Chron. 12:33.

Let us remember: Through the Spirit we wait for [or, eagerly expect] the hope of righteousness by faith. vs. 5.

We walk in the Spirit. vs. 16.

The Spirit opposes the flesh. vs. 17.

We are led of the Spirit. vs. 18.

We live in the Spirit. vs. 25.

We keep step by the Spirit. vs. 25.

We sow to the Spirit to reap life everlasting. ch. 6:8.

Meditations on the Epistle to the Galatians: Beautiful Grace, Galatians 5:2-12: Practical Results of Faith and Law

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

"See! I Paul, I say to you, that if you should be receiving circumcision, Christ shall do you no good at all. Yes, I protest again to every man receiving circumcision, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. You have lost the benefit of Christ [or, you are invalidated from Christ], you whoever in virtue of law are being justified, you have fallen away from grace. For, as for us, by (the) Spirit we are eagerly looking forward to (the) hope of righteousness on the principle of faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision has any power, nor uncircumcision; but faith working through love. You were running well [or, nobly]! Who has interfered with you [literally, cut you off] (for you) not to be persuaded by (the) truth? This persuasion (is) not from the One calling you. A little leaven is leavening the whole lump. As for me, I am fully persuaded about you in (the) Lord, that you will be none otherwise minded. But the one troubling you shall bear his guilt, whoever he may be. But as for me, brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? Then the scandal [or, stumblingblock] of the cross has been made without effect [or, invalidated]. Would that the ones upsetting you would even cut themselves off!" ch. 5:2-12.

With ch. 4 we closed the portion of our epistle that speaks of the DOCTRINE of law and grace; and with ch. 5 we begin to see the practical results of each. In the eleven verses now before us we will see how terrible are these results of law. Words could hardly be stronger than in the next few verses. Paul does not say that the Galatians had received circumcision, but he knew well that the Jewish teachers were trying to compel them to receive it. In Acts 15:1 JnD we read: "Certain persons, having come down from Judea, taught the brethren, If ye shall not have been circumcised according to the custom of Moses, ye cannot be saved." These teachers were now saying these same words to the Galatians. The one said, "If you shall not have been circumcised, you cannot be saved." Paul replies by the Holy Spirit, "If you should be circumcised, Christ shall do you no good whatever." We must clearly understand that "circumcision" was the mark which separated those who trusted in the law from all other people. This was the outward sign that a man was trusting to law. In 1 Cor. 7:18 we read: "Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised." No man can trust to Christ and to circumcision, or the law, at the same time. He who trusts to Christ does not, and cannot, trust to law. He who trusts to law does not trust to Christ. So Christ does no good to any man who trusts law. The cross of Christ is useless to such a man. The death of Christ is not for this man. In life or in death, in the present time or in eternity, Christ does this man no good. Some people say, "I try and keep the law, and trust to it; and where I fail I trust to Christ!" No, this is not possible. You must choose either Christ or the law. You cannot have part of each. Paul makes his words still stronger by saying first: "See, look, consider! I Paul, I the apostle of the Gentiles, I Paul, with the authority that Christ has given to me, I Paul, for whom you would once have dug out your eyes; it is I who say this to you: If you should be circumcised, Christ shall do you no good whatever."

"Yes, I testify again to every man receiving circumcision, that he is a debtor to do the whole law." Paul speaks with all the earnestness and energy that he possibly can. This matter is of the highest importance. This question undermines all the foundation of Christianity. "Yes," says the Apostle, "I testify...." The meaning is that he solemnly gives evidence, as though before witnesses, of what the result is to the man who receives circumcision. He has taken the mark of being under law, and now he is debtor to do the whole law. He cannot say, as many do today, I do my part and Christ does His part. I do the best I can, and Christ takes care of my failures. No, indeed! Christ does it all, or He does nothing. If you trust the law, you are a debtor to keep it all. The law says, You may not covet. One covetous thought, and you are lost. You must love your neighbor as yourself. If you do not, you are lost. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deut. 6:5). If you fail to do this, for even one moment, you are lost. Christ will not help you. He profits you nothing. He will do you no good at all. You must keep the whole law, or you are lost. James 2:10 says plainly, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). The law is like a sheet of glass; if you break it at all, then it is all broken. The law is like an anchor chain; if you break one link, the whole chain is broken, and the ship is lost. O, my reader, if you have been trusting to your own good works, if you have been trusting to the law, hear God's solemn words. Give up your hopes in works and law, and turn to Christ alone: cast yourself on Him, and on Him only. In Him you have a perfect and complete salvation. Christ must be everything, or nothing.

"You are invalidated from Christ, you whoever in virtue of law are being justified." "Invalidated from," the Greek word which this tries to translate, appears also in Rom. 7:6, which tells us that we are set free from the law. This has been translated "delivered from the law,"

(Rom. 7:6) or “clear from the law.” It is not that we are separated from the law, or separated from Christ, but that we are separated from, or deprived of, the benefit or the effect that Christ would bring to us. If the man who tries now to be justified by law shall plead the name of Christ in a coming day to make him just, the answer will be: “The name of Christ for you is not valid.” Such a man has no right to His name. It tells us again that Christ and the law cannot both give us righteousness. You may trust Christ for righteousness and He will give you a perfect righteousness: or, you may trust the law for righteousness, and it will curse you and condemn you. You yourself must choose whether you will have Christ or the law. Let me repeat it once more, You cannot trust to both.

A man may be the most moral, upright, honest, good, kind man, but if he trusts to the law he is lost; and he will spend eternity in hell. Reader, be clear: there is salvation only in the name of Jesus; and you may add not one single thing to that name. Jesus can and will save the worst sinner who trusts in Him, but the best man in the world is lost if he trust in the law.

To the one who gives up Christ for the law Paul writes: “You have fallen away from grace.” Many persons think that if they sin after they have trusted in Christ, then they have fallen from grace. No, the Bible says no such thing. To turn to the law is to fall from grace. A man may be the most righteous man in the eyes of his friends. He may strive earnestly in his own strength to please God. He may give away much to the poor, and do everything he thinks he ought to do. But if this man is trusting to the law, or partly to the law and partly to Christ, then this good man has fallen from grace. Rom. 5:2 tells us we have access by faith into grace— not by law. In 2 Peter 3:17 Peter warns the saints: “Beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall away from your own steadfastness.” This word “fall away” is the same Greek word as “fallen away from grace” in Galatians. In 2 Peter 3:14 we read: “Be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.” In Peter, the danger seems to be that we fall away from the proper behavior of a Christian. In Galatians the danger is that we fall away from the truth, the grace that makes us Christians. You will remember that in 2 Peter 1 we noticed that Peter wrote his second epistle to the same persons to whom he had written the first, and that letter was addressed to the Galatians (as well as to others). So we find that the Galatian Christians are warned not to fall away either in their doctrine or in their walk. It is very possible that Peter was thinking of this verse in Paul’s epistle to the Galatians when he wrote these words, for in the following verses he is speaking of Paul’s epistles, and he specially commends them, and calls them “the Scriptures.” 2 Peter 3:15, 16. If this is so, we see the great grace that is shown forth in Peter’s heart to specially commend to the Galatian Christians the very epistle that shows so clearly his own failure.

Be clear then, dear reader, that the Apostle Paul, by the Holy Spirit, plainly teaches that there is no salvation to the one who insists on receiving circumcision. Such a man shows plainly he is trusting to the law to be justified. Only by the grace of our Lord Jesus can any man obtain salvation. (See Acts 15:11.) How then can any man be saved when Christ does him no good whatever, when he is invalidated from Christ, when he has fallen away from grace?

Those who turn to the law for blessing find that it only curses them. (Gal. 3:10.) They find in it death and condemnation. (2 Cor. 3:7, 9.) For them the law works wrath. (Rom. 4:15.) But the grace of God brings salvation. (Titus 2:11.)

The Christian is not to:

1. Receive the grace of God in vain. (2 Cor. 6:1.)
2. Set aside the grace of God. (Gal. 2:21.)
3. Fall away from grace. (Gal. 5:4.)
4. Do despite unto the Spirit of grace. (Heb. 10:29.)
5. Fall short of the grace of God. (Heb. 12:15.)
6. Turn the grace of God into lasciviousness. (Jude 4.)

But on the contrary, the Christian is to:

1. Continue in the grace of God. (Acts 13:43.)
2. Stand in grace. (Rom. 5:2; compare 1 Peter 5:12.)
3. Be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. (2 Tim. 2:1.)
4. Draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace. (Heb. 4:16.)
5. Be established in heart by grace. (Heb. 13:9.)
6. Grow in the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 3:18.)

We have been gazing, with solemnized hearts I hope, at the result of law. Now the Apostle turns to those who continue in the grace of God. “For, as for us, by the Spirit we are eagerly looking forward to the hope of righteousness on the principle of faith.” In Gal. 3:2 we saw that we received the Spirit by the hearing of faith. Now we see that by the Spirit we “look forward to the hope of righteousness.” The law was a thing of the flesh; and the Spirit is “contrary” to the flesh. (Gal. 5:17.) So we read in Gal. 3:3, “Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” In this short epistle, where the law, the work of flesh, is so prominent, we find the Spirit also prominent. For the law is the false way, the Spirit the true way, of justification and holiness. In this short epistle we read of the Spirit sixteen times.

So the Apostle says, “For, as for us, by the Spirit we are eagerly looking forward to the hope of righteousness.” The word translated “eagerly looking forward” is used in several other places in the New Testament, but always of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, or of some blessing we receive from His coming. See, for example, 1 Cor. 1:7, Phil. 3:20, and Heb. 9:28. Or, for the blessings, see Rom. 8:19, 23. So in this verse

in Galatians we may expect that the "hope" is "that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ." Titus 2:13. Hope, in the language of men, is always an uncertain thing. Perhaps they will receive it, perhaps not. But in God's language, hope is a certain thing because there is no uncertainty with God. When God promises us something, there is no uncertainty; we know we will receive it, though we must "with patience wait for it" (Rom. 8:25). We hope for it (not uncertainly) while we wait for it. So we eagerly look forward to the hope of righteousness.

In the New Testament the Holy Spirit presents to us "righteousness" in various ways. The Spirit uses, I think, five different words to describe righteousness in Romans. We do have righteousness before God now. We are even now reckoned righteous freely by His grace. (Rom. 3:24.) But the whole work of being made righteous, as looked at completely in the New Testament, is not entirely fulfilled until the Lord's coming. God knows the end from the beginning, so He need not wait until the end of man's life to pronounce His verdict; but as soon as a man trusts in Christ, then God counts him righteous. But then all his walk and ways must be made to conform in righteousness, to the righteousness we already possess in God's sight. This will only be fully complete when the Lord comes.

"All of us, with unveiled faces, reflecting like bright mirrors the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same likeness, from one degree of radiant holiness to another, even as derived from the Lord the Spirit." 2 Cor. 3:18.

"Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29).

"We know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

So we eagerly look forward to that day when Christ shall come, when all our hopes and expectations, that which is contained in the word "righteousness" in all its fullness, shall be completely fulfilled. Surely we may cry, "Make haste, my Beloved!" (Song of Sol. 8:14).

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision has any power, nor uncircumcision; but faith working through love." (Compare 1 Cor. 7:19 and Gal. 6:15.) Circumcision was merely an outward cutting off of the flesh, merely an outward ceremony, and as we have so often seen in this epistle, the Holy Spirit insists that outward forms and ceremonies have no power whatever. Both circumcision and uncircumcision alike can never produce any results for God. So the man who is circumcised is just as helpless to please God as the man who is uncircumcised. There is no difference; neither the one nor the other has the least power to do anything for God. The spiritual meaning of circumcision was "a heart affair." In Jer. 6:10 the Lord complains of Israel that "their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken" (Jer. 6:10); and in Jer. 9:26 He adds: "All the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart." So Paul says: "Circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.... For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." Rom. 2:25, 28, 29. But, although outward forms and ceremonies have no power, yet there is a power: "Faith working through love" (vs. 6). But this is an inward power, this is "a heart affair." Faith and love go together, they walk hand in hand. As we learn to know our Lord better we trust Him more entirely, and as we trust Him more we love Him more fully and more wholeheartedly; and faith working through love has mighty power: "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it" (Song of Sol. 8:7).

"Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth." 1 Cor. 13:4-8.

"Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance... and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; of whom the world was not worthy: they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith...." Heb. 11:33-39.

Yes, how true is the word that, although neither circumcision nor uncircumcision have any power whatever, yet in Christ Jesus faith working by love has power untold. We must notice how Paul, in vv. 5, 6 of our chapter, links together "faith, hope, and love," as he does in 1 Cor. 13:13. "And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three."

"You were running well!" Paul loves the picture of the race. In 1 Cor. 9:24-27 he exhorts the Corinthian believers from the same picture: "So run, that ye may obtain!" (1 Cor. 9:24). In Gal. 2:2 and Phil. 2:16, Paul speaks of himself in his own race, that he had not run in vain, or to no purpose. In Phil. 3:12-14, Paul sees himself still as the runner, but drawing nearer the end of the race. The goal is in sight, and that is not the time to relax; on the contrary, now is the time to put forth all his strength, so "down to the goal I press!" As he parted from his dear Ephesian brethren he thinks of the time when, the race finished, the goal passed, the prize won, only the joy remains: "Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy" (Acts 20:24). It is the Greek word for the racecourse that Paul uses here once again. And in 2 Tim. 4:7, 8, using the same word, he sees the race is over: "I have finished my course [again, the word means the 'racecourse']... henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." This was not the kingly crown of royalty, but it was the victor's wreath that the winner of the race received at the Olympic Games. That wreath was made of leaves, "a corruptible crown". But the crown that we receive is "an incorruptible" one. (See 1 Cor. 9:25.)

The Galatian believers were running in this race. They had been running nobly, but someone had come in and interfered with them. The word means "cut into." It generally has the idea of interfering with a person's road, trying to hinder them by breaking down the bridges and spoiling the road. We often see it in these days in war. So someone had been hindering the Galatian runners, someone had been interfering with them. They had grown weary of the race, and were not running at all well now.

We come now to the word “persuade” used three times over in the Greek. It is generally translated “obey” on the first occasion: “Who has interfered with you, for you not to obey the truth?” But the literal meaning is “to be persuaded.” A man does not obey until he is persuaded of the truth that is being presented to him. So we may translate: “Who has interfered with you, for you not to be persuaded by the truth?” Paul is not asking for the sake of information. He probably knew well who the enemy was that was “cutting in” and interfering with those he loved so dearly. It is rather an exclamation to make the Galatian believers themselves see how they have failed. In the next chapter of Galatians we will see that he exhorts them not to lose heart, not to relax. The enemy has persuaded them to give up the truth they had learned from Paul; so Paul adds, “This persuasion is not from the One calling you.” It was not the Lord, it was not the Holy Spirit that had persuaded them to give up. It was the enemy’s work. “An enemy hath done this” (Matt. 13:28). Just as the enemy sowed tares among the wheat, bringing in evil among the good, so also the woman in Matt. 13:33 put a little leaven into much meal till all was leavened. Perhaps Paul was thinking of our Lord’s parable, and so he writes: “A little leaven is leavening the whole lump.” Paul had preached the truth and had given them the good meal; but the false teachers had mixed the leaven of law-keeping with it, and soon all would be spoiled. We must remember that in the Bible leaven always speaks of what is evil. Evil spreads surely and rapidly, just as the leaven in the meal soon affects the whole lump of dough. It may be there was only one evil teacher in Galatia (see ch. 5:10), but one evil teacher may do untold harm. One person who has smallpox may bring this terrible disease to many persons. Paul uses these same words about leaven again in 1 Cor. 5:6. In that case it was moral evil; here in Galatians it is doctrinal evil.

“As for me, I am fully persuaded about you in the Lord, that you will be none otherwise minded.” Here we find the same word, “persuade,” used again. Paul had said, “I stand in doubt of you” (vs. 20), but now, as he turns his eyes from the Galatians and the false teachers and “looks off unto Jesus,” he can exclaim, “I am fully persuaded about you in the Lord.” There is no word in the Greek for “fully,” but the tense of the Greek verb tells of completeness and finality; so we have added the word “fully” to try and give that sense. When we are perplexed and in doubt and in trouble, what comfort it is to turn our eyes to the Lord. It is from Him that we get encouragement and comfort and strength and confidence. So Paul, like David of old, “encouraged himself in the Lord” (1 Sam. 30:6).

And as for the one making the trouble, he shall bear his guilt. No man may trouble the Lord’s sheep without bearing his guilt. Alas, there are many today who are troubling the Lord’s flock. But they shall each one bear his guilt. Achan, who took the cursed things from Jericho and so brought defeat to Israel (Josh. 7), is called “the troubler of Israel” (1 Chron. 2:7). It would seem there was one man in particular who was doing this evil work, or who was the leader in it. This man appears to have had great influence, and was, perhaps, a man of great importance in the world, for we see Paul adds the words, “whoever he may be” (Esther 4:11). It mattered not to Paul even if it were Peter himself; he would oppose him before all. The position of the man made not the smallest difference to Paul; and he solemnly warns: “The one troubling you shall bear his guilt, whoever he may be.” (Compare Matt. 18:6, 7.)

The enemies of Paul had said that when it suited Paul he also preached circumcision. He had had Timothy circumcised because he thought this would help him. Paul now asks a question that completely answers these wicked taunts: “But as for me, brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?” Paul had already, in Gal. 1:7-10, spoken of the same wicked charge they were making against him. Now he answers it more definitely. It was always the Jews who persecuted Paul. It was they who were so bitter against him because he preached to the Gentiles and set aside their ancient customs. But if Paul were truly preaching the doctrines of the Jews, why should they persecute him? Paul was still being persecuted, and this was a proof that he was still preaching that circumcision had no power and that faith in Christ alone can save. But what about the Galatians? Were they still being persecuted? When they turned from Christ to circumcision, then their persecution would cease. It may be that Paul would gently remind them of this. If Paul were preaching the doctrines of the Jews, then the scandal of the cross would surely have ceased. It was such a scandalous thing to preach about a Man who had been nailed on a cross. This death was worse than being hanged on a gallows. This death was kept for slaves and for criminals of the worst kind. A Roman citizen could not be crucified. But Paul gloried in the cross. He loved to tell the story of the cross. He was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, nor of the cross of Christ. To him it was the power of God unto salvation. But to men of the world, it was a scandal. “We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock [or scandal], and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” 1 Cor. 1:23, 24.

The Greek word translated “scandal” literally means the stick in a trap to which the bait is fastened, and so it came to mean the trap or snare itself. It is generally translated “stumblingblock,” which has something of the same meaning. It is the word from which we get the English word “scandal.” A scandal is something men stumble over, and they do not wish to have anything to do with it. The first time this word is used is in Matt. 13:41, but the verb from it is used in Matt. 5:29. These words are used many times in the gospel of Matthew. This gospel was written especially for the Jews, and there were many things that scandalized, or stumbled, them. But the cross was the greatest scandal of all.

“Then is the scandal fully done away,” or “fully invalidated;” this is the same word as v.4, which we have just considered. Again, here the Greek does not have the word “fully,” but the tense of the verb expresses this meaning. For the one preaching the law, the scandal of the cross is fully done away, made without effect.

“Would that the ones upsetting you would even cut themselves off.” These troublemakers of the Christians were continually talking about circumcision, cutting off the flesh. Paul replies: “Would that they would cut themselves off!” (vs. 12). Paul probably meant that he wished they would excommunicate themselves, and openly cut themselves off from the assemblies of the Christians. That is the “cutting off” that he wished to see as regards these wicked men.

Meditations on the Epistle to the Galatians: Beautiful Grace, Galatians 4:21-5:1: Abraham's Two Sons

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

“Tell me, the ones wishing to be under law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one from the handmaid and one from the freewoman. But on the one hand the one from the handmaid was born according to flesh, but on the other hand the one from

the freewoman (was born) through the promise. Which things are allegorized [or, contain an allegory]; for these (women) are two covenants, one indeed from mount Sinai, bearing (children) unto slavery, which is Hagar. Now Hagar is Sina mountain in Arabia; but corresponds to Jerusalem (which is) now, for she is enslaved with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, which is our mother; for it is written, Rejoice, barren (woman), the one not bearing. Break forth and cry, the one not travailing; because more numerous (are) the children of the desolate than of the one having the husband. But you, brothers, according to Isaac are children of promise. But just as then the one born according to flesh persecuted the one (born) according to Spirit, just so also now. But what says the Scripture? Cast out the handmaid and her son; for the son of the handmaid shall certainly not inherit [or, be heir] with the son of the freewoman. Wherefore, brothers, we are not handmaid's children, but of the freewoman. With (this) freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore and do not be held again in a yoke of slavery." ch. 4:21-5:1.

The Galatians wished to go to the Old Testament; they wished to be under law; so Paul says, as it were, I will meet you on your own ground. You wish to be under law; will you listen, then, to the law? We must remember that in the Scriptures "the law" included all the five books of Moses. Then he tells them the story of Abraham and his two wives. (Gen. 16 and 21.) One, Sarah, was his own wife, a freewoman, on an equality with himself. The other, Hagar, was a slave whom he had taken as a concubine. God had promised to give him children from Sarah, but Abraham got weary of waiting and at Sarah's suggestion took his slave so that she might give him a son. She did give him a son, but what bitter sorrow came with that son! Sorrow in Abraham's own house, sorrow to Abraham's descendants, sorrow that lasts to the present day, for the Arabs that have caused so much trouble and sorrow in Palestine are the children of Hagar. Abraham had used his own methods to help God fulfill His promise. Abraham's faith had begun to give way; for faith and our methods cannot go on together. How often we fail in just this way! How often we grow weary of waiting for God, and think to help Him answer our prayers by our own methods! But it always ends in sorrow. This is not the lesson that Paul has for the Galatians in this story, but it is one we may learn as we read it.

One son, the elder, Ishmael, was born in the natural way. But his mother was a slave, and he was born to be a slave also. The other child, Isaac, was not born in the natural way, because not only was his father a hundred years old, but his mother was ninety and long before had lost the power to give birth to children. But God had promised that Sarah should have a son, and that from Sarah Abraham's children should multiply as the stars and as the sand. God's promises are always true. He is the faithful God. (Deut. 7:9.) So, in God's own time He sent Abraham a son by Sarah his wife. This son was truly a "child of promise" (vs. 28). He was not born in the natural way. By the power of her own nature Sarah could not have born a son, but God Himself gave her this power because He had promised to do so. So the Apostle says, "The one from the handmaid was born according to flesh, but on the other hand, the one from the freewoman (was born) through the promise." Then he tells us this is all an allegory. This does not mean the story itself is not true, for every word of it is entirely true; but it means that God arranged that this story should have a hidden meaning to teach us these truths of liberty and slavery: of grace and law.

These two women, Hagar and Sarah, the one a slave, the other a freewoman, represent the two covenants. The first covenant we find in Gen. 15:18. This is the chapter in which the Lord had freely reckoned Abraham righteous (v.6), and in v.18 we read: "In that same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land." There is no "IF"; there is no condition. God promises to do it all. In Gen. 17 we read again of the covenant: "I will make My covenant between Me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.... As for Me, behold, My covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations." vv. 2, 4. We find the word "covenant" mentioned twelve times in this chapter. Again we can see that this was an unconditional promise of blessing that God gave to Abraham. God did everything, and Abraham received the blessing from God. This was the covenant of promise. In the allegory Sarah was like this covenant.

But in Ex. 19:5, when Israel had reached Sinai, we read: "Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people" (Ex. 19:5). In this covenant there is an "if." "If ye will obey" (Zech. 6:15). The people of Israel must do their part, then God will do His part. But the people of Israel never did their part. They never did obey. They broke the covenant immediately. This was a covenant that put the people under slavery. Hagar, the slave woman, was like this in the allegory.

In just the same way Christ gives eternal life freely to everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus. There is no "if." There is no condition. It all depends on God. He does everything, and we receive the blessing. This is like the first covenant of which we read in Gen. 15 and 17, and again in Gen. 22. But those who are under the law must keep the law in order to receive blessing. "This do, and thou shalt live" (Luke 10:28). This is bondage and slavery; we must work and do in order to obtain, and we never can obtain this way. Those who are under this covenant are those who put themselves under law, and they are slaves, like the children of Hagar. They are from Mount Sina. God gave the law at Mount Sina (or Sinai); and so Mount Sina represents the law. "Now Hagar is Sina mountain, in Arabia; but corresponds to Jerusalem (which is) now, for she is enslaved with her children." People think that Hagar went to Arabia when Abraham cast her out; and so Arabia seems to speak of the land of slavery, or the bondage of the law. In the same way Jerusalem in Palestine was the great center from which they taught the law. "So Sina mountain in Arabia corresponds to Jerusalem (which is) now." They both speak of the law, and both are enslaved with their children.

We must notice that this is the second time Paul speaks of Arabia in this epistle. In ch. 1:17 Paul said that he went to Arabia. It may be that there he learned the bitterness of this slavery of the law. (See Rom. 7.) "Are ye ignorant, brethren, (for I speak to those knowing law,) that law rules over a man as long as he lives?" (Rom. 7:1).JND. "I see another law in my members, warring in opposition to the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which exists in my members" (Rom. 7:23).JND. But read all of Rom. 7 for Paul's experiences with the law.

"But the Jerusalem above is free, which is our mother" (vs. 26). That is the heavenly Jerusalem. That is the land of promise. That heavenly city is free. There is no slavery there. We who believe in the Lord Jesus, and do not trust in the law, may truly say that that heavenly city "is our mother." We are children of the freewoman. We are born to freedom, not to slavery; and no man has the right to enslave us now. There are many who would like to enslave us, and many who try to enslave us, but they have no right to do so; and we may reply to them in the words of Paul, "to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour" (ch. 2:5). Every rule and regulation made by man is part of this slavery. There is perhaps not a sect or a society of man that does not have its own rules; and all these are part of the bondage and slavery from which Christ has set us free. Alas, alas, most Christians, even true ones, are like the Galatians of old: they "wish to be under law," and gladly take upon themselves the yoke of bondage.

“The Jerusalem above is free, which is our mother: for it is written, Rejoice, barren (woman), the one not bearing. Break forth and cry, the one not travailing; because more numerous (are) the children of the desolate than of the one having a husband.”

These words are quoted from Isa. 54:1. In a most remarkable way the Spirit of God uses these words of the prophet to claim as the children of Abraham, belonging to the true house of Israel, all the Christians from the day of Pentecost until the Lord comes again to take us home to Himself. During this time Israel has been set aside. About seventy years after the birth of Christ the Romans completely destroyed Jerusalem, burned the temple, and from that day until recently the Jews have been scattered to the ends of the earth. Their house has indeed been left unto them desolate (see Matt. 23:38), but, amazing as it will seem in that day, they will find far more children begotten from the gospel, in the time of their desolation, than they ever had in the days of their greatest prosperity. The children brought in by grace are “more numerous” than those ever were under law. But these children are not children of the earthly Jerusalem, but of the Jerusalem above, the heavenly Jerusalem, which is free. For the heavenly Jerusalem “is our mother.” But God reckons them as Sarah’s children, “children of promise,” (vs. 28) “children of Abraham” (ch. 3:7).

The Christians of Galatia wished to leave their blessed place of freedom, to go under law. The Apostle clearly presents to them in this allegory the great difference between those under law, who were born to be slaves, and those under grace who are free. He might have closed this subject by asking the Galatians to examine themselves, and see whether they were children of Hagar or children of Sarah: but he does not. On the contrary he exclaims: “But you, brothers, after the manner of Isaac are children of the promise.” Oh the grace that throws his doubts of them to the winds and says to them, as it were, I know that in your hearts you do really only trust the Lord Jesus for your salvation. I know that it is only your heads, not your hearts, that have been led astray. I know you are really and truly Christians. I know that you are children of the freewoman, children of Sarah, children of promise like Isaac. Do you think that, after such an exclamation as that, they could turn to Paul and say, “No, Paul, you are mistaken. We are children of Hagar; and we want to be slaves”? No, I think the grace of God in that sentence must have melted their hearts; and one and all they must have cried out, “Yes, Paul, you are right. We are children of the promise, like Isaac; though we forgot for a while, and acted like children of Hagar.”

Dear reader, may I ask, Who is your mother? Are you a child of Hagar, or are you a child of Sarah? Are you a slave, or a freeborn son? It may be that in heart you are a child of the freewoman, but like the Galatians you have been acting as if you were a child of Hagar, under the rules and bondage of men, instead of walking in the liberty of the Spirit. If this is so, will you not even now turn away from slavery and all its miseries, and openly take your place with the children of promise?

Paul then reminds them that the one born after the flesh persecuted the one born after the Spirit. Nearly all Paul’s persecutions came from the Jews, those under law, children born after the flesh, children of the slave woman. They never wearied of persecuting Paul and all those who were the children of promise. Could it be possible that the Galatian Christians, Paul’s own children in the faith, would take part with these persecutors? Yet that is what they were doing.

Then comes the great climax, and Paul exclaims, “But what saith the Scripture?” And the answer is clear: “Cast out the handmaid and her son; for the son of the handmaid shall certainly not inherit with the son of the freewoman.” That is the end of those under law. “Cast them out.” There is no inheritance for them. The inheritance is all of grace, none whatever can be had by law. What a grand end! All could plainly see that they must take their stand on one side or the other, and who would be willing to take part with the one who was to be cast out?

This closes ch. 4, the end of the second division of our epistle. But the first verse of ch. 5 really belongs with it; and we can almost hear the Apostle’s voice as it rings out in a challenge that reaches to every one of us: “With this freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not be entangled [or, held in] again by a yoke of slavery.” May God grant that in our day there may be many of His saints who will hear this cry, and will give ear to it and obey. For, sad to say, there are few Christians today who are not entangled in the systems of men, who are not entangled with the rules and regulations made by men. Like the Galatians of old, they “wish to be under law.” The Lord may say today, as He did of old, “My people love to have it so” (Jer. 5:31).

Let us then, dear brothers and sisters, hear and obey this cry of the Holy Spirit through the Apostle: “With this freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not be entangled again by a yoke of slavery!”

P.F.B.

Meditations on the Epistle to the Galatians: Beautiful Grace, Galatians 4:8-20: Back to Slavery

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

“But then, on the one hand, not knowing God, you were enslaved to the ones by nature not being gods; now, on the other hand, having come to know God, rather indeed having become known by God, how are you turning back again (to rest) on the weak and poverty-stricken principles, to which you are wishing to be again enslaved anew? Days you are scrupulously observing, and months, and seasons, and years. I am frightened about you, lest perhaps I have toiled without reason for you.

“Become as I (am), for I also (became, or, am) as you, brothers, I beseech you. You have not wronged me at all: but you know that through [or, in] weakness of the flesh I announced the good news to you at the first, and my temptation in my flesh you did not scorn or loathe, but as an angel of God you received me, as Christ Jesus. Where, then, (is) that [literally, the] blessedness of yours? For I bear you witness that, if possible, having dug out your eyes, you would have given (them) to me. So I have become your enemy in speaking the truth to you [or, by telling you the truth]? They are not zealously seeking you in a good way, but they are desiring to shut you out, in order that you may zealously seek them. But it is good to be zealously sought at all times in a good way [or, course], and not only when I am present with you. My bairns, of whom I again am travailing in birth until Christ should be formed in you; but I have been wishing to be present with you at this very moment, and to change my tone, because I am perplexed as to you.” ch. 4:8-20.

Our last chapter ended with a consideration of the words, "But because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, our Father! So thou art no longer a slave but a son; but if a son, also an heir through God." ch. 4:6,7. No more a slave, but a son! If a son, then an heir! That is the glorious position into which God has brought us. As we have seen, it gives us a little glimpse into the glory that awaits us. The Galatians knew something at least of all this. They had tasted the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Yet in spite of all this blessed knowledge, they were turning back to their old slavery. So we find a sharp contrast between the liberty of vv. 6, 7 and the slavery of vv. 8, 9.

In those former days, says the Apostle, not knowing God, you were enslaved to the ones by nature not being gods. Now, on the other hand, having come to know God (rather, indeed, having become known by God), how, the Apostle indignantly asks, are you turning back again (to rest) on the weak and poverty-stricken principles, to which you are wishing to be again enslaved anew? These are most solemn words. In those former days they did not know God. They only served their dumb idols. They knew nothing better. The idols they served were not gods, and yet they were slaves to them. But now they have learned to know the true and living God, or rather, the true and living God knows them. Now they have tasted the liberty of His service. How can it be possible after this, the Apostle asks, that you should be turning back again? Please notice especially these words "turning back again". They had left their idols, and now they are turning to the law. No man would have written these words, "turning back again." But the Holy Spirit says that, in God's sight, for the Galatians to turn aside from the simple good news they had received to the law is just the same as "turning back again to the weak and poverty-stricken principles, to which you are wishing to be again enslaved anew." What were the weak and poverty-stricken principles to which they had been slaves before? These were their idols and all the practices of heathenism. And now they were wishing to turn back again to be enslaved again anew. Notice those words again. They tell us that it is the same old slavery to which they wished to go as they had been under once before. The law is just as weak as the idols to save anybody; the one is as hopeless as the other. The one is as poverty-stricken as the other; there is no food for my soul either in the law or in heathenism. And yet you wish to put on again the chains of slavery from which the Lord had set you free! You are wishing to be a slave once more! And notice that little word "anew" at the end of the sentence. It tells us that it is the same old slavery to which they were going, but it is a new master. They had been slaves to those idols which are not gods; now they wish to be slaves of law. A slave may change masters, but he is still a slave. The slavery is the same though the masters may be different.

O, no! I think the Galatians cry. You are entirely mistaken. We are going now to the Old Testament, God's own Book. We are learning now about the things God taught Israel, as recorded in that Book; and we are adding these to the doctrines of Christ.

Reader, note. The Holy Spirit says (no human being would have dared to say it) that to go back to the law and to these outward forms and ceremonies is nothing different in God's sight than going back to the old heathen practices from which the Lord had delivered them. The bondage of the law is just as bitter bondage as the bondage of the idols. Hear the words of a man who in modern times slaved under that master for some twenty-eight years: "... the long and bitter experiences I had in that bondage [the law]." (The Lord's Day From Neither Catholics Nor Pagans, by D. M. Canright, p. 19.) Listen to other testimonies quoted by the same modern writer: "Here I am, bound with these chains." From another: "It seems they will crush me. They are a yoke of bondage which I cannot stand up under. Still I do want to be right." From another: "How am I straightened, while the fetters are being forged for most unwilling limbs!... What distress we are in as a people! how miserable! and is there no relief?"

Peter and Paul had tasted this bondage: the one spoke of it as "a yoke... which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear" (Acts 15:10); and the other writes of it as "the yoke of bondage" (ch. 5:1). So we see that whether in the days of Peter and Paul or in our own day the yoke is the same; the slavery and the bondage have not changed in the least. We find the same groans of despair both now and 1900 years ago.

Please be quite clear: the law, the feast days and circumcision are as utterly unable to save men, or to help to save them, as dumb idols. The Galatians thought they were becoming more holy and religious, but God says they were going back to the same principles as heathenism. They thought they were obtaining a more reverent value for the Scriptures. God says, No, you are turning back again to your own old slavery from which grace delivered you. They thought that Christianity would be better for adding to it the old and beautiful forms and ceremonies of the law. Not at all, says the Apostle. You are going straight back to your old heathenish principles without even knowing it. The Thessalonians turned to God from idols (1 Thess. 1:9), but the Galatians were turning from God back to the old slavery they had endured under the dominion of idols.

The Apostle has shown that Christ has bought out even the Jew from under the slavery of law. How, then, can a Gentile, on whom the law never had a claim, willingly put himself as a slave under it? But this is just what the Galatians were doing. They had been born and brought up under heathenism, and they had learned from childhood all the wicked things connected with idolatry. They had served idols all their lives, just as many in China do now. They were altogether ignorant of the law of Israel. Then Paul had come and told them the good news of salvation through Christ alone and, believing, they were saved. God's grace had made them one with all other believers, Jews and Gentiles—all one in Christ. Christ had bought out the Jews from the slavery of the law, and He had rescued the Gentiles from the slavery of their idols, making all one in Himself. But these false teachers come, and tell them they must be circumcised, they must keep the law, they must observe the feast days. Then the Holy Spirit tells them that, for a Gentile Christian to put himself under the law and these outward ceremonies, is not only obeying Jewish customs but is the same as going back again to his heathen idols.

The Lord had patience with the Jews who went on with these Jewish principles. In Rom. 14 we see that a Gentile must also have patience towards the Jew who still is under the bondage of his days and his meats and other outward ceremonies. But for a Gentile to put himself under these Jewish principles is nothing better than heathenism. Who would have dared to say this, if the Holy Spirit Himself had not told us that it is so.

How many there are in this day who are doing exactly what these Galatians did! How many try to force on Christians the seventh day, the old Jewish Sabbath! How many say that on certain days we must not eat meat, while others try to tell us we must not eat it at all! How many openly tell us we must observe the Jewish law, and make us slaves to the Ten Commandments, a yoke which no man yet has been able to bear! See the outward forms which so many teachers observe today. See the robes and vestments that they wear! See the names and titles they take to themselves! How little do they realize that in the sight of God all this is not only worthless and useless, but is in reality going back to the slavery of heathenism. How many true Christians have prepared for themselves an unwritten list (or code) of rules. In God's sight

these are all but weak and poverty-stricken principles. These are strong words, but they are the clear teaching of the Holy Spirit in these verses in Galatians.

Notice also how the Apostle speaks of the idols of the Galatians—and the idols of China are no different. They were by nature not gods. This includes the idols, those horrible wood, stone and mud, or even silver and gold, images that we see in the temples everywhere in China. It includes the great men of old whom men love to worship as gods. It includes the demons of which we read in 1 Cor. 10:20. It includes the ancestors whom so many worship. It includes “Shang Ti” whose name blasphemously insults so many copies of the Chinese Scriptures. These, one and all, “are by nature not gods.” They have been made gods by men, but they are gods in name only. “By nature they are not gods.” The Greek negative used here not only denies the fact that these objects, which men have formerly worshipped, are gods, but it denies the possibility that they could be gods. (See 2 Chron. 13:9.) Do not think that this idolatry has its character improved because those practicing it worship Jesus. Do not think Shang Ti had been converted because men have put him into the pages of the Chinese Bible. True Christianity refuses any mixture such as this. Christianity is the most tender, gentle, loving thing in all the world. No sinner is too bad to receive a welcome. But Christianity is also the sternest and strongest opponent of anything and everything that men wish to add to it or mix with it. True Christianity is the most exclusive thing in all the world. I mean by this exclusive of sin and falsehood. True Christianity will not tolerate having forms and ceremonies added to it. True Christianity will not tolerate any addition, or any mixture, not even God’s law. All such in God’s sight are simply heathenism and idolatry. You have noticed how fervent, how intense, how stern is the epistle to the Galatians. What have they done? Have they committed some great sin? Listen, “I am frightened about you: days you are scrupulously observing, and months, and seasons, and years.” The days, what were they? See Col. 2:16. Listen, “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days.”

Who would have suspected that keeping the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, the day commanded by God in the law, was so evil a thing? Yet, it was just this that frightened the Apostle Paul about the Galatians. It meant slavery under the law; that is what made it so evil. To what did Paul refer by the “months”? I believe that is the same as the “new moons” of which we so often read. See 2 Chron. 2:4; 8:13. We know much about them in China and how they are celebrated. God condemns all this. The “seasons” would refer to the Jewish feast days. See Lev. 23. The years would refer to the Sabbath year. See Lev. 25:1-8.

It is well for Christians to remember that the religious observance of days is not consistent with the spirit of the good news. To keep one day different to another is to say that in some sense this day is holier than other days; but to the Christian every day is holy. It is true that the Lord has marked out for us the first day of the week as set apart from the other days. It is the day of our Lord’s resurrection. It is the day on which the Holy Spirit was given. (Lev. 23:15, 16; Acts 2:1.) It is the day on which the disciples came together to break bread. (Acts 20:7.) The Apostle told the Galatians and the Corinthians on this day to lay by them in store as God had prospered them. (1 Cor. 16:1, 2.) If we compare this with Heb. 13 we will see that this is included as one of the sacrifices we may offer to God on that first day of the week. Finally, we find in Rev. 1:10 that the Spirit of God calls this day “the Lord’s day” (Rev. 1:10). In Greek the word “Lord’s” is an adjective; so we might better translate it “the Lordly day.” This word is only used in this way twice in the New Testament: “the Lordly day” and “the Lordly supper” in 1 Cor. 11:20. This word beautifully links together the supper and the day. In many lands the Lord’s people have liberty to use “the Lordly day” for their Lord. In many lands it is set apart as a day on which we may turn away from our usual employment and use this day not for ourselves but for our Lord. The Sabbath of old was a day of rest. Often for the Christian, the Lord’s Day is the busiest day in the week. The Sabbath of old was made for man. (Mark 2:27.) The Lord’s Day belongs to the Lord, and we have the privilege of using it for Himself. Alas, in China many have not this privilege, and it may be that the Lord’s people can only use it in this way at very great cost to themselves. But let us remember that the Lord has said, “Them that honor Me, I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed” (1 Sam. 2:30).

Some people talk about the “Christian Sabbath” meaning the first day of the week. There is no such thing in the Bible as the “Christian Sabbath.” “Sabbath” means “rest,” and the Lord said, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17). The Lord Jesus could not rest in a world full of sin and suffering: He could not keep the Sabbath down here; and so we find that continually the Jewish leaders were finding fault with Him because He broke the Sabbath. No more can a true Christian keep the Sabbath in such a world. He has no more right to be resting here than his Master. If his Master must work, so must he. But in Heb. 4:9 we read: “There remaineth a keeping of a sabbath to the people of God.” The Sabbath rest is ahead of us. Soon, in the glory, we will rest with Him who has purchased that rest for us. Then we will keep Sabbath, but not now. Col. 2:16, 17 tells us the Sabbath was a shadow. The Sabbath was a rest for bodies. Now we have (what is far more important) rest of heart. In that coming day we will have both rest of bodies and of hearts.

In Rom. 14 the Spirit of God gives us further teaching on the subject of days from another point of view. We have suggested that this chapter referred especially to the Jewish believers who had been brought up to such things; and there are many who, though Gentiles, in our own day are in a very similar position. They have been brought up to forms and ceremonies, and they have a conscience that they should observe them. We are to bear with these saints, and remember they keep the day as to the Lord. We sometimes hear very bitter things said against those who keep Christmas day. But there are many dear children of God who esteem this day above other days: not in the spirit of Gal. 4, but in the spirit of Rom. 14. To such the Spirit says, “He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord” (Rom. 14:6). And to those who judge and criticize their brethren for this act, the Lord says very plainly, “Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own Master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.... But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at naught thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.... Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way.” Rom. 14:4, 10, 13. It is true that the one who is under the dominion of days and meats is called by the Holy Spirit “weak in the faith” (Rom. 14:1). But we are to receive such, and not judge him. (See Rom. 14:1.) And in all these things may we ever remember the words: “Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace” (Rom. 14:19).

In Gal. 4:12 we read, “Become as I (am), for I (became) as you, brothers, I beseech you.” How tender the Apostle becomes towards his dear brethren, and children in the faith! Once more he uses that sweet name “brothers.” “Become as I,” he cries. Was Paul under the law? They knew well he was not. “I became to the Jews as a Jew, in order that I might gain the Jews: to those under law, as under law, not being myself under law, in order that I might gain those under law: to those without law, as without law, (not as without law to God, but as legitimately subject to Christ,) in order that I might gain those without law.” 1 Cor. 9:20, 21 JnD. They knew well he was free. Once he had been under the law. Once he had groaned in that slavery, but now he was free. So he can joyfully say, “I became as you.” I left the slavery and yoke of law,

and became as you who are free from it. Now you become as I am. Then at the end he adds that sweet little word, "I beseech you!" Can we not see these words flowing out from a heart that is ready to break with love and sorrow! What earnestness, what severity, what fervor, what tenderness, what love all combined. Surely it tells us of the heart of Christ to us, when we turn away from Himself.

The Apostle continues: "You have not wronged me at all: on the contrary you know that through weakness of the flesh I announced the good news to you at the first, and your trial in my flesh you did not scorn nor loathe, but as an angel of God you received me, as Christ Jesus." Perhaps the Galatians would think that the Apostle's strong words were because he felt offended, because they had turned from his teaching to that of others. Oh, no, says Paul. It is not a matter of personal wrong: on the contrary, I only look back to the loving welcome you gave me on my first visit with you; then, you would have dug out your eyes and given them to me. It seems as though Paul had not intended to preach the good news to the Galatians, but sickness of some kind kept him among them. "Through weakness of the flesh" (v.13) might be translated, "on account of weakness of the flesh I announced the good news to you at the first." We do not know what this weakness was; but it evidently hindered the Apostle in his journey, and kept him in the place where he "happened" to be. It was one of those interruptions to our plans which often makes us so cross, but let us remember that God orders these interruptions. Paul, no doubt, was earnestly pressing on to some field of labor for the Lord; instead, he is taken sick. Not only is he taken sick, but the sickness seems to have been one that was especially unpleasant and made him in such a condition that people who saw and heard him would be likely to scorn and loathe him not wish to have anything to do with him. It was on account of this sickness he first preached the gospel to the Galatians. It was at such a time as this that the Galatians gave him such a warm welcome that the Apostle could never forget it. They received him just as he was. It was a trial to them ("your trial in my flesh," he calls it), but that made no difference to their love and their welcome. The most precious things they possessed, even their eyes, they would have dug out and given him if they could. Weak, sick, and perhaps loathsome, as he was, they received him, even as Christ Jesus. Could they have done more? No, indeed! And this love still lived in the Apostle's heart, and this made the sorrow of their fall all the more bitter to him. This sickness may have been the "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7) which Paul three times asked the Lord to remove; we do not know if this is so.

"So I have become your enemy by telling you the truth?" In some old manuscripts, at the end of Acts 21:36, we read the words: "Down with our enemy!" Paul had been seized by the crowd in the temple at Jerusalem and then arrested by the Romans. As the soldiers carried him along to the castle, the people followed crying, "Away with him!" Here, some old copies read: "Away with him! Down with our enemy!" These words were probably not written by Luke, but they probably tell us truthfully how the Jews spoke of him. A very old writer, who was a bitter enemy of the teaching of Paul, writing about 160-188 A.D., says, "Some of the Gentiles... have accepted the lawless and foolish teaching of an enemy." It is very probable that these false teachers from Jerusalem who had come to Galatia had called Paul an enemy. Paul seems to have heard that something like this had happened, and so he upbraids them: "So I have become your enemy by telling you the truth?" They had forgotten that "faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Prov. 27:6). He puts it in the form of a question, so as to leave a doubt and give the Galatians the opportunity to answer, "No, Paul, you are not our enemy! You are our best and dearest earthly friend."

"They are not in a good way zealously seeking you honorably, but they are wishing [desiring] to shut you out, in order that you may zealously seek after them. But it is a good thing [or, honorable] to be zealously sought after in a good (cause) at all times, and not only when I am present with you."

The words "zealously seek" probably come from a word meaning "to boil." These false teachers were so "hot-hearted" in their efforts to win the Galatian Christians away from their love to Paul, and away from his teaching, so that they might "hot-heartedly" turn to themselves instead, that these teachers would do anything to make proselytes of them. They were not working in a good, a right, an honorable way. That is what the Greek word means. They were using underhanded methods to gain the Galatians. This is the difference between announcing the good news and making proselytes. In the first we are hot-hearted for Christ; in the second we are hot-hearted for a doctrine or for a party. These false teachers were hot-hearted after the Galatians in a wrong way. Compare Paul when he could say to the Corinthians, "I am jealous over you with godly jealousy" (2 Cor. 11:2). Paul was glad to have others share the work of the good news. Paul might plant, and Apollos water. (1 Cor. 3:6.) Titus and Timothy and Silas and Luke might have a share in the labors of the good news, and Paul would rejoice. Indeed he rejoiced that Christ was preached even when some did it of envy and strife, supposing to add affliction to his bonds. (Phil. 1:15, 16, 18.) But these false teachers were not preaching Christ but the law. For this reason Paul does not rejoice, but opposes them with all his strength. "My bairns!" Or, perhaps, "My bairns!" or, "My little bairns!"

The Apostle's heart is too full to finish the sentence he had begun. He breaks off in the middle and cries, "My bairns!" It is not certain whether the Greek reads, "My bairns!" or "My bairns!" "My little bairns!" If it is "My little bairns" (as very possibly it is), then it is the only time Paul uses this word. Our Lord used it once, when He cried, "Little bairns, yet a little time I am with you!" John 13:33. John uses it seven times in his first epistle. We do not find it anywhere else in the New Testament. The Greek word translated "bairns" comes from the word meaning born, or begotten, just as the Scottish word "bairn" comes from the word born. It means a child (a boy or a girl), and especially emphasizes the relationship through birth. The word we considered in vv. 1-7 of this chapter, "son," emphasizes the dignity of the position. Paul often uses the other word translated "bairns."

"My bairns, of whom I again am travailing in birth until Christ should be formed in you." Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel" (1 Cor. 4:15). He looked on those who believed in Christ through his labors as his own children, whom he had begotten; and he well knew the pain of bringing them forth. He had suffered this once with the Galatians, when first they had believed in Christ, and now he is suffering it a second time. We read in Gal. 2:20— "Christ liveth in me." If Christ lives in us, then we should manifest forth Christ in all our walk and ways. But the Galatians had turned from Christ to the law, and being occupied with the law will never help us to show forth Christ. There are many teachers today who are continually setting forth rules and regulations by which Christians must live: you may not do this, and you ought to do that. This is just putting me under law once more. It is all part of those weak and poverty-stricken principles that are totally unable to show forth Christ in our lives.

What we need in order to enable us to show forth Christ in our lives is that Christ should live in us. So the Apostle travails again in birth until Christ be formed in them. What a man truly believes affects his character and his daily walk down here. Doctrine that exalts Christ makes us holy. Doctrine that does not exalt Christ hinders the Holy Spirit working in us and forming us like Christ. When the false teachers told the

Galatians that they must have circumcision and the law as well as Christ in order to be saved, this was in reality an attack on Christ Himself, and meant that Christ alone was not sufficient to save them. A defective Savior is no Savior at all. The result of the teaching of these law teachers was that the Galatians lost sight of Christ, they forgot that "Christ liveth in me," (ch. 2:20) and the life which they lived in the flesh was according to the law, not by the faith of the Son of God. (ch. 2:20.) So the result was that Paul must travail in birth a second time that Christ might be formed in them. Love made him willing to do this—not like Moses, who, weary with the burden of God's people, cries, "Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that Thou shouldst say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child" (Num. 11:12).

The word translated "formed" (vs. 19) is used only here in the New Testament. It does not mean what is outward and quickly passing away, but what is inward and real. It is made from a similar word meaning form, which is used three times, always of our Lord. (Mark 16:12; Phil. 2:6, 7.) Another word, made from this one, is used in Rom. 12:2— "Be not fashioned [made to resemble in outward form] according to this age; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." Here we may see that the Lord brings about an outward change in the character and walk down here of the believer by means of the inward change in his spiritual condition. We find the same word in 2 Cor. 3:18— "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed [transformed by an inward change] into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." It is not when we are occupied with trying to keep the law, but it is when we look off unto Jesus, and are occupied with His glory, that we are changed to be like Him.

W.R.

"But I have been wishing [or, could wish] to be present with you at this very moment, and to change my tone, because I am perplexed as to you."

The emphatic words in this sentence are, "at this very moment." It was a crisis with the Galatian saints. They were giving up the true gospel. The Apostle longs to be with them, and to talk to them face to face. How much better, he feels, would words be than a letter. But, dear reader, how much better for you and for me was the letter! Paul was unable to go to his beloved children in the faith, much as he longed to do so, and so he wrote this letter that we have been considering. No doubt Paul bitterly regretted being hindered making this visit. How little he thought that this was God's own arrangement, in order that His Church might have this priceless little epistle given to us by the Holy Spirit. The Apostle longed to change his tone from rebuke to love. Could he but be with them, and they hear the tones of loving entreaty, surely they must turn from their evil ways. "For I am perplexed as to you" (vs. 20). He believed they had received the Holy Spirit. (ch. 3:2.) He calls them brothers, and children, and even bairns. But Christ was so little manifested in their lives that he has to confess: "I am perplexed as to you" (vs. 20). He hoped they were true, and that only in their heads they had received the doctrine which totally perverted the gospel. Paul never had such perplexity about other converts, not even the Corinthians. I wonder if Paul would be perplexed as to us, dear brethren, if he watched our daily life? I wonder if he would see that Christ needed to be formed anew in us?

Meditations on the Epistle to the Galatians: Beautiful Grace, Galatians 4:1-7: Sons and Heirs

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

"But I say, as long a time as the heir is a child [or, a minor], he differs nothing from a slave, (though) being lord of all; but he is under guardians and stewards until the (time) previously fixed by the father. Thus also we, when we were children [or, minors], (we) were continually enslaved under the principles of the world; but when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth from (Himself) His Son, born from a woman, born under law, in order that He might redeem the ones under law, in order that we might receive from (Himself) the sonship. But because you are sons, God sent forth from (Himself) the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying Abba, the [or perhaps we should say, our] Father! So thou art no longer a slave but a son; but if a son, also an heir through God." ch. 4:1-7.

In v.7 of the last chapter the Apostle told the Galatians that they which are "on the principle of faith, these are Abraham's sons" (ch. 3:7). In the remainder of the chapter, this subject is more fully considered, and the chapter ends in a note of triumph: "If you are of Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise." The new chapter we are beginning now continues this subject of the heir. In our last chapter we saw that those who would later have the dignity of being full-grown sons were under child trainers while they were still children. Even so, the heir to the property himself, while still a child, or a minor, did not have liberty, but he himself was under a guardian, and his possessions were under a steward. This was true, even though when he came of age he would be master of everything. All would then belong to him; but while still a minor, he has no right to the possessions, and he has no liberty to do what he himself wishes. As far as the law is concerned, it places him in the same position as a slave, who had no right (according to law) to anything; his master had entire authority over him. It is said that the Roman child ended his "babyhood" with his seventh year; but it was not until his twenty-fifth year that he was considered a full-grown man: complete, as the Apostle calls him, as compared to a minor (literally, a baby). (See Eph. 4:13, 14; 1 Cor. 14:20.) In these verses in Galatians we see that the father arranged beforehand exactly the age at which his son should cease to be reckoned as a minor and should be considered a full-grown son. In just the same way Paul says, "Thus also we [we Jews of the Old Testament who were under the law], when we were minors [that is, as we saw in the last chapter, when we were still under the guardianship of the law, our child trainer], we were continually enslaved under the principles of the world," or, as another translates, "under the elementary lessons of outward things [or, outward ordinances]."

These words are very important for us to understand. The institutions of the law were suited to man in the flesh— to men of the world. They were all outward: a magnificent temple, beautiful clothes for the priests, jewels and gold, trumpets, music, sweet incense, altars and sacrifices that men could see with their natural eyes. All these things formed what the epistle to the Hebrews calls "a worldly sanctuary" (Heb. 9:1). All these things were provided in order that man in the flesh might be in relationship with God; and so these institutions were outward according to the principles of this world, things which men could see and hear and smell, all suited to man in the flesh; and there was no need to use faith to see that which was invisible. (Heb. 11:27.) Christians, on the other hand, are a heavenly people. They do not see the Object whom they adore, except by faith. ("Whom having not seen, ye love" (1 Peter 1:8).) The Spirit reveals to them that which they do

not see. They know Christ ascended into heaven, having finished the work which the Father gave Him to do. Now, “we see Jesus... crowned with glory and honor” (Heb. 2:9). Now our hearts rise up into the heavenly temple, by the grace of the Holy Spirit come down from heaven, to adore God up there. But we see all this by the eye of faith.

The Samaritans worshipped in Mount Gerizim, and the Jews worshipped at Jerusalem. They each worshipped in their own worldly sanctuary, each with external sacrifices, a beautiful temple, and vestments. It is true that God Himself had given the institutions at Jerusalem, and so the Lord could say to the Samaritan woman: “Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). The Samaritans were very little different to heathen, but in Jerusalem the Jews worshipped the one true God. They knew whom they worshipped. Yet the Lord says to this woman, “Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father” (John 4:21). The worship at Samaria never was from God, but the worship at Jerusalem which came from God was to be set aside, in just the same way that the worship at Samaria was to be done away. The Lord tells the woman the reason for this. “The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24).

The outward, formal, worldly worship was all to pass away, because the hour had come when the true worshippers should worship the Father not with a worldly and fleshly worship, but in spirit and in truth. And, reader, just ponder for a moment those words: “The Father seeketh such to worship Him” (John 4:23). Think of this: The Father, the Father in heaven, is seeking worshippers—worshippers who are willing to worship Him in His way, not in man’s way. Every religion all over the world has its own external ceremonies, has its own temple or hall of worship, adorned to make the man of the world see something which will help him to worship. These are all but “worldly sanctuaries,” and some much worse, for in some of these they worship demons. (1 Cor. 10:20.) All these outward ceremonies and adornments are but “the principles of the world” (vs. 3). The flesh loves them and delights in them. So on every hand we see great worship halls (churches, as men call them), beautifully adorned; magnificent buildings; beautiful music, great organs, and well-trained choirs. We see the vestments and the altars, and many other things to please the outward eye and ear. These, dear reader, are all but the principles of the world, and the whole thing is but a worldly sanctuary. This is not what the Father is seeking today. On the other hand, there may be, in a simple, little upper room, two or three gathered together to the name of Jesus and to Him alone (see Matt. 18:20 JND); they will surely be despised and scorned by those who love the principles of the world, but it may be that these are the worshippers in spirit and in truth for whom the Father is seeking. It may be that the Lord is present in the midst of those despised few in a way that the vast crowds in the worldly sanctuary know nothing of. Christian reader, you and I know that these things are so. We know that the beautiful worship hall, the lovely music and the eloquent preacher will draw crowds even of true believers, who despise the feeble little company who seek to worship according to the Word of God in spirit and in truth. There are few today who have not been influenced by the subtle power of the principles of the world, and the worldly sanctuary. Christian reader, may I ask, How about you?

“Thus also we, when we were minors, were continually enslaved under the principles of the world.”

You and I would not have dared to write that word “enslaved.” We would not have realized that the people of Israel, in the days before grace came, were enslaved—enslaved under the principles of the world. But so the Word of God stands. The law was their master; they were nothing better than slaves to the outward institutions to which they were subject. And are these today, who are under the power and influence of the principles of the world, any better? Are they in any better position than those of old who served a worldly sanctuary? Do these persons today know anything of the liberty of the Holy Spirit? For “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Cor. 3:17). These are very important questions, questions that if we are wise, we will ponder very seriously on our knees in the presence of our God, remembering that still the Father is seeking worshippers who will worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Before we leave this subject, we must turn to Col. 2 and see what the Holy Spirit has to say to us there, for in that chapter twice He uses these same words. In Col. 2:8-11 we read: “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the principles of the world, and not after Christ. For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power: in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands.” How many a good and true Christian man or woman has been spoiled through philosophy, through the traditions of men, through the principles of the world! They think they are getting something higher and grander and better; but in the sight of God they are spoiled. In Him, whom having not seen we love (1 Peter 1:8), dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. But the eye of flesh cannot see Him; and so it wanders to philosophy, to the traditions of men, to the principles of the world—to anything and everything that the eye can see, and the mind can understand and value—but all these things are summed up in those few sad words, “not after Christ” (Phil. 3:12).

We read more of these principles of the world in vv. 20-23: “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh.” Those words exactly describe these things, these principles of the world as God sees them: “to the satisfying of the flesh” (Col. 2:23). The magnificent churches or worship halls, the music, the choirs, the special clothing, or vestments: all these things satisfy the flesh, but they are not worship in spirit and in truth. They have a show of wisdom, and most persons are deceived by them. But these have forgotten, or they have never known, that they are dead with Christ from the principles of the world.

In the days of old, and in our own day, men sought the favor of God by means which an unconverted man could use, quite as well, or even better than one that is converted, for the unconverted man’s conscience does not make him feel that these things cannot cleanse the soul. Those who seek to obtain righteousness by works are often very bitter against those who have peace with God through faith, for this declares that all their labor is for nothing. It is remarkable that we only read of one city where the Gentiles persecuted Paul in which it was not the Jews who had stirred them up against him. The Jews boasted in what man could do, and they held fast their own glory. They were not willing to take the place of poor, helpless, lost, ruined sinners without strength. But faith gives God the glory and seeks in a new life, whose spring is love, to glorify Him by obedience to His Word and by doing His will.

So the law was a child trainer until Christ, the promised Seed. The forms and ceremonies of the Old Testament resembled the method of outward ceremonies of the Gentile religion. True, God always held fast the perfect rule for man’s conduct, and the unity of the Godhead; yet

He, in His mercy, provided a system of worship that was suited to the ways of man's spirit: God coming near to man, in order to show forth whether it was possible for man in the flesh to please God. Man has not kept God's law, but he has held fast to the ceremonies in order to provide himself through them with a righteousness of his own; this is an easy way, this observance of outward forms and ceremonies, since man can do this without conquering his own passions and lusts. But on the other hand, if his conscience wakes up, these things become an unbearable yoke, and he finds out that the word is still true: "Thus also we, when we were minors, were continually enslaved under the principles of the world." Alas, it is always thus. It was so in Israel's day, and it is so even in our own day.

"But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth from (Himself) His Son." At just the right moment the promised Seed came. God sent forth from the glory of heaven His only begotten Son, the Word who was made flesh, and He came and dwelt among us. He came as God's representative (for the Greek word has this meaning). "The fullness of the time." How much there is in those words! Man had been tested and tried in every way. In the Garden of Eden man was innocent, but he failed. From Adam to Noah, man had his conscience to guide him, and the world became so full of violence and corruption that God destroyed it with the flood. From Noah to Abraham man had the responsibility of governing, and the world became so wicked that God rejected it, and chose one man and his family. He guarded them, fenced them in, led them, taught them and dealt with them in grace. But they chose law instead. They utterly failed under law; and it should have been manifest to all that man was a complete failure in every way. Then at just the right moment, "Having yet therefore one Son, His well-beloved, He sent Him also last unto them" (Mark 12:6). God sent Him forth from Himself.

God had foretold in the prophet Daniel just exactly when the Messiah was to be "cut off." If there had been men of spiritual understanding to understand the Scriptures, they might have known beforehand the very day on which the Messiah must suffer. God had chosen the exact time when He should send forth His Son; and He prepared all accordingly. He sent before Him His servant John to prepare His way before Him. (See Matt. 11:10.) God allowed the Romans to have a strong government, having control of all that part of the world of which Palestine is the center. The Romans made good roads and kept a great measure of order, which made it possible to preach the gospel in very many places. God had also arranged that all that part of the world should understand the Greek language, so that this helped greatly in spreading the good news. He also arranged that this language should be, perhaps, at this time, the most perfect language this world has known, with which to give us the New Testament.

It is very evident that God Himself prepared everything in this world, so that all should be ready to receive His Son and send forth the good news of the grace of God to every part of the world. But, alas, when the Son of God came to this earth, "there was no room" (Luke 2:7) for Him; they sent His mother out to the stable, and there the holy Child was born. (Luke 2:7.) There in a stable, the only begotten Son of God came to this earth, an outcast (Jer. 30:17) from the beginning of His sojourn here.

A multitude of the heavenly host (Luke 2:13) came to announce the arrival of this divine Stranger, praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14). But the only ones to hear their message were a few shepherds out on the hillside keeping watch over their sheep. Jerusalem, the city of the great King, was troubled by the news that He was born. (Matt. 2:3.) And the chief priests and scribes, who should have been the first to welcome Him, did not make the smallest effort to seek Him. True, there were those who brought kingly gifts, and falling down before Him did Him homage, but these were Gentile strangers. (Matt. 2:11.) And old Simeon and Anna had hearts prepared to give a welcome to the newborn King; and Anna knew all those in Jerusalem that looked for redemption, and she spoke of Him to them. I fear the number was not great. (See Luke 2:25, 36-38.) Such was man's condition when God's time arrived, when "the fullness of the time came." In Rom. 5:6, the Holy Spirit calls it "due time." In Mark 1:15, He sent to men the message, "The time is fulfilled" (Mark 1:15). It was God's time, the time for the most important event that ever has happened in the history of the universe: "GOD SENT FORTH FROM HIMSELF HIS SON."

The King of glory (Psa. 24:7) did not come from heaven manifesting forth His mighty power and glory, but He came of a woman, born of a woman. He took on Himself our human nature. He came under law (not under the law), that He might redeem (or, buy out) those that were under law. We may see plainly that instead of bringing Christians under law, God is really leading those who had been under law out from it. But He had to buy them out, and the cost was His well-beloved Son. No doubt this applies first of all to the Jews, and many Jewish believers then alive, who had been brought up under the law of Moses, had learned what it meant to be bought out from under that law. But when the Holy Spirit says, "He came under law, that He might buy out those that were under law" (not, the law), it tells us that Christ's work went much further than to the Jews alone. His redemption went to the ends of the earth, for man by nature loves to put himself under law, nor was it the law of Moses alone but law of every kind from which Christ redeemed us. And so the Gentile Christians in Galatia shared in this redemption from under law. Redemption places all (that is, all who believe in Christ and His work on the cross) under the benefit of that work, whether they be Jews or Gentiles. In God's sight these are bought out from under law in order that those who were under law might be delivered from it, and that they might receive from Him the sonship. For we have seen that the son was free. The son was no longer under a child trainer, a guardian, a steward. Before God could give to us the place and the spirit of sons, He must buy us out from under law.

So, when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth from (Himself) His Son, not only that He might buy out the ones under law, but also that we might receive from Himself the sonship. Who, but God the Father, could give to us the place and the spirit of sons? And the cost of this wonderful place into which God has brought us was His own well-beloved Son. You remember that almost the first words our Lord Jesus spoke after His resurrection were, "Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God" (John 20:17). Precious, marvelous words, which He never spoke before His death and His resurrection. But His work was all finished. He had paid the mighty price to buy out those under law: He had met all the claims of law, and we are free. All our sins were gone, and His Father now is our Father. He is now "the Firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29), and, strange as it seems to us, "He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb. 2:11). What wonderful words, brethren of the Son of God! God was His Father, and God was their Father. God was His God, and God was their God. Not only were they forgiven and justified—blessed, wondrous work though this was—but they were made sons of God. God brings us into the same relationship to Himself in which our Lord Himself stood.

Was He any longer under law? No, surely not. Under the law He had died. He had borne its curse; but that was all passed, and now He is risen. And with Him all who believe in Him are brought out from under law: they are free; they are sons. And "because you are sons, God sent forth from (Himself) the Spirit of His Son, into our hearts, crying, Abba, our Father! So thou art no longer a slave but on the contrary a son; but if a son, also an heir through God." ch. 4:7. Note that it is "because ye are sons," (vs. 6) (not, in order that ye may be sons) "God sent

forth from (Himself) the Spirit of His Son." Notice also that here we see the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit all working together to bring forth from under law those who had been slaves to it. How then could anyone think that Gentiles should go back into that place from which God had thus bought out both Jews and Gentiles?

"Abba" is the Chaldee, or Aramaic, word for Father. It is a word that is made with the lips only, so that a very small child, who does not have any teeth yet, could say it. Almost every language has the same sort of name for father and mother, as in English very small children say "papa" and "mama," both words made by the lips only. Even so is "Abba." This tells us of the welcome God gives to even the smallest, the youngest, the weakest believer. He may not know how to pray, but God has given to even such a one the Spirit of His Son, and he can look up to heaven and cry, "Abba!" No one but a child has the right to this word. This is the word that our Lord Himself has made so dear to the heart of every true child of God, as we stand by with bowed heads and bowed hearts, and hear Him cry on that dark night in the garden of Gethsemane, "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto Thee; take away this cup from Me: nevertheless, not what I will, but what Thou wilt" (Mark 14:36). We only find this precious word three times in the New Testament: first our Lord Himself uses it; and then in Rom. 8:15 where the Chinese New Testament so beautifully says, "You have not received the heart of a slave again to fear, but you have received the heart of a son, so that we cry, Abba, Father." (The translation may not be very good, but I think the meaning is right.) Finally, we find this same sweet word here in our chapter in Galatians. Some men tell us that in the words, "Abba, our Father," (Jer. 17:22) the second name, "Father," is only a translation of "Abba," but I think it is much more than that. Our hearts understand these things better than our heads; but, dear Christian reader, perhaps you have looked up to heaven, and cried, "Abba, Father!" If you have done this, then you will understand; and if you have never uttered this cry from your heart, then no words of man can make it plain to you. Three times in the first five verses of our epistle, Paul speaks of God as the Father. It is a mark of the child that he knows the Father (1 John 2:13), and so from the beginning of the epistle Paul would remind them that they are sons, not slaves or servants.

It is the Spirit of God in our hearts, the Spirit of His Son within us, that utters this cry, "Abba, Father!" Nothing can ever imitate this cry. Only the Holy Spirit Himself can cry thus in our hearts. This cry, as we have already pointed out, is the proof that He dwells within us. "So," the Apostle adds, "thou art no longer a slave but a son." Yes, that cry "Abba, Father" is the proof that we are not under law, we are no longer minors, but we are now sons, sons of God. "But if a son, then an heir through God." We are not the sort of an heir that the first verse of our chapter describes, who differs nothing from a slave. We are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). Such is the place to which God brought us when He bought us out from under law.

We do not read more in Galatians of the heir, and we only once find the inheritance mentioned (ch. 3:18), but these words seem to open the door of the Father's house and let us look in and have a glimpse of the glory that awaits us there. These words seem to take our hearts from earth to heaven, and leave behind the strife, the law teachers, and the false brethren. But the time for the glory has not yet come, though we are heirs already, and in Christ we have already obtained an inheritance. See Eph. 1:11. The Father's house is our home (John 14:2); "we shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house" (Psa. 65:4). That day is yet before us, but even now down here how many of God's children have found comfort in the Father's house. Everywhere, true Christians turn to John 14 for cheer and encouragement. And soon our Lord's prayer will be answered: "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). We will see His glory. We only find glory mentioned once in Galatians. (ch. 1:5.) The subject of the book is too sad and stern and their fall too terrible to speak to them of the glory; but I am glad that the Spirit of God does remind them in this epistle that we are not only sons, but heirs. I am very glad the Spirit does, as it were, in this epistle open the door to the glory: and I hope some of the Galatians looked in, and while gazing on the grace that made them heirs, and on the glory of their Lord, I hope they were "changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18).

J.N. Darby

Meditations on the Epistle to the Galatians: Beautiful Grace, Galatians 3:21-29: The Law as the Child Trainer

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"(Is), then, the law against the promises of God? Far be the thought! [Literally, 'Let it not be!'] For if a law had been given, one being able to impart life, then indeed righteousness would have been on the principle of law: but the Scripture has shut all [literally, everything] in on every side under sin, in order that the promise, on the principle of faith of Jesus Christ might be given to the believing ones [the ones having faith].

"But before the coming of that faith, we were being constantly guarded under law, being shut in on every side unto the faith about to be revealed. So the law became our child trainer unto Christ, in order that we should be justified on the principle of faith. But that faith having come, we are no longer under a child trainer. For you are all God's sons by means of that faith, in virtue of Christ Jesus; for you, as many as were baptized unto Christ, clothed yourselves with Christ. There is not Jew nor Greek, there is not slave nor free, there is not male and female; for you are all one in virtue of Christ Jesus. But if you (are) of Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise." ch. 3:21-29.

The law is not against the promises of God, but it showed man that he could not obtain the blessings of these promises by his own faithfulness and by his own works. For if the law could have given life, the new life given by the law would, of course, have kept the law's commandments. This would have been human righteousness, and righteousness by the law. Although this righteousness would only be human righteousness, still it would have been pleasing to God. But the law did not, and could not, give such a life to man; and the law did not, and could not, provide man with even human righteousness; it only showed man how sinful he was. If man had kept the law, under which he voluntarily placed himself at Mount Sinai, in order that he might obtain the promise of life and blessing from God, then he would have obtained those blessings which God had promised. But man could not keep the law. All Jews as well as Gentiles, those who had the privileges of receiving the promises and knowing God's will, as well as those who had not these privileges alike have sinned. God has shown clearly that all men are sinners. The Scripture has shut in all on every side under sin. Whichever way we look at man, we find he is a sinner. There is no way out. The case is quite hopeless. "There is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:22-23).

But has God shut in all men, Jews and Gentiles alike, under sin in order to bring all men into condemnation? No indeed! God has shut in all under sin “in order that the promise, on the principle of faith of Jesus Christ, might be given to the ones having faith.” In Rom. 3:21, 22, we read: “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all....” The offer of righteousness without law is made to all—Jew and Gentile alike—for there is no difference: but this righteousness is only “upon all them that believe” (Rom. 3:22). So the promise on the principle of faith of Jesus Christ is given to the ones having faith. Under law, all are lost: under grace, all may be saved. The law cannot, and ought not, spare sinners. The law pulls down what is evil; but the promise freely gives what is good and builds it up. The law exposes man in all his nothingness and wickedness, and proves he is only a poor lost sinner. Grace makes manifest the faithful promises of God, and His goodness to the poor, lost sinner who deserves nothing. So we see that the law is not against the promises of God. When we understand the true work of the law, and the true result of God’s promises, we see that they are in no way against each other, but that each has its own place. But if we mix them up, then all is confusion.

We come now to a new subject, though, as usual, it flows straight on from what the Apostle has just been saying. The last words we have considered were: “But the Scripture has shut all in on every side under sin, in order that the promise, on the principle of faith of Jesus Christ, should be given to the ones having faith.” The Apostle now continues: “But before the coming of the faith [or, that faith], we were being constantly guarded under law.” This is v.23; but in v.26 there is a change from “we” to “you.” This tells us that in v.23, and the other verses in this connection, the Apostle is speaking of the Jews, who were under law. But in v.26 he turns to the Galatian Christians, and so he addresses them as “you.” The Apostle uses “we” when he speaks of the law, for the Galatian Gentiles were never under law. But when he speaks of being sons, he uses “you,” for they all had a part in this.

“But before the coming of that faith we were being constantly guarded under law.” “That faith” refers to the whole truth of the good news founded on faith in Christ Jesus. Before Christ came and brought the good news of salvation through His death, the Jews were under the law. It is true that the law turned their sin into transgression and showed how bad they were. But the law did more than this. It guarded them from the idolatry that was all around them. There was one nation in the world (even though that nation had failed so terribly) that still held the truth and the knowledge of the One true God. The law (which perhaps here would include the entire Old Testament; see Rom. 3:1, 2) had been the guardian of the Jews, preserving among them this knowledge of God. The law was not the means of justifying them, for they did not keep it; but they were shut in under the obligation to keep it. They were very proud that God had given it to them and were very proud of the promises given in the law, even though they never could obtain them through it. But the law did guard them and did preserve among them the knowledge of the true God.

So, the Apostle continues, the law became our child trainer unto Christ, in order that we should be justified on the principle of faith. Among the wealthy families of Greece and Rome, it was a common practice to have a man take charge of boys from about the age of six years until perhaps sixteen. This man would have complete charge of the boy, and would be responsible for his manners and for his morals. He would have the authority to punish him when necessary. He would take him to school, though he would not generally teach him. This man was very often a slave. You must remember that slaves in Greece and Rome were often captives in war, and so might be well-educated men, quite able to take charge of the boys of their master. You will understand this man was really more of a guardian than a teacher. Perhaps it is because the Apostle had just been saying that the law was our guardian that brought to mind this custom in the families of Greece and Rome. Even in old English history of a thousand years ago, we read of those who held the title in noble families of the “child trainer.” This is just what the law was to Israel. It was given to train them, to show them their own wickedness, and to punish them. All this it did; but it could not justify them, so the Scripture says: “The law was our child trainer unto Christ, in order that we should be justified on the principle of faith.” The law had shown them that all was lost, all was hopeless, and now Jesus, the Savior, comes—“the faith” comes—and we are justified on the principle of faith.

The Apostle continues, “But that faith having come, we are no longer under a child trainer.” The law had done its work and now the faith has come; the good news of salvation through Christ has come, and the need for the child trainer no longer exists. Just as in the old families of Greece and Rome, when the child grew out of his childhood, when he became sixteen or seventeen years old and was reckoned as a mature son, then the child trainer was no longer needed. So the Apostle says, turning to the Galatians, “You all” (Jews and Gentiles alike, all the Christians in the assemblies in Galatia) “are God’s sons by means of that faith, in virtue of Christ Jesus.” The emphasis is not on the word “all,” but on the word “sons.” In the Greek this word means a son who is of full age. This is the important part of the argument. You are no longer children, so you are no longer under a child trainer, but now you all are full-grown sons; you are no longer subject to the severe and humiliating discipline of the child trainer, very likely a slave himself. Now you are a son, now you are mature, now you are free.

“For you, as many as were baptized unto Christ, clothed yourselves with Christ.” The Apostle assumes that everyone in the assemblies in Galatia had received baptism. Every believer in those days, whether Jew or Gentile, gladly accepted this very blessed sign of having part with Christ. Baptism cannot save us, or take our sins away. “Without shedding of blood is no remission [of sin]” (Heb. 9:22). But baptism is the mark that a man is a Christian. When a man is baptized he takes upon him the name of Christ; he puts on Christ: he clothes himself with Christ. This is all outward, and it may be nothing more than profession without true change of heart, for baptism is like the door that lets us enter into that great circle of profession which we call “Christianity.” Thank God, there are many in this great circle who are true; but, alas, there are very many who are false, who bear the name, but they have never been born again, born into the family of God: they are not truly sons. But these believers in Galatia were baptized “unto Christ.”

This is not at all a question of law. Christian baptism supposes man to be dead; and nobody asks a dead man to keep the law. The only death that can deliver man from his own death is the death of Christ. Therefore, when a man is baptized, he is not baptized unto his own death; he is baptized unto Christ’s death. So when believers in Galatia were baptized, at that moment they “put on Christ,” or “clothed themselves with Christ.”

Every true believer is clothed with Christ. When God looks at me, He sees me in Christ, clothed with Christ. And when I have been baptized, and man looks at me, he says, That man has been baptized; he is a Christian; he bears the name of Christ; he has put on Christ: he has clothed himself with Christ. And this is true of every believer, Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female. We all have put on Christ. When God looks at us, He sees Christ. So the Apostle exclaims: “There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; there is not

male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." All is Christ and only Christ. It is not an old creation, but a new creation. In the old creation there were all these differences, but this is something entirely new. We are all one in Christ: and if you are Christ's, what need to be circumcised? You do not want to become the children of Abraham Jews in that sense, the fleshly sense. The Apostle now closes this part of the argument saying, "But if you are of Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise." Of Christ: you are part of Christ: you are members of Christ: not merely the property of Christ, but you are identified with Christ. See ch. 5:24: "But the ones of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh." These Galatian believers are already Abraham's seed, entirely apart from any question of circumcision or the law; and more than that they are "heirs according to promise" (vs. 29). The Apostle has shown that Christ is the one true Seed; so if we are a part of that one true Seed, then we are Abraham's seed, Abraham's children, heirs according to promise, and all without law or circumcision.

Meditations on the Epistle to the Galatians: Beautiful Grace, Galatians 3:15-20: Abraham and the Covenant

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

"Brothers, I speak according to man [or, I use a comparison drawn from human affairs, or, I argue from the practice of men]; even a man's covenant having been ratified, no one sets (it) aside, or adds provisions to (it). But the promises were spoken to Abraham, and to his seed: he does not say, And to seeds, as concerning many, but as concerning one, and to thy seed, which is Christ. Now I say this, a covenant ratified beforehand by God, the law, having come four hundred and thirty years after, does not deprive of authority, so as to make the promise without efficacy. For if the inheritance (is) on the principle of law, it is no longer on the principle of promise; but God has freely given (it) in grace to Abraham by means of promise. Why then the law? It was added for the sake of transgressions, until the seed should come to whom the promise was made, having been appointed by means of angels in (the) hand of a mediator. But a mediator is not on behalf of one, but God is one." ch. 3:15-20.

"Brothers!" There is something very tender in this word. It comes right from Paul's heart, and from this verse onwards in the epistle we will often find it. I think Paul uses it eight times, besides the time he used it in ch. 1:11, saying again and again, "Brothers, brothers, brothers" as though he would call them back from the path where they had gone astray. Ch. 6 begins and ends with this word "brothers," and the last word in the epistle (except "Amen") is "brothers." It is very touching to see the severity and the love thus twined together.

Paul now uses a common example in daily life to illustrate what he wishes to teach the Galatians. If a covenant is made between two persons, and each puts his seal to this covenant so that it is fully ratified and completed—as we say in law terms, "Signed, sealed and delivered"—then nobody has the right to change it. Nobody can take away some of the provisions or add new provisions. The covenant is settled and confirmed, and may not be altered. This is a common practice in daily life which we all understand and agree to.

Now God had made a covenant with Abraham. God had given Abraham many precious promises. Some of these promises were to himself alone (as in Gen. 12:1-3, when Abraham left his native land in obedience to God's command); some of the promises were given to Abraham's descendants, his "seed" meaning the vast multitudes of descendants that God promised to give to him. If we turn to Gen. 22 we will see that in obedience to God's word Abraham offered up his only begotten son, Isaac, as a burnt offering. You will remember that just as Abraham lifted up the knife to kill his son, God called to him and provided a ram to die instead of Isaac, so that in type Abraham received Isaac back from the dead in resurrection. This is one of the most beautiful pictures in the Bible of God giving His only begotten Son.

After Abraham had shown forth in this way his complete faith in God, God said to him: "By Myself have I sworn... because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed My voice." Gen. 22:16-18. You will notice that this is a promise—a covenant—between God and Abraham. You will notice that it is, as Paul says, "freely given in grace."

There are no conditions attached to it by which Abraham might lose the blessings God promised to him. There was no "IF" in the covenant to raise a doubt. It was certain. It was ratified and was "signed, sealed and delivered" by the Lord God Almighty and confirmed by God's oath. Notice, too, it followed at once on the ground of the death and resurrection (in type) of Abraham's only son whom he loved. (Gen. 22:2.)

Please notice also that there were two parts to this covenant. The first part spoke of Abraham's seed becoming as the stars of heaven and as the sand of the seashore. The second spoke of one "seed"—"In thy seed, shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 26:4). The first part of the covenant ended with the words, "Thy seed [the vast numbers of descendants], shall possess the gate of his enemies" (Gen. 22:17). That speaks to us of the Jews, who are to have their blessings on earth and who are to be victorious over all their enemies. The second part of the covenant is in connection with the Gentiles, for it plainly says, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 26:4). The nations, as you know, are the Gentiles.

It is exceedingly important for us to clearly understand these things, if we are to understand the verses we have just read in Gal. 3:15-20. At first it seems very strange that Paul should use the promise given in Gen. 22 as a foundation for his argument to show the importance of one seed. But when we see the difference between the promise which refers to the Jews and that which refers to the Gentiles, then it is all clear. Notice well, when God gives a promise, not of possessing the gate of his enemies but of bringing blessing to all nations, then he speaks of only one seed. There is no mention made of multitudes of seed as the stars or the sand. It is on this difference that Paul founds his argument. Notice also that the blessing to the Jews and to the Gentiles is all founded on the death and resurrection of God's only begotten Son.

Let us turn again to the verses we have just read in Galatians. Paul first points out that even with an earthly covenant, after it is fully ratified, nothing can be taken from it or added to it. God has clearly given us the terms of the covenant—a free, unconditional covenant. Paul then points out that the promise to the Gentiles was made to one seed "which is Christ" (ch. 1:7). Four hundred and thirty years later the law came. According to law, nothing can set aside, or add to, the covenant given four hundred and thirty years before. So the law is powerless to interfere with the covenant God gave to Abraham; and the Gentiles, "all nations of the earth," (Acts 17:26) may put in their claim according

to this covenant. God will surely bless Israel, and the Jews will surely be exalted, as well as converted, so that they will receive, and believe in, the Lord Jesus as their Messiah; they will be the head of the nations, and not the tail. (See Deut. 28:13.) But in the meantime, under the good news, God is bringing blessing to all the nations of the earth through that one Seed, which is Christ. It may be that Abraham thought that one seed was Isaac; and indeed Isaac was a very wonderful type of the one Seed who should offer up Himself as a burnt offering and rise again from the dead. But now the true Seed, Christ, has come, and today all nations of the earth are receiving the blessing.

The day is coming very quickly when the other part of the promise will be fulfilled, and Israel will come into the most wonderful blessing: but this cannot take place while the good news is still going forth to the nations. We see already the fig tree putting forth its leaves (Matt. 24:32), telling us of Israel's beginning to come to its position, not only as a nation in the earth, but as the head and chief nation. These things make those of us who are of the Church of God turn our eyes with more earnest longing to the heavens, watching and waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ to return and to take us to be forever with Himself, as He so often promises.

(See John 14; 1 Cor. 15:50-58; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 22:20.)

But if all the blessing of the nations is entirely on the ground of grace and only by faith, "why then the law?" (vs. 19). Does not this make very light of the law? We say the promise is everything, and the law can neither set it aside nor add other provisions to it. "Why then the law?" (vs. 19). It was added for the sake of transgressions, until the seed should come to whom the promise was made. All the law can do is bring in transgressions. In the Greek New Testament we find many different words that tell us of wrongdoing. Each word has its own special meaning. The word translated "transgressions" comes from a word meaning "I step over," or "I step across." When I was a boy at school, our teacher used to make all the boys in the class stand around his desk while he asked us questions. He first drew a line with chalk on the floor, and every boy had to stand with the toes of his shoes touching this line. In this way we could not move, for if on the one hand we drew our feet back, or if on the other hand we put our feet forward, we did not have them on this line; then we received a punishment. The word "transgress" tells us of stepping across this line. The word transgression tells us of this line. When we transgress, we step across it. The law is this line. Before the law came, there was sin, there was wrongdoing; but until the line was drawn, until the law came, there was no transgression. "Where no law is, there is no transgression" (Rom. 4:15). So the law was given in order that sin might be shown forth in its true character as transgression: "that sin... might become exceeding sinful" (Rom. 7:13). (See also Rom. 5:20.)

The man who puts himself under law is only drawing a line which will show forth how bad he is, because again and again he steps over this line, and it is manifest to him and to all others that he is a transgressor. He will never, never obtain righteousness in this way. He may labor as hard and as earnestly as he wishes, and all that he will gain will be transgressions; nothing more, nothing better. In ch. 5, 6, we will find a word which means "walking according to line." I think the Apostle says by this word, You want to walk by a line? (They wanted the law for their line.) I will give you lines to walk by. "Why then the law? It was added for the sake of transgressions, until the seed should come to whom the promise was made." In other words, "It was added until Christ should come." Before the law, there was promise which flowed freely from the grace of God. Then came the law to show forth transgression, but only until Christ came, and then once more the grace of God flows forth freely. So we may see that the law was only a parenthesis; it did its own work to show to all what was in the heart of man, for man is a sinner, and the law made this plain. The law showed forth the actual sins which every man commits. The law made it clear that the heart is only evil continually, and the law proved this by the transgressions. That is all the law can do. Then came the Seed, the one Seed, which is Christ. And in Him are fulfilled all the promises of God.

He came under the law for Israel, but He died and rose again, and so was free and able to bless all the nations of the earth. Now the Gentiles are as free as the Jews to receive salvation and blessing from Christ. For on the other side of the grave there is neither Jew nor Gentile, and Christ has come forth from the grave on the resurrection side. At the cross Jew and Gentile joined together to crucify Him; there was no difference there; one was as bad as the other. Now all must be grace, and again there is no difference. God's grace flows out freely to all.

The law worked in two ways. In the first place, the sins which men committed became "exceeding sinful," (Rom. 7:13) because they not only practiced what was evil, but they did so after God had plainly forbidden it. In the second place, "sin in the flesh" (1 Cor. 7:28) (Rom. 8:3), lust, the condition of man according to the flesh, was made clear to all. The flesh loves sin; and even a converted man who tries to conquer it in his own strength is led away captive by the power of sin which rules in the flesh. By the law is the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20), that is, sin in the flesh; and through the law sin became exceeding sinful. (Rom. 7:13.) God showed to all that the fruit and the root were both bad.

If my child is accustomed to being idle and running about the streets, it is a bad habit: but if I forbid him to go out, and he does it again, it is a transgression and is much worse than a bad habit. It was for this purpose that God gave the law, in order to teach us what we really are. The law is holy, just, and good. (Rom. 7:12.) It shows to man his duty towards God, as a child of Adam. It was given to man, when he already was a sinner, not in order to produce sin, but to change sin into transgression.

Now we come to still another argument. The law was "appointed through angels in the hand of a mediator." This mediator was Moses. It is plain that a mediator is not a mediator of one; there must be two parties if there is a mediator. As Job says, "Neither is there any daysman [mediator] betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both" (Job 9:33). Moses received the law "by angels." Gal. 3:19. He stood between God and man. In order to enjoy the result of blessing from the law, each of these parties must keep their part in the covenant. God is faithful; and He surely will keep His part. But alas, even before Moses came down from Mount Sinai, the people had broken their part of the covenant and made a golden calf. The covenant contained the clause: "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me" (Deut. 5:7). Indeed this was the first clause of the covenant. God promised blessing, IF man (Israel) was obedient. But man immediately disobeyed.

But in God's covenant with Abraham, it was altogether different. There was no IF in that covenant. "God is one." It all depended on God. There was no mediator here. God spoke directly to Abraham. There was no question of Abraham's obedience in order to obtain the blessing. It all rested on God's faithfulness: and "God is faithful" (1 Cor. 1:9, 10:13). So that the covenant with Abraham is as strong and as steadfast as the Word of God. But the covenant with Israel, when Moses was the mediator, had no more strength or stability than the faithfulness of man in the flesh. This could not possibly succeed, just as the other covenant with Abraham could not possibly fail. The one depended on God and man: the other depended on GOD ALONE.

Notice also that this has nothing to do with Christ being our Mediator, to bear our sins and save us. The covenant with Abraham only spoke of the promised Seed (that is, Christ). The mediator spoken of in Gal. 3:19, 20 was Moses, and he had nothing to do with this Seed. The covenant with Abraham was simply a promise that the Seed should come, and the Seed did come. But between the time that the Seed was promised and the time that the Seed came, God gave the law. He gave the law to prove man, and to show the weakness and sinfulness of the flesh. It was necessary that the law should come, because man's pride and self-confidence must be shown forth in some way.

We needed a wall outside our house, and I called a mason to build it. He made a very poor foundation, and I said to him, "Your wall will not stand up." However, he guaranteed it and insisted on his own way. Soon the wall appeared to me to be leaning, but I was not sure, so I got a plumb line. I found that the wall was more than a foot out of plumb. I called for the mason. He looked at the wall and said, "That wall is all right. It is quite straight." I did not say a word, but hung the plumb line on it. The plumb line showed how far from true was the wall. The mason's mouth was shut, he could not say a word; his pride and self-confidence were clearly shown forth. But it was necessary to use the plumb line in order to do this. Just so, it was necessary to use the law in order to show forth man's pride and self-confidence. But the plumb line could not make the wall straight; it could only show how bad it was. So the law cannot make us righteous, but can only show how bad we are.

But there is one thing more we must consider before we leave these verses. The law was given by angels in the hand of a mediator. When God gave Abraham the promise, He gave it Himself. He said, "By Myself have I sworn... because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son..." (Gen. 22:16). He spoke directly to Abraham. He did not call an angel or a mediator to come between Himself and Abraham. When God has something to give to man that can never fail, He loves to appear in grace, and give it, or say it, Himself. But if there is something that can only bring distress on man, even though it is for man's good, then God calls others to speak to man. With the law there are two that came between, both the angels and Moses the mediator. What a contrast with the simplicity of grace! In the law, man had to give. In the promise, man had only to receive.

Let us sum up the difference between the law and grace:

1. Instead of justifying, the law condemns. Instead of giving life, it kills. It was added to make manifest, and to multiply, transgressions.
2. It was but temporary. It was only brought in as a parenthesis, and when the Seed came to whom the promise had been given, the authority of the law was annulled.
3. It did not come directly from God to man. There was a double mediation, angels and Moses, between God and man.
4. It depended on two parties: God and man. Not so the promise, which depended only on God.

These four things very clearly show how infinitely higher is grace than law.

Meditations on the Epistle to the Galatians: Beautiful Grace, Galatians 3:6-14: Abraham's Seed

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

"Just as Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

"Know then, that the ones on the principle of faith, these are Abraham's sons! But the Scripture foreseeing that on the principle of faith God justified the nations, announced the good news beforehand to Abraham, that all the nations shall be blessed in thee. So that the ones on the principle of faith are blessed with believing Abraham [or, 'the having faith Abraham']. For whoever are on the principle of works of law, are under a curse; for it is written that, Cursed (is) every one who does not remain constantly in all the things written in the book of the law to do them. But that in virtue of law no one is justified with God, (is) evident, because the just shall live on the principle of faith; but the law is not on the principle of faith; but the one having done them, shall live in virtue of them. Christ has redeemed us out from the curse of the law, having become a curse on behalf of us, because it is written, Cursed (is) every one hanging on a tree; in order that the blessing of Abraham might come unto the nations, in virtue of Jesus Christ, in order that we might receive the promise of the Spirit by means of faith." ch. 3:6-14.

A new paragraph began with ch. 3:1, but we have seen that the first words of ch. 3 reach back to ch. 2 just as truly as they reach forward to the first verses of ch. 3. Paul's heart is so full that it seems as though he could not stop to divide his subject into paragraphs, or subjects. So the present paragraph we hope now to consider begins at v.7. "Know then, that the ones on the principle of faith, these are Abraham's sons." But the subject of Abraham in v.6 closed the last paragraph. So we must remember the argument flows straight on from that verse. Though we have divided our book into chapters, Paul's letter was very little divided. One subject flowed naturally into the next. So we must go back to v.6, which we have quoted above with our present paragraph. "Just as Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Paul quotes this verse from the Greek translation of Gen. 15:6. We find it also in Rom. 4:3 and almost the same words in Rom. 4:9. We should take notice that in this verse in Genesis the words "believe" or "had faith in," "reckon," and "righteousness" are used for the first time in the Bible. In this paragraph, including the verse just quoted, we find six quotations from the Old Testament. The Jewish teachers were insisting on circumcision and the law, because they were taught in the Old Testament. Paul replies, We will see what the Old Testament does teach with regard to the law. How was Abraham reckoned righteous? By law? Surely not! The Old Testament is clear: "Abraham believed, had faith in God." That was how Abraham was reckoned righteous.

The Jewish teachers had said, You must become as Jews. You must live like Jews; keep the Jewish law, the Jewish feasts; receive circumcision, which is the special mark that distinguishes the Jew; then you are proselytes and can be reckoned as Jews. Know then [or, Be it known to you], says Paul, that the ones who are on the principle of faith, these are Abraham's sons. It is not the outward marks that make a man a son of Abraham; it is not even the natural birth: but the ones who follow in the steps of Abraham and have faith in God, these are the ones who

(in God's sight) are the true sons of Abraham. How completely Paul answers every argument of these false teachers!

But the Galatian Christians were Gentiles; they belonged to "the nations," and what right had Paul to say that they could be counted as "sons of Abraham" (Heb. 7:5)? Again Paul goes back to the Old Testament and shows that God had promised Abraham that all nations should be blessed in him. This verse also is quoted from the Greek Old Testament—Gen. 12:3. It is quoted again in Acts 3:25. So according to the Old Testament that had been committed to the Jews, the Galatians had a right to expect blessing from Abraham. How could this blessing come? Surely in the same way that Abraham himself received the blessing: Faith, all of faith, and only faith. "So that the ones on the principle of faith are blessed with the believing Abraham." If we could say, "So that the ones on the principle of faith are blessed with the 'having faith Abraham'," it would be nearer to the Greek. It was faith that marked Abraham. It was faith that brought the blessing to Abraham. So the ones on the principle of faith are marked out as being in the likeness of Abraham, and these are blessed just as Abraham was: the one who was famous for his faith. The Old Testament makes this abundantly clear. The subject of law is never mentioned in this part of the Bible. Abraham never heard of the law. There are those who try to prove that the Ten Commandments were given to Adam in the Garden of Eden. This is just the foolishness of men. The Bible teaches no such thing; on the contrary it plainly says that the law did not come until four hundred and thirty years later than Abraham. (Gal. 3:17.) Faith brings blessing. The law brings a curse.

Now Paul turns to the opposite side of the question. What about the law and the Old Testament? Again he turns to the Old Testament itself to bear witness. "Whoever are on the principle of works of law, are under a curse; for it is written, Cursed is every one who does not remain constantly in all the things written in the book of the law to do them." Gal. 3:10. (See Deut. 27:26, Jer. 11:3.) All the law can do to a man is curse him. The law did suggest bringing blessing to men, but found it impossible, for if they turn aside in the smallest degree from its commands, it curses them. It is very remarkable that in Deut. 27 God commands Israel to stand on the two mountains, six tribes on Mount Gerizim to bless and six tribes on Mount Ebal to curse. We find many curses in this chapter. In v.12 we read of the six tribes to bless. But we find no blessing, for the law cannot bless: and though blessings are mentioned in the next chapter (Deut. 28), all depend on "If thou shalt hearken diligently..." (Deut. 28:1). Note also, the Old Testament which gives us the law ends with "a curse"; but the New Testament ends with these words: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen" (Phil. 4:23).

We must remember that James says, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). What man loves the Lord his God with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength? (Deut. 6:5.) Who loves his neighbor as himself? If a man sees a house on fire, who hopes it is his own house that is burning, and not his neighbor's? Who has never coveted something that is not his? Every honest man knows that he never has, and never can, keep these commands. But the law is like a mighty chain. If you break one link, the whole chain is broken. But "Cursed is every one who does not remain constantly in all the things written in the book of the law to do them." Every man, woman and child who has ever lived (except our Lord) must come under that curse if he puts himself under law. Remember, not only can the law not bless, neither can it forgive. All the law can do to man is curse him and condemn him. The law said, "This do, and thou shalt live" (Luke 10:28). (See also Lev. 18:5.) But no man yet, except our Lord Jesus Christ, could claim life by this method; so we read in the Old Testament: "The just [or, righteous man] shall live on the principle of faith." Hab. 2:4. Why does the Old Testament say this? Because "it is evident that in virtue of law no one is justified with God." There must be another way to justify man; there must be another way to bring life to man, or else every living soul must perish. So, God says, "The just shall live on the principle of faith" (vs. 11). Thank God for this word! This little word was the mighty sword that God used to free Martin Luther from the bondage of the law and the rules of men. You perhaps know the story. He had gone to Rome to try and find salvation by works. He had worked hard for it in Germany without success. But salvation is no more possible to obtain by works in Rome than it is in Germany or in China. Luther was climbing a very long flight of steps on his knees in order to accumulate merit, to give him righteousness. He was about halfway up, when it seemed as though a mighty voice from heaven cried in his ear, "The just shall live by faith" (vs. 11). Martin Luther sprang to his feet and ran down the steps, knowing full well that works could never, never justify him, but only faith.

These are precious words. Paul quotes them from Hab. 2:4 (from the Greek Old Testament). Paul quotes them, rather should we say the Holy Spirit quotes them, again in Rom. 1:17; and the Holy Spirit quotes them a third time in Heb. 10:38. "A threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Eccl. 4:12). Yes, dear reader, my only hope of life, and your only hope, lies in these words. You and I can never obtain life by the law. "The just shall live by faith" (vs. 11). Do not think this means that it is only the just men who may put in a claim for this verse. Remember Abraham became a just man because he believed God. So any poor sinner may also be reckoned a just man, a righteous man, simply by having faith in God. And, "The just shall live by faith" (vs. 11). The words of our Lord Jesus confirm this verse: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life" (John 6:47). And again: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation [or, judgment], but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). Reader, have you this everlasting life? Do you know that you will never come into judgment? Forsake your own works: turn from the law and its curse: put your trust in the Lord Jesus alone, and instantly you have these greatest of all blessings. You have the "verily, verily" of the Lord Jesus Himself to make you know that this is true. Can the law offer anything like this? No, never! The law can only curse. The law is not on the principle of faith: but (the most emphatic "but" that the Greek Testament can use) "the one having done them [or, having done these things] shall live in virtue of them." And nobody has ever done "these things," except our Lord, and the law curses all who come under it.

But, blessed, thrice blessed message! "Christ has redeemed us out from the curse of the law." The word means to buy us out from the curse, just as a man, in days of old, could buy a slave out from the slave market. The word is used especially in connection with buying out slaves from their slavery to set them free. So Christ has bought us out from the curse of the law and set us free. What a price He paid! We read in ch. 1:4 that He "gave Himself for our sins," and we read in ch. 2:20 that He "loved me and gave Himself up for me." This was the price He paid to buy us out—even "Himself." Could He have given more? "For our sakes He became poor" (2 Cor. 8:9); but this is even more than that: "He bought us out from the curse of the law, having become a curse on our behalf." Think, reader, what this means: The holy, spotless Son of God became a curse on our behalf! Eternity will be too short to ever fully understand all that this means.

There are three Greek words used in the New Testament for "redeem." The first really means "I buy," or "I buy in the slave market." We were slaves of sin. Our Lord Jesus bought us with His own blood. So, now we are slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ, bought by Him. "Know ye not that... ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price." 1 Cor. 6:19, 20.

The second word is the one we have been looking at. (Gal. 3:13.) "I buy a slave out from the slave market." I buy him to set him free. The Lord Jesus has not only bought us to be His slaves, but He has bought us out of the slave market to set us free, never to be a slave of any other: never to be put up for sale again in any slave market. We are His slaves for now and forever.

The third word is from a noun that means the ransom price for a slave. (See 1 Peter 1:18; Titus 2:14.) So the meaning is to release a slave on receipt of a ransom. We who are believers in the Lord Jesus have been set free from our former slavery to sin, to be the Lord's freemen.

We were hopeless to redeem ourselves. We had brought the curse on ourselves, but we had no way to escape from it. Then "Christ redeemed us out from this curse, being made a curse for us, because it is written, Cursed (is) every one hanging on a tree." Gal. 3:13. (See Deut. 21:23.) The word used for tree is sometimes translated "gallows." Christ hung on the gallows for us: this, according to the law, made Him a curse. The law had no claim against Him. The law could not curse Him. He had never broken it. He had always remained constantly in all the things written in it. But of His own voluntary will He went to the gallows for us; of His own voluntary will He became a curse to buy you and me out from the curse that lay upon us.

Perhaps it seems a contradiction to say that we are slaves of Jesus Christ, and yet He has bought us out of the slave market to make us free men. There is an old story about a slave market in the south of the United States of America many years ago. An Englishman was walking past the slave market when he noticed that there was a sale of slaves taking place. He went over to watch, as they did not have slaves in England, and he had never seen such a thing before. As he watched, a very fine young man was brought out for sale. He was young and strong, and had a fine head and face. The bid went high for him, and as the Englishman watched, his heart was stirred with great pity for this man. At last he also began to bid; the price went higher and higher, but the Englishman determined that he should buy that slave. At last his bid was the highest, and the slave was handed over to him.

The slave came to him with chains on his hands and his feet, and a look of fury in his face. He cursed the Englishman with all the power he possessed. He said, "You call yourself an Englishman. You say you do not believe in slavery, and yet you buy me. Curses be upon you!" The Englishman did not say one word, until at last the man, having no more breath to curse, stopped.

Then the Englishman stepped forward, unlocked the chains on his hands and his feet, and threw them away, saying to him, "I bought you to set you free. You are a free man!" The slave fell down at his feet and cried out with tears, "I am your slave forever!" He became the faithful slave of that Englishman, but he was also a free man.

In v.10 we read that we are "under the curse" (vs. 10). Then in v.13 we read, "Having become a curse on behalf of us." This literally is "over" or "above" us. He is made a curse "over us," and finally in the same verse, Christ has redeemed us out from under the curse. Think of the curse as a great sword hanging by a thread over my head. It may fall at any moment and destroy me. Christ came above me, between me and the sword. The sword fell on Him; He received the blow that should have taken us down to hell; He took us out from under the curse. This preposition translated "on behalf of," or "over," or "above," is really the preposition of substitution, used already in ch. 1:4; 2:20 to show that the Lord Jesus Christ is our Substitute.

It is true that the law was given to Israel, and so these verses apply in a special way to the Jews and to those who, like the Galatians, have put themselves in the position of Jews, under law. But in a wider sense it applies to every one of us, for in Rom. 2:14, 15 we read: "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness." And again, "That by the law every mouth is stopped and all the world is guilty before God." Rom. 3:19. Every man by nature turns to law or good works for salvation. So every one of us may put in our claim for that redemption (without works) out from under the curse.

Redeemed out from under the curse, the blessing of Abraham, in virtue of Jesus Christ, may now flow out freely to all the nations. We may put in our claim as part of those nations indicated long since in God's promise to Abraham in Gen. 12:3.

Meditations on the Epistle to the Galatians: Beautiful Grace, Galatians 3:1-6: The Holy Spirit by Law or by Grace?

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

We have suggested that the book of Galatians may be divided into three parts, each part of two chapters. So we have now reached the second part of the book. The subject of the first part was a brief history of certain events in Paul's life which showed that his apostleship and his teaching did not come from men, but from God. We suggested that the second part (ch. 3, 4) gives to us the doctrine connected with the subject of this epistle. But our readers may see that the last verses of ch. 2 have already given us some most important doctrines. We have there learned that we are dead to the law. Notice it does not say the law is dead, but we are dead to it. We are crucified with Christ; yet we live, risen with Him. Now we have a new life: Christ lives in me. And this new life we live by faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. These are doctrines of the very highest importance, and we find these doctrines in ch. 2. Truly no man can say where the subject of history ends and the subject of doctrine begins. Though the book clearly has these various subjects, yet they are so closely woven together as one letter, that we cannot divide it into different parts.

Again, let me remind my readers that when Paul wrote this letter there were no chapters or verses. Ch. 3 reads straight on from ch. 2. We have just learned that "Christ liveth in me" (vs. 2:20). Now we are to learn another, most blessed truth. The Spirit of God also lives in me. Let us read these verses together. (But compare Rom. 8:9, 10).

Is it not Christ who lives in me by His Spirit? See Gal. 4:6; Phil. 1:19; Col. 1:27; 2:6.)

"O senseless Galatians, who has bewitched you, to whom, over against (your very) eyes, Jesus Christ has been publicly placarded—nailed on the cross. This only I wish to learn from you: Have you received the Spirit on the principle of works of law, or on the principle of a message (telling) of faith? Are you so senseless? Having begun by (the) Spirit, now are you making yourselves complete by (the) flesh? Have you suffered so many things for no reason? If indeed (they are) really for no reason? Therefore the One abundantly supplying to you the Spirit, and working mighty things in [or, among] you, (is it) on the principle of works of law, or on the principle of a message (telling) of faith? Just as Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." ch. 3:1-6.

The Apostle had just written the words: "The Son of God loved me and gave up Himself on my behalf." That was the theme, the center, the substance of Paul's message. "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). You remember when he went to Corinth he determined in himself not to know anything except "Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). Paul had told this story until the Galatians had, as it were, seen Him with their own eyes nailed on the cross over against them. He had publicly placarded "Jesus Christ crucified" (vs. 1) before them.

The Son of God loved me, and gave Himself up for me. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. It was grace, all unspeakable grace: but the Galatian Christians had "set aside God's grace" and had chosen the law. The Galatian Christians had turned their eyes away from Christ crucified and were looking for righteousness to come by the law. If this is true, "then Christ died for nothing!" (ch. 2:21). The very thought makes Paul indignantly exclaim, "O senseless Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Who has fascinated you? Who has cast on you 'the evil eye'?" How well we in China can understand this question! How many a mother is afraid that someone may "cast the evil eye" on one of her children! How many are frightened of witchcraft! So it was in Galatia. The Galatians also knew all about these things of heathendom; and Paul uses this, that they so well understand, to show that it was the devil's evil work, not the work of God, to turn their eyes away from Christ to the law. These false teachers were nothing better than the heathen fortunetellers about them, practicing witchcraft, and they had bewitched the Galatians.

This indignant exclamation links together ch. 2, 3. You must not think of there being a division here. The words "O senseless Galatians" (vs. 1) reach back to the last verses of ch. 2 and forward to the first verses of ch. 3.

"This only would I learn from you." It was as though Paul says: The one argument I now bring before you is enough to prove to you that you are wrong. That argument is the presence of the Spirit of God. It is, in truth, a mighty argument. But alas, today Christians believe so little in the presence of the Holy Spirit that they lose much of the power of it. Paul continues: "Have you received the Spirit on the principle of works of law, or on the principle of a message (telling) of faith?" The Galatians knew well that they had received the Spirit of God. They knew the mighty change which He had worked in themselves and in each other. Was this on the principle of law? They had never heard of having to keep the law when they received the Spirit of God; so certainly it was not by law. This question, indeed, should have answered everything for the Galatians.

But perhaps we should turn aside for a moment to consider more fully what the Scriptures teach regarding the Holy Spirit. Many true Christians today are not sure whether they have the Holy Spirit or not. Many are praying that He may be given to them. This is the test according to the Scriptures: If a man, convicted of sin and believing on the Lord Jesus as his only Savior who has finished the work of salvation, can truly from his heart say, "Abba, Father," such a one possesses the Holy Spirit. "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear [which the law gives]; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15). And again: "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (ch. 4:6). The one who reads his Bible and believes it knows that this is true. But those who do not know this from their own Bibles very often do possess the consciousness of their relationship with God; He is their Father, and they are His children. And in the presence of God, in prayer, they will from their hearts address Him as "Father!" Such a person may be very ignorant and have much to learn. He may also have much to "unlearn" of false teaching he has received from men. But if he can truly say "Father," then it is surely the Holy Spirit alone who has taught this to him. This is not simply "conversion." A sinner, as a sinner, cannot receive the Spirit, but as soon as a man truly believes in Christ and His precious blood cleanses his sins, then the Holy Spirit comes and dwells in him. You remember the Apostle asks: "Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (vs. 2). Eph. 1:13 answers this question. "In whom... after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise".

We see the difference in the case of the prodigal son. He had come to himself; he had owned he had sinned and that he was ready to perish. He arose and set off to return to his father. He was acting rightly. He was truly converted: but as yet he had not on the best robe, nor the ring, nor the shoes. As yet he had not met his father. He knew well the wealth and bounty of his father's house, but he did not know if he might enter there. He did not know if his father would receive him. He had not the sense of being a son. He meant to say, "Make me as one of thy hired servants" (Luke 15:19), for he knew he was not worthy to be called a son. He had not the sense of being a son, although he truly was one. How many truly converted men and women are in this condition. They are not sealed by the Spirit. (Eph. 1:13.) We may not be able to explain how we cry "Abba, Father" or why we know we have this privilege. We may know nothing of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (we must know something of the Scriptures to know this); but if we can truly cry, "Father!" then we must have the Spirit of God dwelling in us. There are many who, from bad teaching, are afraid to say they are children of God; but when they are alone in prayer, in God's presence, they say, "Father!" and they say this blessed name from the bottom of their hearts. This is the work of the Spirit dwelling in them. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17). There is not only liberty in the presence of God, but there is also liberty from the law and from the power of sin.

Now look for a moment at the work of the Holy Spirit for us. First, it is the Holy Spirit who convinces, or convicts, us of sin. (John 16:8, 9, margin.) He is not a spirit of bondage, but of adoption. (Rom. 8:15.) We know that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. (Rom. 8:17.) If we are heirs, then we have an inheritance; but to be in such a relationship to God and to Christ is far more than having an inheritance, which is only the result of this relationship. All this we know by the Spirit.

But there is more. The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us. (Rom. 5:5.) How precious this is. We dwell in love, the love of God; for God is love (1 John 4:16), and by the Spirit, He dwells in us. The proof of the love is that God gave His only begotten Son, and that the Son gave Himself for us. But we can only enjoy this love through the Holy Spirit. By His presence the love is "shed abroad in our hearts" (Rom. 5:5).

The Apostle John says: "No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit" (1 John 4:12-13). Then, to show that this belongs to all Christians, without any question, he says: "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in Him, and he in God" (1 John 4:15).

It is difficult for one who does not walk with God to believe that we can dwell in God and God in us. But the Word clearly says: "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom. 8:9). He dwells in us, and the one who walks in communion with God enjoys this and rejoices in it with humility and gratitude. The presence of God never makes us proud. He is too great for us to be anything before Him. It was not when Paul was in the third heaven that he was in danger of being exalted above measure, but when he came down to earth again. (See 2 Cor. 12.)

The Spirit of God also gives us to know that we are in Christ, and Christ in us. (John 14:20.) There is no condemnation for them that are in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 8:1.) (Note that the last half of this verse is not in the original Scriptures.) Not only are our sins forgiven and we are justified before God, but we are acceptable to God in our Lord Jesus who is the beloved, "accepted [or, taken into favor] in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6). Here we see the believer's perfect acceptance, and also his responsibility. Before God I am perfectly accepted in Christ. But if I am in Christ, Christ is in me as life and power, and I am responsible to manifest this life before the world. Christ is for us before God, and we are for Christ before the world.

By the Holy Spirit, therefore, we know that we are in Christ, and Christ in us. What a wonderful fact, that the Spirit of God dwells in us! This is the result of Christ's perfect redemption. But what a responsibility this is also for the Christian! God did not dwell with Adam, even when he was innocent, before he sinned, in the Garden of Eden. God did not dwell with Abraham, though He visited him, and Abraham was called "the Friend of God" (James 2:23). (See also Isa. 41:8.) But as soon as Israel was redeemed by the blood of a lamb, even though this was but a type of the true redemption, then God came to dwell in the midst of His people and sat between the cherubim in the tabernacle, in the holy of holies. Now that the true redemption is completed, He comes to dwell in believers individually, and in His people, gathered together by the Holy Spirit. His presence in us is more than conversion. The persons washed in the blood of Jesus become the dwelling place of God. They are thus sealed for glory by means of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

But perhaps the Galatians reply: You do not speak fairly. You do not understand. We trust only in the work of Christ to save us and to make us righteous before God. But after we are saved, after we are made righteous, then we must have the law to keep us walking as we should. The law will help to keep us holy. The Apostle exclaims at such a suggestion: "Are you so senseless? Having begun by (the) Spirit, now are you making yourselves complete by (the) flesh?" There are very many today who will acknowledge that they must "begin by the Spirit." It is only the Spirit of God who can bring conviction of sin. (See John 16:8,9, margin.) It is only the Spirit of God that can give us faith in Christ. So it is only by the Spirit that we can be justified. But after they are saved, there are multitudes who wish to take the law for "a rule of life." "Are ye so senseless?" (vs. 3). asks the Holy Spirit. Do you suppose that God would save you and cleanse you and justify you, and then leave you to "make yourselves complete" by means of the old flesh that is enmity against God? (See Rom. 8:5-9.) The words "making yourselves complete" are translated in this way because the Greek word "complete" is in the middle voice, meaning "to do something for myself." Do you suppose that the law can sanctify you? can make you holy? Never! In John 17:17 the Lord prays: "Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy Word is truth" (John 17:17). In Eph. 5:26, speaking of the Church of God, we read: "That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word" (Eph. 5:26). In 1 Thess. 5:23 it is God who sanctifies us. In Heb. 13:12, "Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate." We might continue with other scriptures, but never would we find that the law sanctifies. O, dear readers, are any of you so senseless?

In the last verse of ch. 2 we read, "If righteousness come by the law, then Christ died for nothing." Now the Apostle turns to the sufferings that the Galatian Christians passed through when they first confessed Christ. They thought it was well worthwhile then to suffer for Christ's sake. But if they are justified by law, it was all a terrible mistake. Christ died for nothing, and their own sufferings were all without reason, all in vain. Paul adds: "If indeed (they are) really in vain." It is as though he said, But though I say this, I really cannot believe it is so. I cannot help but think that surely those sufferings meant that you truly did trust in Christ.

We must compare these sufferings with Gal. 6:12. There we find the true secret of the motives of those who preached circumcision. They did this "only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ" (ch. 6:12). It is the cross that brings suffering. The enemy hates the cross. He is willing to have the law, but not the cross. Leave out the cross and you can avoid suffering for Christ's sake.

Notice the different expressions the Apostle uses: In ch. 2:2 he spoke of running "to no purpose"; in ch. 2:21 Christ died "for nothing." Here in ch. 3:4 they themselves had suffered "without reason," and in ch. 4:11 The Apostle says he fears lest he has bestowed on them labor "without reason." These are three different expressions in the Greek, as shown in the translation, though all translated "in vain" in our English Bible.

But Paul continues the subject of the Holy Spirit. "Therefore the One abundantly supplying to you the Spirit, and working mighty things in you [or, among you], is it on the principle of works of law, or on the principle of a message (telling) of faith?" John 3:34 says, "God giveth not the Spirit by measure." It is God who gives the Spirit, and He supplies the Spirit abundantly. (This word in the Greek originally meant one who supplied a "chorus"—a group of singers—with everything they needed. A wealthy man would do this very generously and abundantly; so the word came to have the meaning of "supplying abundantly.") You remember in John 7:38, our Lord said: "He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). We read the explanation in the next verse: "But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39). "Rivers of living water" speak of the abundant supply.

The Galatian believers had experienced this abundant supply of the Holy Spirit; and now the Apostle asks, Was it by law or by a message (telling) of faith? Or, perhaps we should translate it "a hearing of faith" (vs. 2). They heard the message and believed.

It seems as though the three great phases of the work of the Holy Spirit come before us in these verses. First, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit by works of law?" This tells of the convicting power of the Spirit, of the way He led the soul to faith in Christ, and then of how He came and

dwelt in the new believer. Second, the Spirit completes the work He began. He first began the great work in the soul, and it is He who completes that work, making the believer more and more conformed to Christ. (Rom. 8:29; 12:2; Phil. 3:10.) "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). Now, third, we have the Spirit abundantly supplied to the believers and working mighty things in them, or among them, which tells us not only of that mighty change which had taken place at their conversion, but also speaks of works of power, such as miracles; and would probably mean the gifts of the Spirit, such as we see in 1 Cor. 12:4-31. "To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will" (1 Cor. 12:8-11). These things the Galatian assemblies had seen among themselves. They knew they were all true. And they knew well that all this had come to them before ever there was one word said to them about works of the law. They had heard the message, the "report" (Isa. 53:1), and they had believed it; and they had then received all these blessings of the Spirit of God.

This leads the Apostle to his next great subject. Just as the Galatians had heard a message and believed it, had been justified by faith and received the Spirit by faith, so Abraham had heard a message from God. He had believed it, and God reckoned it to Abraham as righteousness. You remember the story—one of the most beautiful in the Bible, to make plain how a sinner is justified. It was a clear, starry night. The Lord brought Abraham forth out of his tent, and He said to him, "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them," (Gen. 15:5) and He said unto him, "So shall thy seed be" (Rom. 4:18). Abraham believed the Lord's word, though he was then an old man and his wife an old woman. In the eyes of man this promise was impossible; but Abraham believed God, and God counted, or reckoned, this faith to him as righteousness. So the record goes in Gen. 15:5, 6. Nothing could be more clear and more simple. It was by simple faith in a simple statement. Abraham did not look at the impossibility of the promise, but he looked at the almighty power of the One who made it. And he said, "Yes, Lord, I believe you." And God said, "Abraham, I count you to be a righteous man." Even so does God count me a righteous man, wretched sinner though I am by nature. God says, "Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6). I say, "That is myself; I believe it: I thank Thee." And God says, "I count you a righteous man." Reader, does God count you righteous? He waits to do so: He waits till you, by simple faith in His Word, trust only to the death of Christ for your sins. Then He says, I count, I reckon, you righteous. Remember that this happened 430 years before the law was given. Abraham had never heard of the law when God reckoned him righteous. It was all by grace. It was all by faith.

"Justified freely by His grace" (Rom. 3:24).

"Who... was raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25).

"Justified by faith" (ch. 2:16).

"Justified by His blood" (Rom. 5:9).

Meditations on the Epistle to the Galatians: Beautiful Grace, Galatians 2:11-17: Peter's Visit to Antioch Are the Jews Under Law?

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"But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to (the) face, because he was convicted of evil. For before (the) coming of certain from James, he was eating [making a habit of eating] with (those) of the nations; but when they came, he began to draw back, and was setting himself apart, fearing the ones from the circumcision. And the rest of (the) Jews also dissembled [played the hypocrite] with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away in their dissimulation [hypocrisy]. But when I saw that they do not walk straightforwardly according to the truth of the good news, I said to Cephas in the presence of all: If thou, being a Jew, art living as the nations, and not as the Jews, how (is it) thou art compelling the nations to be as Jews? We, by nature Jews, and not sinners from (the) nations, knowing then that a man is not justified on the principle of works of law, but only by means of faith of Christ Jesus, we also, we have believed on Christ Jesus, in order that we might be justified on the principle of faith of Christ and not on the principle of works of law, because on the principle of works of law, not any flesh shall be justified. If then, while seeking to be justified in [or, in virtue of] Christ, we also ourselves have been found sinners, then is Christ a minister of sin? Far be the thought! [or, No indeed! or, Let it not be!]" ch. 2:11-17.

In our last chapter we saw that though certain Jews from Jerusalem came to the Gentiles at Antioch and tried to compel them to act as Jews, to be circumcised and keep the law, yet the assembly at Jerusalem refused to approve this action and decided that the Gentiles were not to be put under law. The question that now comes before us is: "Are the Jews who are Christians to be kept under law?"

Peter came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. This, we suppose, was soon after the great conference in Jerusalem, of which we have spoken. At Antioch Peter found that the Jewish Christians who lived there ate with the Gentile Christians. According to the law, there were many kinds of food that a Jew was not allowed to eat. (See Lev. 11.) You remember in Acts 10, the Lord sent Peter a vision of a great sheet let down from heaven, in which was every kind of four-footed beasts of the earth and wild beasts (all of which the law forbade the Jews to eat); and a voice came from heaven saying, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat" (Acts 10:13). Peter replied, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." The voice said to him, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common" (Acts 10:13-15). The Lord sent this vision three times, and by it taught Peter not only that the Gentiles were not unclean in His sight, but that God had changed the old Jewish law that forbade eating certain foods. The Jews carried this law further, and refused to eat with the Gentiles, in case they might eat some forbidden food. Not long ago a good friend of mine who is a Jew came to tea with me. He sat at the table and talked, but refused to eat anything or even drink a cup of tea. This was the practice of the Jews in the days of Peter and Paul. But in Acts 11:3 we see that Peter obeyed the Lord and ate with the Gentiles.

When Peter came to Antioch, and found the Jews eating freely with the Gentiles, he knew that this was God's own order, and he joined them. After a time certain men came from James from Jerusalem.

Peter knew very well that according to the truth of the good news, God Himself had broken down the old "middle wall of partition" (Eph. 2:14), and that this old Jewish law had been done away in Christ. God Himself had revealed this to Peter. Peter knew the liberty that is in Christ Jesus, and he knew that this liberty was of God.

(From the Chinese')

There are solemn lessons for us in Peter's life. It is most unlikely you or I would have been any better. Thank God that in such times of extremity, God has found a man to stand in the breach. In days of old God said that He would destroy Israel, "had not Moses His chosen stood before Him in the breach, to turn away His wrath, lest He should destroy them" (Psa. 106:23). In Ezek. 22:30 we read: "I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none." How terribly sad! The Lord is seeking for one man to be true to Him, one man to stand in the breach like Moses or Paul, but He found him not. Perhaps our day seems like this, as we see the enemy coming in like a flood. (Isa. 59:19.) And though we may not have faith or courage to follow these noble servants of old, we may at least "be grieved for the breach" (Amos 6:6, margin) that we see all around us today. In Ezek. 9:4 we see that the Lord puts His special mark on those who sigh and cry for all the abominations that be done.

Well may we Gentiles today thank God that He found one man in those days of old to stand in this breach. Peter had failed, and even Barnabas, who had stood so bravely with Paul in Jerusalem, had turned aside through fear; and Paul is left to fight the battle single-handed. It reminds us of Shammah in 2 Sam. 23:11, 12. All the people of Israel were afraid and ran away as the Philistines came, but Shammah stood in a piece of ground full of lentils, and he defended it all alone, single-handed: "and the Lord wrought a great victory" (2 Sam. 23:12). Even so was it in these days at Antioch. It seemed as though either the Gentiles must be as Jews, or else there must be a terrible division in the Church, with a Gentile church on one side and a Jewish church on the other. It seemed as though the false teachers had triumphed.

Do not suppose because a man is a leader or honorable or highly esteemed that he must be right and that it is right for us to follow him without examining his path for ourselves. All at Antioch, Jews and Gentiles, must have known that Peter had made a mistake. Either he never should have eaten with the Gentiles, or else he should have continued to eat with them after the men came down from James. Peter had publicly sinned and had drawn away others after him in this sin. Paul therefore publicly rebuked Peter in the presence of all.

Notice first that in Jerusalem at the conference it is apparent that Paul and Peter are on an equality. The false teachers who had come to Galatia had said Paul should have received his authority as an apostle and his teaching from Peter: but now it is shown that Peter is not his superior.

In Jerusalem it was decided that the Gentile believers should not be put under the Jewish law. Now at Antioch the question has been forced on the conscience of the Christians: are the Jewish believers still to be held under the Jewish law?

Now, in the presence of all, Paul rebukes Peter: "If thou, being a Jew, art living as the nations, and not as the Jews, how is it thou art compelling the nations to be as Jews?" Peter's own conscience told him this was all true. And Paul continues: "We, by nature Jews, and not sinners from the nations, knowing that a man is not justified on the principle of works of the law, but only by means of faith of Christ Jesus." "Sinners from the nations" was the way the Jews looked at the Gentiles. The Jews believed they were better than the Gentiles, and Paul uses to Peter the old words which showed forth the natural pride of heart that refused to acknowledge "there is no difference" (Rom. 3:22, 10:12). Peter knew this was true. He knew well that whether it was a matter of sin before God or salvation without works by grace alone, there was "no difference." His own scriptures, Psa. 14, had told him all this. There he read in his Hebrew Bible: "They are all together become stinking." Psa. 14:3 (margin). (See also Rom. 3:22, 23.) But when he set himself apart, as he had just done, he was acting on the same old principle that the Jews were better than the Gentiles and could trust to their own works for salvation.

Paul continues: You know "that a man is not justified by works of the law" (vs. 16). Why then, Peter, are you seeking to put yourself under the law? Did you not say in Jerusalem that it was a yoke neither we nor our fathers were able to bear? You know that a man is only justified by the faith of Christ Jesus. You know there is no other way. Why, then, are you seeking to add works of the law?

Paul does not make it clear whether he said to Peter everything he wrote down to the end of this chapter; but quite possibly he did so. He continues, pointing out to Peter how he, and Paul, were justified. If any man had ground of being justified by works of law, certainly Paul had. He tells us this himself: "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more" (Phil. 3:4).

Phil. 3:4 (and the verses that follow). But Paul reminds Peter that "we also, we have believed on Christ Jesus, in order that we might be justified on the principle of faith of Christ and not on the principle of works of law." Peter and Paul themselves have no hope of being justified by works. They also had "become stinking." There is no difference. Whether it is Paul or Peter, whether it is Jew or Gentile, whether it is Galatians or Chinese, there is no difference: we all have sinned; and the only hope of every one of us is Christ Jesus, and only faith in Him. Why then, Peter, are you adding your own works? Why are you separating yourself as if you are better than they? Do you not remember your own Old Testament, that in Psa. 143:2 it says: "In Thy sight shall no man living be justified" (on the principle of works of law)? These are mighty arguments that everybody knew were true: these are in fact the great arguments and the great theme of this epistle.

Paul continues: If, then, while seeking to be justified in virtue of Christ, we also ourselves have been found sinners, is Christ a minister, or promoter, of sin? If you have done right, Peter, in setting yourself apart from the Gentiles and putting yourself in this way under the law, then it is quite evident that you were all wrong when you ate with the Gentiles: and Christ was a promoter of sin when He, by His Spirit, told you to do so: and it was all wrong that "what God hath cleansed" (Acts 11:9) (Acts 10:15) we may not call common. This is what is implied in Paul's words.

But Paul still continues: "For if what I threw down, these things again I build, I demonstrate myself a transgressor." ch. 2:18. It was Peter himself who had first opened the door of the good news to the Gentiles, had first thrown down the middle wall of partition. It was Peter

himself who had first eaten with them. It was Peter himself who had defended this action when they “of the circumcision contended with him” (Acts 11:2) regarding it. It was Peter himself who had begun. Now Peter changes all his course. He had been throwing down the ceremonies of the Jewish law. He had been throwing down the middle wall of partition. Now he is building up this wall, and throwing down the freedom of Christ. And so, if he is right now, he clearly demonstrates to everybody that he was wrong before; he demonstrates himself a transgressor.

Paul goes on (we do not know if he still is speaking to Peter, but we suppose so): “For I, by means of law have died, in order that I shall live to God. With Christ I have been crucified: but I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me: but (the life) which now I live in (the) flesh, in (virtue of) faith I live, the (faith) of the Son of God, the One having loved me, and having given up Himself on behalf of me.” ch. 2:19, 20.

All the law can do to a sinner is kill him: and “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Peter was a sinner, and if he put himself under law, all it could do was to kill him. Paul says plainly: “I by means of law have died to law.” The law had killed Paul, and now it had no further power over him.

Recently a man was executed for murder. Not long afterward it was proved that this man was guilty of other murders; but the law had no power whatever to say or to do anything to him. The law had already killed him for his sin; and now by the law he is dead to the law, and the law is powerless to touch him.

This is the position of each one of us. The law has already condemned each one of us to death, and “with Christ I have been crucified.” The death sentence has not only been passed on each of us—“all the world... guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19)—but in Christ it has been carried out. He, the sinless One, has been crucified, and “with Christ I have been crucified.” So the law is completely powerless to touch me. It has nothing further to say to me. It has killed me, and that is all it can do. Now, I have died “in order that I shall live unto God.”

Notice again (as in ch. 2:4), it is not “that I might live unto God” (vs. 19) (with a doubt), but “that I shall live unto God.” The law had killed Paul, and yet he lives. Christ had taken all the punishment on Himself: so Paul’s death was but the death of “the old man,” Saul the Pharisee, and this was a very great gain. The law had killed him, but Christ had died instead of him: now, Paul being dead, the law can do no more—it has dominion over a man only as long as he lives. (Rom. 7:1.) We are each of us associated with Christ in His death and in His resurrection; so He has become our life: “With Christ I have been crucified: but I live, no longer I but Christ lives in me.” So I am dead both to the flesh and to the law. There is no condemnation for me since Christ has taken it. (Rom. 8:1.) He took all my sins and bore them upon the cross, abolishing them by His death. I am free, not only from the guilt of my sins, but from the power of sin in the flesh. (See Rom. 8:1-3.) For the believer, the “old man” is crucified with Christ (see Rom. 6:6 and Gal. 5:24) that the body of sin might be annulled, or made inactive.

Suppose you take a pig from the mud and filth in which it enjoys living and, as Peter suggests (2 Peter 2:22), you wash it. You put a pretty ribbon around its neck and bring it into the best room in your house. You give it a list of rules, telling it what it must do and what it must not do in order to keep clean. Now suppose that pig sees outside your fence a pond with mud and filth: what will it do? Will it remember the rules you have given it, and say, No, I must not go into that mud? No, “the sow that was washed” (2 Peter 2:22) returns to her wallowing in the mire. The pig is not subject to these rules, neither indeed can be. (Compare Rom. 8:7.)

You see that it is a hopeless matter to reform this pig, so you do the only thing you can: you kill it. Now the pig no longer has any desire to wallow in the mire. Then you take a living lamb, pure and clean, without spot or blemish (compare 1 Peter 1:19), and you take this living lamb and put it inside the dead pig, so that now the pig has the lamb for its life. Now the pig loathes and abhors the filth and the mud. The other pigs think it strange that this pig does not run with them to enjoy the mud and filth (compare 1 Peter 4:4), and they speak evil of it. They say, This is not a true pig; it has not the nature of a pig. They speak right, for this pig has a new nature. The spotless lamb is its life; it delights to be clean and to keep away from filth of every kind, for that is the nature of the lamb.

It might be that this pig would fall into the mud, but it will never be happy until it is out of the filth and made clean again. The pig with the life of a lamb inside it does not practice being filthy: on the contrary, it hates it. (See 1 John 3:9 JND.)

This is a feeble picture of what Christ has done for us. He, the spotless Lamb of God, is our life. Just as it was not the pig that lived, but the lamb lived in it, so “I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me.”

Christ has redeemed us, and now we are not put back under law to which we have died. Our salvation now depends entirely on Christ, and so there is no uncertainty about it. The flesh still is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. (In ch. 5 we will see the struggle that still goes on between it and the Spirit of God dwelling in us.) But now by faith the believer reckons himself to be dead, crucified with Christ: and Christ risen has now become our life. Christ lives in us, and we can thus reckon ourselves to be dead to sin (Rom. 6:10, 11) and alive unto God in Jesus Christ our Lord. So, the life which now I live in the flesh, I live in virtue of faith, the faith of the Son of God, the One who loved me, and gave Himself up to death for me.

“The faith of the Son of God” (vs. 20): this means the faith which I have in the Son of God. Just as when I say I have the love of God in my heart, it may mean God’s love to me, or my love to God. The power of that new life must come from my faith in Christ.

The expression “the faith of the Son of God” (vs. 20) has caused difficulty to some. They say it must mean the faith exercised by the Son of God. This is not so. This expression with “of” is the genitive case in Greek, and it may be either subjective or objective genitive. That means that the noun following “of” may be either the subject or the object of the verb idea in the noun before “of.” Take, for example, the expression “the love of God” (Eph. 3:19). This may be subjective and mean “God loves me,” that is, the love of God to me, as in Rom. 8:39. Nothing can “separate us from the love of God.” Or it may be objective and mean my love to God, as in 1 John 5:3: “This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.” In this passage in Galatians the expression is certainly objective: my faith in the Son of God gives me the power of the new life.

“I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness (is) by means of law, then Christ has died for nothing.” ch. 2:21.

Peter had set aside the grace of God by his action. It seemed a small thing merely to refuse to eat meals with the Gentile believers, for there was no suggestion that they refused to eat the Lord's supper with them. But turning aside this way from the truth led Peter into deceit and hypocrisy: by it, he made Christ a minister of sin. He set aside the grace of God, and he made Christ die for nothing. The Galatian assemblies had also set aside the grace of God and chosen law instead. They also made Christ die for nothing.

Those men and women today who seek to add the law or anything else to the death of Christ, do these very same wicked things. They also set aside the grace of God and make Christ die for nothing. It may seem a small matter to say, "I believe in Christ, and try to keep the law." "I believe in Christ and do the best I can." "I believe in Christ, and seek to live by 'the golden rule'." All these statements, which we hear so often, in reality are trying to add something to Christ and His work on the cross, and put those who say them into the very same position as the false teachers, Peter, and the Galatian assemblies.

Meditations on the Epistle to the Galatians: Beautiful Grace, Galatians 2:1-5: More About Paul's Visit to Jerusalem

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

In our last chapter we looked at the great conference at Jerusalem when the apostles and elders considered the questions of circumcision and the law with regard to the Gentile believers. In that chapter we considered chiefly the account Luke gives us in Acts 15. We must now briefly consider a little further the account Paul gives us in Galatians, which we have quoted at the beginning of the last chapter. Please read these verses, Gal. 2:1-5, once more.

In v.3 we read: "But not even Titus, he with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised." The word "Greek" has three meanings in the New Testament. First, a Greek by nationality; second, in contrast to a Jew, it means any Gentile—not necessarily one of Greek nationality; third, in a wider sense, it means all nations who are not Jews, but who were under the influence of Greek learning and customs. In this verse, we believe the meaning is simply that Titus was a Gentile.

The word "compelled," in the same verse, tells us that the Jewish teachers made very strong efforts to compel Titus to receive circumcision. As we read further down in this chapter, we will be astonished at the power that these men had in the Church in those days. It is evident that they were determined not to receive Titus as a Christian unless he would receive circumcision, which was a sign that he was under the law. We can see from these verses in Galatians that the attack made on the freedom of the Church of God was very bitter, and very terrible.

Paul's description of these men is very strong. First, he says they were false. They were traitors. They were not true believers in Christ at all. They had outwardly accepted Christianity, but they knew nothing of the power of the precious blood of Christ to cleanse their sins. They were professors merely, and really did not have eternal life. They were in Paul's words "false brethren." This word is only used twice in the New Testament, here and in 2 Cor. 11:26. They were "the false brethren," (vs. 4) showing the Galatians knew them. Sad to say, we have multitudes of this kind of men around us today. There are very many everywhere who are only Christians in name, but have never known what it means to be "born again." (See John 3.) They have never known real conviction of sin, nor have they known what a terrible burden their sins really are: nor have they ever known the power of the precious blood of the Lord Jesus to take away those sins. These false brethren had been brought in by stealth, brought in without the other brethren knowing. This Greek word is used of what we now call "fifth columnists," that is, enemies brought in secretly, who pretend to be friends, and do their evil work from the inside, instead of attacking from the outside as honest men do. These men had come in before, not by the door, but had climbed up some other way and so come in (see John 10) "to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus." The words "to spy out" are used in the Greek Old Testament for spying out a city. (2 Sam. 10:3.) It means to spy out with the intention of overthrowing by an enemy. Notice that our freedom is not freedom to sin, but freedom in Christ Jesus. That is the foundation of true Christianity, and these false brethren wanted to overthrow this foundation. Notice the uncommon expression, "in order that they shall bring us to abject slavery." Usually we would say, "in order that they might bring us..."—there is the idea of doubt here. But these false teachers were so strong and so sure of success that they had no doubt whatever that they would succeed in bring the Church of God into abject slavery. For this reason we find "shall," not "might." And notice not only did they wish to bring us into slavery, but also "abject slavery"—slavery with no hope of release: cruel, bitter, hopeless slavery. Such is the true position of those who are under the law. This word is only used here and in 2 Cor. 11:20, speaking of these same men.

Now Paul leaves the description of these wicked men to tell us how he met their attacks. In the original Greek in this part, the sentences are broken off; the grammar is not complete, all telling us of the very strong feeling that Paul had, as he recalled that terrible attack, and though the truth was victorious, yet the struggle was very great. Paul says: "To whom we yielded by subjection, not even for an hour, in order that the truth of the good news might remain with you." Others might yield, for the sake of peace, but Paul would never yield; no, not even for an hour. How we Gentiles can thank God for such a man as Paul. What a mighty debt we owe to him and his fellow servant Barnabas. The word translated "remain" has the meaning of "firm possession." Paul and Barnabas fought a bitter fight that we in China, and the whole Church of God, might firmly possess and never give up the precious truth of complete justification and sanctification by faith alone, and not by works of the law.

"But from the ones being reputed to be something,—whatever they formerly were, it makes no difference to me; God does not accept man's person [literally, man's face],—for to me the ones being reputed (to be something) imparted nothing." ch. 2:6.

We have seen that the false brethren had tried to make the Galatian assemblies believe that Paul was not a true apostle because he had not received his authority or his teaching from the apostles at Jerusalem. Paul has shown us that he received both his authority as an apostle and his teaching from the Lord Jesus Christ, and not from any man. These false brethren wished to make Peter and James and John head of the Church, and all would receive their authority from them. These men were apostles, they had seen the Lord and been in His company on earth, and men looked up to them as men of very great importance. But Paul entirely rejected their authority. To Paul, Peter was only a man. Paul knew that he himself was sent, not from men, but from God. It is strange that today so many men look up to Peter as head of the Church. Paul refused to do such a thing. The Church among the Gentiles is the fruit of Paul's labor, not of Peter's labor. Peter fully

acknowledged Paul's position and, as we will see, gave to him and to Barnabas the right hand of fellowship that they should go to the Gentiles. So we may see that during this visit to Jerusalem, Paul received no further authority from the apostles there and no further revelation of the good news from them. His own words are that they "imparted nothing to me." It is also possible that the meaning is that they "imposed nothing on me." If this is the true meaning, it would tell us that the apostles at Jerusalem did not in any way impose the teaching of the law on Paul's good news.

"But, on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the good news of the uncircumcision, just as Peter (that) of the circumcision, (for the One having worked for Peter unto (the) apostleship of the circumcised, worked also for me unto the nations), and recognizing the grace given to me, James and Cephas and John, the ones being reputed to be pillars, gave to me and to Barnabas (the) right hands of fellowship, in order that we (should go) unto the nations, but they unto the circumcised. Only that we should remember the poor, which very thing also I have been eager to do." ch. 2:7-10.

In the verses we have just quoted, we must not suppose that the "good news of the uncircumcised [or, uncircumcision]" is different in any way from the "good news of the circumcised [or, circumcision]." It is not a different good news. There is only one good news, but it is presented to different people: one to the Gentiles, the other to the Jews. We must notice also that Paul was put on an equality with Peter. One is the apostle to the nations, the other is the apostle to the Jews. Peter is not placed in the smallest degree above Paul. They are alike, and there is not the least sign of Peter wishing, or expecting, to be considered in a higher position than Paul: nor, is there any record that James and John considered Peter above Paul. Further, there was no sign of the least jealousy between these great servants of God. They recognized that Paul had been entrusted with the good news to the nations, and they knew well that it was the Lord Jesus Christ who had entrusted this good news to him: gladly then do they give the right hands of fellowship to Paul and to Barnabas. Do not think that this is a matter of no importance. Alas, there are many millions of Gentile men and women today who believe that Peter is the head of the Church, and even the foundation of the Church. Although the Lord greatly blessed Peter, he is the apostle of the circumcision, and only of the circumcision. Paul is the apostle of the uncircumcision, that is, of the Gentiles. Paul is the only one of the apostles who writes about the Church, the body of Christ. The Lord entrusted this to him, as He had entrusted to him the gospel of the uncircumcision.

Do not think that any division had come into the Church because Paul was to go to the nations and the other apostles at Jerusalem to the Jews. The Lord of the harvest may send His servants to any part of the harvest field He wishes; and the Lord chose to send Paul to one part, and Peter to another; but they went in full fellowship one with the other.

You will remember that Paul and Barnabas had already visited Jerusalem with alms for the poor Jewish Christians, sent to them by the Gentile Christians. (Acts 11:12, 27-30:25.) The brethren at Jerusalem ask that the Gentile Christians, although not under law or subject to circumcision, should still remember the poor. This care of the poor was a very strong bond between the Gentile believers and the Jewish believers. There was much to divide them, much to cause jealousy between them, but the loving care for the poor saints in Judea, by their more wealthy Gentile brethren, bound together these Jewish and Gentile Christians. This is exactly what Paul longed to see, so he adds, "Which very thing I have been eager to do."

Paul tells us in some of his other epistles about this very matter. We have noticed that in 1 Cor. 16:1,2, Paul tells the Corinthian assembly of the instructions he had already given to the assemblies of Galatia: "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come" (1 Cor. 16:2). The first day of the week is the resurrection day. It was on the first day of the week that the disciples in Troas came together to break bread. (Acts 20:7.) And on the first day of the week the Spirit of God tells believers to put aside as God has prospered them. In Heb. 13:16 this is called "a sacrifice," and "with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb. 13:16). This sacrifice is connected with "the sacrifice of praise" in the previous verse (Heb. 13:15); and both these sacrifices which we may offer to the Lord are connected with His sacrifice of Himself for us. (See Heb. 13:10-12.) For this reason when we come together on the first day of the week to break bread, on the one hand we eat the one loaf and we drink the one cup, remembering the Lord's sacrifice; and on the other hand we offer to Him the sacrifice of praise, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks unto His name (Heb. 13:15); and we also offer to Him the sacrifice of giving money as God has prospered us, a sacrifice to show forth our gratitude for all He has done for us and to "remember the poor" (vs. 10). With this sacrifice God is well pleased.

Alas, there are some who quite forget the wonderful privilege God has given us in this opportunity to show forth our love and gratitude to His name. They only think of giving this money as "a collection," and quite forget that God sees it as "a sacrifice," and that it is a sacrifice with which God is well pleased. There are some who give, not according as God has prospered them, but as little as they possibly can so as not to lose face. We must remember that God sees the heart, and God does not measure and judge as we measure. You remember the poor widow who threw two mites into the treasury, which the Lord tells us was "all her living." Mark 12:44. In the parable of the treasure hid in a field, the Lord says that the man who found it, for the joy of it, went away and "sold [exchanged, or, bartered] whatever he had and bought that field." Matt. 13:44. But the words are stronger in the next parable of the pearl. Of it the Lord says: "Having found one pearl of great price, having gone away, he sold [the word is different from that in the last parable, and means 'to sell into slavery'] all things whatever he had, and bought it." Matt. 13:45, 46. Of this widow, who cast in the two mites, the Lord uses exactly the same words as He used of Himself seeking that precious pearl: "She of her own will cast in all things whatever she had, the whole of her living." In Mark 10:21, to the rich ruler the Lord used exactly the words of the first of these parables: "Sell whatever thou hast," (Mark 10:21) but he was not willing. You remember that in God's sight she had given more than all the great gifts of the rich men. Why do you think the Bible tells us that "she threw in two mites, which make a farthing?" (Mark 12:42). If she had cast in a farthing, the amount would have been the same, but she would have had no choice to keep back something for herself; but as the farthing was divided into two mites, she could have kept one for herself and given the Lord one: but the divided offering showed forth her undivided heart. Many of the Christians of China are poor, but few are as poor as this widow; and they have the same opportunity that she had to offer great gifts in the sight of God. I often wonder if the reason so many of us are so poor is because we so often fail to acknowledge how "God has prospered us" by giving in this measure to Him on the first day of the week.

Our readers would do well to also read for themselves the whole of 2 Cor. 9 "As touching the ministering to the saints." And it would be well for us all to let vv. 6, 7 sink down deep into our hearts: "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:6-7). And notice we get a good deal about sowing and reaping in ch. 6 of our epistle.

The last visit that Paul ever made to Jerusalem (as far as we know) was to take more alms to the poor there. To take these alms cost Paul his liberty. "Now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things. When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain" (Rom. 15:25-28). But there is a note of sadness mixed with the joy of being the bearer of the gifts from the Gentile assemblies, for he adds in vv. 30, 31: "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints." It would seem that Paul knew full well the power that these Jewish teachers still had in Jerusalem; and it might be this loving gift from the Gentile Christians would be refused by the Jerusalem assembly. The victory was won at Jerusalem for the freedom of the Gentiles from circumcision and the law; but the mouths of the false teachers were not stopped, and they have been busy at their wicked work from that day down to our own day. The Church of God was not divided; but the danger of division due to these wicked men still existed.

The epistle to the Hebrews, probably written shortly before Jerusalem was completely destroyed by the Roman armies, is a burning appeal to the Jewish Christians to turn from the forms and ceremonies which they loved so well, and which were but a shadow, to the body which is Christ. The Holy Spirit powerfully sets forth in this epistle how much "better" the reality—the substance—was than the shadows to which they were clinging so strongly. (Heb. 8:5, 10:1.) We find the word "better" 13 times in Hebrews, besides other similar words, such as "more excellent," about 7 times more, as the Spirit compares the truths of Christianity to the shadows of Judaism.

Meditations on the Epistle to the Galatians: Beautiful Grace, Galatians 2:1-5: The Conference at Jerusalem

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

"Then after a space of fourteen years, again I went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking along also Titus. And I went up according to a revelation; and I laid before them the good news which I am proclaiming among the nations, but privately to the ones having reputation, lest somehow I am running, or had run, to no purpose. But not even Titus, he with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. But on account of the false brethren brought in by stealth to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, in order that they shall bring us into abject slavery: to whom we yielded by subjection, not even for an hour, in order that the truth of the good news might remain with you." ch. 2:1-5.

We saw in the first chapter of Galatians that three years after Paul's conversion he went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Peter. In Acts 11:30 and 12:25 we read that Paul and Barnabas again went to Jerusalem with alms for the poor. This seems to have been about the time that Herod killed James the brother of John and put Peter in prison, intending to kill him. In the history of his life in Galatians Paul does not mention this visit. But we have seen that he speaks only of those things which are important for the truth he is defending.

The visit of which Paul speaks in Gal. 2:1 is almost certainly the same visit Luke describes in Acts 15. Paul and Barnabas had returned to Antioch in Syria from their missionary journey to Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Derbe and Lystra and other parts. While they waited at Antioch, "certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question." Acts 15:1, 2.

It is sad to read of "no small dissension and disputation" (Acts 15:2) and of "much disputing." Acts 15:7. That is how Acts 15 begins, and almost more sad, it ends with the quarrel between Paul and Barnabas: "And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder" (Acts 15:39). v.39.

Paul knew very well the terrible danger that this teaching of the law and circumcision was to the truth of the good news. It was for this reason that he so earnestly opposed it. He knew very well the great importance of this meeting at Jerusalem to discuss this great question. Barnabas went with Paul, and together they presented the truth of the grace of God. They took with them a Gentile believer, Titus, who had never been circumcised. If the assembly at Jerusalem should refuse to receive a Gentile believer unless he receives circumcision, then the false teachers have won the victory. But if the assembly at Jerusalem should receive Titus, without being circumcised, then the truth of God has triumphed, and it is clear to the assemblies all over the world that it is not necessary to receive circumcision in order to be counted as a Christian.

In Gal. 2:2 we read: "I went up by revelation." The Lord no doubt guided Paul and Barnabas to take Titus with them, just as He revealed to Paul that he should go to this meeting. Paul first of all privately laid before the leaders of the assembly at Jerusalem the good news "which I am preaching" among the nations (or Gentiles: the word is the same). Paul mentions especially the names of James, Cephas and John. We must notice that although James probably was not one of the twelve apostles, yet in matters that concern Jerusalem, James is placed first. (See v.9.) But in vv. 7, 8, we see Peter's name only. This is because to Peter the Lord specially committed the gospel to the Jews. The Lord had used Peter to first bring the good news to the nations, the Gentiles. (See Acts 10, and 15:7.) But Peter had not followed on in this work among the nations, and God in His grace had worked mightily through him as the apostle of the Jews. But in just the same way God had also worked mightily through Paul as the apostle of the nations. They each acknowledge God's grace to the other, and they agree that just as Peter continued to be the apostle to the Jews, so Paul should also continue to be the apostle to the nations, or Gentiles.

So Paul and Barnabas laid the whole question of the Gentiles and the law before James, Cephas, John, and perhaps others "conspicuous in the assembly." We see in Acts 15:22 That Judas, called Barsabas, and Silas were also "leading men among the brethren" (Acts 15:22). After first laying the whole matter before those "conspicuous in the assembly," then it was publicly discussed, and the teachers of the law had the opportunity to present their side of the matter.

We can see the goodness and wisdom of God in all these matters. First, how good that this question arose in the days of the apostles and that God has given us this complete record in His holy Word of all that happened, so that any person today who wishes to truly know God's will in this matter need have no doubts whatever about it. Then, how good of the Lord to arrange that Paul and Barnabas should be in Antioch ready to oppose these false teachers, just at the time they arrived. In the assemblies in Galatia we find nobody present to stand up against the false teachers and dispute with them. Then notice again God's goodness and wisdom in not permitting Paul and Barnabas to silence these teachers in Antioch. Had they succeeded in doing this, how easily a division might have come into the Church of God. Those who accepted salvation by the free grace of God would follow Paul, making a Gentile church, with Antioch as their center; but those who wished to add the law would follow these law teachers and have Jerusalem as their center. In order to hinder such a division, the Lord made it necessary for His servants at Antioch to take the whole matter up to Jerusalem and lay it before the assembly there.

The Lord strengthened His servant's hands and his heart by giving him this revelation of His will, showing him that he should go to Jerusalem. The men of reputation acknowledged the work of Paul and Barnabas. They approved the gospel which they were preaching among the nations, and God thus prepared everything for the public discussion of this great question.

On the one side were the Pharisees, who believed, and those false teachers—"false brethren brought in by stealth, who were such as came in by stealth to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus." These were the men who later were troubling the Galatian assemblies and were always trying to hinder and disturb Paul's work among the nations. They had been so successful at Antioch that even Paul and Barnabas could not silence them, and perhaps they looked forward to a victory at Jerusalem.

Paul and Barnabas were on the other side, and perhaps Titus, the uncircumcised Gentile, sat between them. James, Cephas and John were present, and no doubt also Judas and Silas and 'many other of the Jerusalem brethren.

"There rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them [the Gentiles], and to command them to keep the law of Moses" (Acts 15:5). That is the whole question. I can well understand there was "much discussion" (Acts 15:7). But at last Peter, in a short address, reminded them that God had chosen him to first bring the good news to the nations. He pointed out to them that God had borne witness to that work by giving them the Holy Spirit while they were still uncircumcised Gentiles and had made "no difference between us and them" (Acts 15:9). He summed up the whole matter by saying: "Now therefore why tempt ye God, by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same manner as they also." Acts 15:10, 11 JnD.

James followed Peter, proving by quotations from the Old Testament that God had shown before that the Gentiles should be brought into the blessing of God, along with the Jews. James summed up his address by saying: "Wherefore I judge, not to trouble those who from the nations turn to God; but to write to them to abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from what is strangled, and from blood. For Moses, from generations of old, has in every city those who preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath." Acts 15:19-21 JnD.

The victory was won.

Thanks be to God for that notable victory which made sure the freedom of the Gentiles. Thanks be to God for men like Paul and Barnabas, Peter and James: men who are not ashamed of the good news, men who are not afraid to say publicly what they know to be the truth.

The victory is won. The Gentiles are not under law, either for justification or for a rule of life. The threatened division in the Church of God does not take place. No split has come between the apostles at Jerusalem and the apostles of the Gentiles. The false teachers and the Pharisees have been defeated, but they have not been silenced; and now in the epistle we are considering, we find them back at their evil work, disturbing the Galatian assemblies.

Our readers must notice that in the letter to the Gentile believers no mention is made of the Ten Commandments. There is not a single word suggesting that the Gentile Christians are under the Ten Commandments. Those who teach this evil doctrine have not a word of foundation from the Scriptures. On the contrary, there are only four commands given to the Gentile believers. Two of these, "to avoid pollutions of idols" and "fornication," are included in the Ten Commandments. Every true Christian, with any knowledge of God, knows that he should avoid these things. Notice that there is not a word telling the Gentile believers that they should keep the Sabbath or seventh day.

The other two commands, which are really one, to avoid things strangled and blood, come from Noah's day. Before the flood it seems as though men lived on grain, vegetables and fruit, and that they did not eat meat. But after the flood, in Gen. 9:3, God gave to Noah and his sons flesh to eat. He says, "Every moving thing that liveth shall be food for you: as the green herb I give you everything. Only, the flesh with its life, its blood, ye shall not eat." Gen. 9:3, 4 JND. In Lev. 17:10-12 JnD we read, "I will set My face against the soul that hath eaten blood, and will cut him off from among his people; for the soul [or, life] of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that maketh atonement for the soul. Therefore have I said,... No soul of you shall eat blood." "The blood is the life" (Deut. 12:23). In the Scriptures God always claims the blood as His portion. Life belongs to God. The blood tells us of the precious blood of Christ and that He gave His life for our lives; so Christians may not eat blood. In "things strangled" (Acts 21:25) the blood has not been poured out, so we Christians may not eat such meat.

There are those today who command the Lord's people to "abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the Word of God and prayer" (1 Tim. 4:3-5). 1 Tim. 4:3-5. From these verses we see that Christians today are perfectly free to eat pork, which was forbidden under the law. Now we may eat it and give God thanks. There are those today who forbid it, but such persons do not "believe and know the truth" (1 Tim. 4:3).

We might think that this is a small matter and that if someone tells me I must not eat pork I may easily yield to his wish. But if we look at the first verse of this chapter in Timothy, we will see that this doctrine which commands "to abstain from meats" (1 Tim. 4:3) is a "doctrine of devils" (1 Tim. 4:1). Those who teach these things have departed "from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (1 Tim. 4:1). In God's sight it is a terrible thing to put Christians under law, even if that law is only to forbid to eat meat. May God help you

and me to understand more clearly God's thoughts about grace and law.

Because we are not under law, this does not give us liberty to steal or murder. The law says: "Thou shalt not steal" (Rom. 13:9). What does the good news say? "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Eph. 4:28). How different from the law! The hand that once went into his neighbor's pocket to steal his goods now works in order to be able to give something to his neighbor. This is not because of any law that tells me I must do this. But my Lord has borne my sins. My stealing is all forgiven. Not the least punishment will I ever have to bear from God because I was a thief. My hands are purchased with His precious blood, and now I love to use them for Him who gave Himself for me. And so "the righteousness of the law" (Rom. 10:5) is fulfilled in those "who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4). But we see that actually the good news goes far beyond "the righteousness of the law" (Rom. 10:5).

Paul had not "run to no purpose." Gal. 2:2. On the one hand, the good news to the Gentiles was specially committed to Paul; and on the other hand, the mystery of the Church of God was also specially committed to him. (Col. 1:23-25.) As we have seen, the Church of God is a heavenly company of people who are neither Jew nor Gentile, but who are the "body of Christ." If the Church had been torn in two, making a Jewish body and a Gentile body, then the truth of the Church would have been denied. No longer would the world see "one body." And we need to remember the dying prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ: "That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me" (John 17:21). But what does the world see today as it looks at the Church of God? Not one division, but hundreds! And, alas, alas, too often we find the saints of God glorying in their shame.

May God help us to remember that every true believer, no matter what his race, his language, his color, no matter whether Jew or Gentile, no matter to what sect or division of man he may be joined, in God's sight belongs to the one body, the Church. This is the true Church of God, and every true believer throughout the whole world is part of it. The Scriptures do not speak of members of a church. We are members of His body, as my finger, my eye and my foot are members of my body; but the expression "members of a church" is unknown in the New Testament.

How many today are seeking to build up a sect or a party, instead of seeking to "feed the flock of God" (1 Peter 5:2). In a coming day, these servants may find that they are running, or have run, to no purpose. Paul is using the racecourse as a picture of his work for the Lord. Paul loves to use this picture, and we find it again in Gal. 5:7 "Ye did run well; who did hinder you?" This time he refers to all the Galatian believers. Every one of us Christians is running a race. In 2 Tim. 2:5 we are warned that a man is not crowned except he strive lawfully. In 1 Cor. 9:24 Paul exhorts his readers: "So run, that ye may obtain" (1 Cor. 9:24). Yes, we are all runners. May God help us not to run to no purpose, but so that we may obtain!

J.B.D.

Meditations on the Epistle to the Galatians: Beautiful Grace, Galatians 1:10-24: Paul's History

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

"For am I now conciliating [literally, persuading] men or God? or am I seeking to please men? If I were yet pleasing men, then I were not Christ's bondsman." ch. 1:10.

We get a new subject with this verse. The false teachers had said: Paul is not a true man. He tries to win favor with the men he talks to. He says himself, "Unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews" (1 Cor. 9:20). So, they said, you can see that Paul also preaches the law when he thinks it will help him. You remember, they said, he circumcised Timothy when he wished to conciliate and please the Jews. (See Acts 16:3.)

In v.10 we have Paul's answer to such words: "For am I now conciliating men, or God? or am I now seeking to please men?" The word translated "conciliate" really is "persuade." These false teachers had said, Paul is trying to persuade men to follow him by being all things to all men. (See 1 Cor. 9:22.) Paul answers, You may judge for yourselves. What am I doing now? Am I seeking to please you in this letter? Am I now seeking to please men or God? They knew very well that Paul was not trying to please them, or to please any man. It is well for us to remember that if we seek to please men, then we are not Christ's slaves. (Gal. 1:10.) The slave of Christ must have his eye fixed on his Master and seek only to please Him. This is a word we all need to remember.

From ch. 1:11 to about ch. 2:17 we have a history of Paul's life before his conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9), but he tells only a few important facts that prove to all men that he could not have received his good news, or his apostleship, from the apostles at Jerusalem. Many important matters are left out, for Paul is now only seeking to prove both his apostleship and his message to be not of men, but from God. This history should have helped the churches of Galatia to understand Paul's special position as an apostle, to trust him and thus to trust the good news he had preached to them.

"For I make known to you, brothers, the good news which was announced by me [the evangel, the one evangelized by me] is more literal, if we could say it, that it is not according to man, for neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught (it), but by means of revelation [or, unveiling] of Jesus Christ." ch. 1:11, 12.

The word "I make known to you," (Eph. 6:21) or "I assure you," or "I wish you to know," (1 Cor. 11:3) introduces a subject on which the Apostle wishes to lay special emphasis. The words which follow are of the greatest importance to us today.

We have already seen that the two great subjects of the epistle are the authority of Paul as an apostle, and the truth of the good news which he had preached to them.

In v.1 he tells them he was an apostle, not from men or by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father. Now Paul tells them that, in just the same way, the gospel which he had announced to them was not according to man, nor did he receive it from man nor was he taught it. This good news was not prepared in the minds of clever men. It was not reasoned out from the Old Testament. Neither Peter nor any of the other apostles had told it to Paul. Paul had not gone to a college or Bible school to learn it. No, the good news Paul had announced to the Galatians came directly to him by revelation (or, by an unveiling) of Jesus Christ Himself. The Lord had revealed it to him. Paul's enemies were right when they said he had received neither his apostleship nor his teaching from the other apostles, but they did not know that he had received both from an infinitely higher source than any man, infinitely higher than the twelve apostles, even from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. (See 1 Cor. 11:23, 15:3; Eph. 3:3.)

"For you heard of my manner of life formerly in Judaism, that surpassingly I kept persecuting the assembly of God, and I kept making havoc of it, and in Judaism I kept blazing a path ahead of and beyond many of my own age in my nation, being more exceedingly zealous of my ancestral traditions." ch. 1:13,14.

Judaism means the Jewish rites, customs and ceremonies.

Paul (then called Saul) had kept the clothes of the men who stoned Stephen, and he had given his voice against Stephen to put him to death. If you read Acts 8:1-3 and 9:1, 2, you will understand what a bitter enemy Saul was to Christ and His good news. But you must remember that Saul also probably saw Stephen's face, like "the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15). He must have watched him "fall asleep" under those cruel stones and have heard that dying prayer, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:60). It may be that it was impossible for Saul to forget all this, and his conscience kept speaking loudly to him. This may have been the "pricks" of which we read in Acts 26:14, but this we do not know for certain; the Scriptures do not tell us.

But we do know that before his conversion Saul persecuted the good news with all his strength, just as after his conversion he preached it with all his strength. Paul could not do anything half-heartedly. He always put all his strength into everything he did. So he went beyond the other Jews of his own age in persecuting the assembly of God.

Then the Lord Jesus met him on the road to Damascus, a city in the north of Syria, far away from Jerusalem. The Lord caused Saul to turn completely around. (That is what "conversion" means.) This man who had been trying to destroy the good news now began to tell it forth everywhere. But he did not go first to any man to learn this good news. If the Lord Jesus had met Saul near Jerusalem, men might have said, "The apostles in Jerusalem taught Saul the good news which he preaches." But there were no apostles at Damascus, and the Lord purposely chose to meet Saul near Damascus, not near Jerusalem. Paul tells us that he did not go up to Jerusalem until after "three years." Gal. 1:18.

All was of God's grace. It pleased God to set Paul apart from his mother's womb, to call him by His grace, and to reveal His Son in Paul, that "I may announce Him as good news among the nations." Gal. 1:15, 16. In Rom. 11 Paul tells us that he was "set apart unto God's good news."

"You have heard" these things, Paul says. He loved to tell the story of that meeting on the road to Damascus. Three times in the book of Acts we find that story (Acts 9:22, 1-21:5-21 and 26:12-18) and so he writes, "You have heard...." We may be sure that Paul himself had told the story he loved so well to the Galatians, and he must have told it as only Paul could tell it. It was all grace. Paul had done nothing to earn such a meeting as that on the Damascus road. Paul had only tried to persecute and kill Christ's people. Paul had been persecuting the Christ. And this is the man the Christ chooses to set him apart to the good news. What grace! Why did He choose Saul of Tarsus? The only reason Saul can give is God's grace, and that "God was pleased to reveal His Son in me." And God chose him in order that he might "announce HIM as good news among the nations." v.16. Is it any wonder that Paul could not, and would not, give up grace? The law could only have condemned Saul to death, but grace makes him a chosen instrument.

"But when the One having set me apart (even) from my mother's womb, and having called (me) through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me in order that I should announce Him (as) good news among the nations, immediately I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to the ones (who were) apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and again returned to Damascus." ch. 1:15-17.

CHRIST Himself is the good news. Philip preached Christ in Samaria (Acts 8:5), and there was great joy in that city. (v.8.) He preached Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:35) and he went on his way rejoicing. (v.39.) May God help us to remember that our business is to "announce Him as good news." Rom. 1:3 tells us that the good news is "concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1:3). It is not a doctrine we preach. It is Christ Himself. He is the good news. He is the living, loving Savior.

You remember the story of Saul's conversion, but let us repeat it, for like Paul himself, I love to hear it over and over, and to tell it out once more. He had gone to the high priest in Jerusalem and had obtained from him letters to the synagogues in Damascus (far north of Jerusalem) that he might arrest any Christians he found and bring them bound unto Jerusalem. He had helped kill Stephen, he had persecuted to death the Christians in Jerusalem, and now he was searching for them in distant cities to persecute them there.

He was coming near to Damascus. It was about noon and the sun shone brightly above him on the road. Suddenly a light from heaven brighter than the sun shone round about him. He fell on the earth and heard a voice speaking to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" (Acts 26:15). And the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" (Acts 9:5). (This means that Paul was like a stubborn ox. His master wished him to go one way and pricked him with his goad, a stick with a sharp point at the end of it, to make him obey. But the ox kicked the goad, and the point went into his leg and hurt him still more. Each time he kicked, the goad hurt more.) Saul trembled when he heard these words, and was astonished and said, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" And the Lord said, "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do" (Acts 9:6). The men with Saul heard a voice but did not see anyone; but Saul had seen heaven opened and had seen the Lord Jesus Himself in the glory. (1 Cor. 9:1.) Saul never forgot that sight. Three times in the book of Acts we read that story. (Acts 9:1, 22:5, 26:12.) The sight of the Lord Jesus in glory changed everything for Saul. He rose from the earth and went into the city, but the glory of that light had blinded him, and men had to lead him by the hand.

For three days he neither ate nor drank. At last he prayed. You may understand a little of what this change meant to Saul. How terrible to find he had been persecuting the Christ, the Messiah of Israel, the true King of the Jews! How terrible to find out that his whole life, everything he believed, and everything he had been doing, was all completely wrong. I do not wonder that he could not eat or drink for three days. Then the Lord sent his servant Ananias. "Behold he prayeth," (Acts 9:11) the Lord said. Ananias came and put his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul!" I think those words were like healing medicine to his sick heart. "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared to you in the way as you came, hath sent me, that you may receive your sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost." Acts 9:17. Immediately he received his sight and was baptized. Little wonder he loved the name, "Brother," so well!

Now Saul is a Christian. But how strange and new everything was to him! Immediately he went to the synagogues. He did not go to take the letters that were in his pocket. I think he burned those letters. But he went and boldly preached Christ, that He is the Son of God. Everybody was amazed and God's power was with him so that he confounded the Jews in Damascus, proving that Jesus truly is the Christ, the Messiah. They tried to kill him, as they had killed the Christ. But he escaped from their hands.

He went away from the crowds of men into the deserts of Arabia. We know very little about his journey into Arabia only what he tells us in this letter to the Galatians. (vs. 17.) He tells us that, after his conversion, immediately he did not go to any other person to consult or to seek advice. "Neither did I go up to Jerusalem unto the ones who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus." Arabia is a very large country. Mount Sinai, where God gave Moses the law, is in Arabia. Elijah had gone away into the wilderness of Arabia to escape from Jezebel and to be alone with God. (1 Kings 19:8.) And I am sure Saul of Tarsus also went to Arabia to be alone with God. I can well understand that Saul felt he must have quiet, and time to be alone and to hear God speak to him. This is a lesson you and I need. Every true servant of God must have time to be alone with God. Moses learned this lesson during forty years alone with God in Arabia. David learned the same lesson, though only a boy, alone with God on the hills of Bethlehem. Even our Lord Jesus rose up a great while before day and went away to a solitary place to pray alone to God (Mark 1:35), and how often do we find Him alone with God in prayer, sometimes all night. (Luke 6:12.) Have you ever noticed that in the gospel of Luke, the gospel that gives us the picture of the Lord Jesus as the dependent Man, we find Him seven times in prayer? (See Luke 3:21, 5:16, 6:12, 9:18, 9:29, 11:1 and 22:41.)

We know nothing of this visit to Arabia, but we can well understand it. It is just what we would have expected. I do not doubt that he took with him his Bible, the Old Testament (for there was no New Testament then), and that there, alone with God, the Holy Spirit made this book shine with a new light and glory as He showed him JESUS on every page. Who taught Paul the hidden meaning of Sarah and Hagar, of which we will read in ch. 4 of our epistle? Who made Deuteronomy shine with the light of the glory of Christ? I do not doubt the Holy Spirit taught him many such things during this time in Arabia.

Christian reader, if we are to serve God acceptably, we also must have our time in Arabia. We also must get time alone with God. You say, It is impossible for me. I am poor and have to work hard for a living; I cannot go to Arabia. No, you cannot go to Arabia, but you can get alone with God. You may say, My house is small and crowded, I cannot get alone with God. I am sure any of us can get alone with God if we truly and earnestly desire to do so. With most of us, we have only to follow our Master when He rose up a great while before day, and we will be alone with God. May you and I learn the depth of meaning there is in those few words, "I went away into Arabia."

We do not know how long Saul stayed in Arabia but he tells us, "and I returned again unto Damascus." ch. 1:17. The king had tried to kill Saul in Damascus, watching the gates day and night. We do not know whether this was before or after his visit to Arabia. But Saul was a brave man and feared nothing. In another place he tells us he was let down over the wall of Damascus in a basket, through a window, and so escaped the king's hand. (2 Cor. 11:32, 33.)

"Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and I remained with him fifteen days: but other of the apostles I did not see, except [or, only] James the brother of the Lord." ch. 1:18, 19.

Three years have passed since the day Saul of Tarsus left Jerusalem with those letters from the high priest. He has not returned in all that time, but he longs to know Peter. Peter is a most lovable man: we all look forward to making the acquaintance of dear, impulsive Peter. Paul goes to visit him, so as to make his acquaintance, and he stays for fifteen days. Do you not wish you could have looked in and listened, as Peter and Paul talked together and became acquainted? It think it was a happy visit, and they learned to love each other, but it ended quite suddenly. When Paul first tried to join himself to the disciples in Jerusalem, they were all afraid of him. This is the man who helped murder Stephen! This is the man who persecuted us so much and put our friends in prison. What does he want at our meetings? They thought he was a spy; but there was one man there, Barnabas, "the son of comfort" (1 Chron. 19:2) (Acts 4:36), a very kind and good man. He took Saul and brought him to the apostles, to Peter and James (for Saul tells us he saw no others), and Barnabas told the wonderful story, that Saul loved so well, of that meeting on the road near Damascus and how the sight of the Lord of glory had changed all of Saul's life. And then I think Peter took him home with him, and they learned to know and love each other.

He seems to have been only fifteen days in Jerusalem, but that was time enough for him to preach boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus. Again the Jews tried to kill him, so the brethren brought him down to Caesarea and sent him forth to Tarsus, his own native city.

You will notice most of these things are left out as Paul tells the story to the Galatians. There we find only a few facts nothing to glorify Paul: but only the things that prove how very, very little he received from those who were apostles before him or from any persons at Jerusalem. Paul was answering his enemies, the false teachers, who said he did not receive his teaching or his authority from the apostles at Jerusalem. No, Paul says, I did not, and I will prove to you from my own history that it was impossible for me to have received either my authority or my teaching from men. And now in v.20, as if to make all doubly sure (like our Lord's words, that He loved so well, "verily, verily"), Paul adds, "But what I am writing to you, lo, before God, I am not lying." Paul's enemies had suggested that his conduct had been deceitful, and perhaps they had said that he was not truthful. So Paul makes this solemn statement that should close the mouths of his enemies.

"Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia." ch. 1:21.

In Acts 9 we have seen that because Paul preached boldly in Jerusalem, the Jews "went about to slay him" (Acts 9:29). v.29. What an example of diligence Paul is to us there. Apparently he was in Jerusalem only fifteen days, but in that short time he found opportunity to preach boldly

and dispute against the Grecians. (Acts 9:29.) The Lord met him in a vision in the temple and told him to depart, and, as we have seen, the brethren sent him to his native home in Tarsus. But all this, which is so much to his credit, is left out in Galatians. He says only, "Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia." Tarsus was a city in Cilicia, and it was "no mean city." Acts 21:39. The province of Cilicia was joined very closely in many ways to Syria, so that often they were almost one. You will see by the map that Cilicia is northeast of Syria. You will remember that Damascus was in Syria; so you will see that Paul was going further and further away from Jerusalem in his labors for the Lord.

"But I remained personally unknown to the assemblies of Judea, the ones in Christ, but only they kept hearing, the one formerly persecuting us, now keeps announcing the good news of the faith which formerly he kept ravaging [or, destroying]; and they kept glorifying God in me." ch. 1:22-24.

We must notice the difference between the "assemblies of Judea" and the assembly of Jerusalem. The assembly of Jerusalem had almost surely learned to know Paul personally, even though he was only fifteen days in that city. But he left so suddenly that the assemblies outside Jerusalem had no chance to get to know him. We find this same difference made in John 7. Compare vv. 20, 25.

The imperfect and present tenses are used in these verses, showing the continuous action. "I remained unknown... they kept on hearing... our persecutor... keeps on announcing the good news of the faith which formerly he kept on destroying." How vivid the whole scene is! We can see those early Christians talking together: "Brother, have you heard? Saul of Tarsus, who helped kill Stephen, is preaching the good news!" How well we can understand! How well we can enter into the relief and the joy that this report, which kept going around, brought to all the assemblies; and then this report caused another imperfect tense, "They kept on glorifying God in me." As the good news of the change in Saul of Tarsus kept going around among the assemblies of Judea, they kept glorifying God. Can you not guess what thanks and praise went up to God in their prayer meetings? A very ancient writer has said, "He does not say, They marveled at me; they praised me; they were struck with admiration of me: but he attributes all to grace. They glorified God, he says, in me."

"In me." We read these words before in v.16. "God was pleased to reveal His Son in me." This tells us that God "unveiled" His Son in Paul. "Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12). I suppose the meaning of this verse in Galatians is that God was pleased to take away the veil, in part at least, and Saul of Tarsus saw the Son of God "face to face." That sight, that look, never left Paul as long as he lived. After Saul was baptized and had taken something to eat, do you remember what he did? "Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). And as God was pleased to thus take away the veil that now hides His Son from view, so the glory of the Son of God changed all of Saul's life; and in him, to those around, God thus unveiled His Son. Many a man and woman learned to know the Son of God through the sight that Saul of Tarsus had of Him on the Damascus road. Paul was not only the instrument God used to tell out the gospel, but also in his own person he bore the strongest testimony to its power. As men looked at Paul, "in him" the Son of God was revealed to them (compare 2 Cor. 3:18), and as the assemblies of Judea heard the reports of his conversion and of his bold preaching, they kept glorifying God "in him."

T.P.

Meditations on the Epistle to the Galatians: Beautiful Grace, Galatians 1:6-9: A Curse Instead of a Blessing

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

"I marvel that thus readily you are being changed over [or deserting, or revolting] from the One having called you in Christ's grace, unto a different good news, which is not another [of the same kind]." ch. 1:6, 7.

V.5 ends the "greeting." As we have seen, in Paul's other epistles, a word of thanksgiving or praise generally follows to the assembly to which he is writing. But there is no such word here. Paul does not call the Galatians "saints." It is the only epistle of Paul in which this word does not appear. He does not call them "faithful brethren" (Col. 1:2) or "holy brethren" as he does other Christians; but again and again he calls them "brothers," showing forth the burning love that filled his heart as he wrote these severe and stern rebukes. We have seen Paul praise even the Corinthians, bad as they were, but there is not a word of praise for the Galatians. May God help you and me, dear brethren, to understand more clearly how terrible it is in the sight of God to turn from Christ to the law, or to add the law or anything else to our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Instead of a thanksgiving we find an indignant exclamation of surprise. "I marvel that thus readily [or, thus hastily], you are being changed over [are deserting, are revolting] from the One having called you in Christ's grace, unto a different good news, which is not another." There are two words used here, both translated "another" in the English. The first means "another of a different kind." The second means "another of the same kind." They had deserted "the good news of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24) and were changing over to a different "good news," even to the law and to circumcision. But it is not "good news" to tell me to keep the law. This is not "another good news." It is not "good news" at all. If I am groaning under a mighty debt, it is "good news" if my friend tells me that he has paid every cent of it for me and that I am free; but it is not "good news" at all to tell me of another debt that I know very well I never can pay. And he who is circumcised "is a debtor to do the whole law" (ch. 5:3).

The Galatians had deserted the One who had called them in Christ's grace. This word translated "desert from" or "revolt from" has the meaning of "a deserter," or a soldier who leaves the army for which he is fighting and who goes over to the enemy. It has the meaning of "a turncoat."

There are many men today who tell you they preach "another good news." Do not believe them. It may be different, but it is not "another good news." There is only one "good news" sent to us by God, and that is "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). Everything else that calls itself "good news" is false. It is counterfeit. It is not THE "good news" at all. Paul reminds them that it is God Himself who had called them, and He called them "in grace," not "in law" or "to law." They had quite forgotten their calling. If it is not God Himself who has called them,

and if it is not in grace alone, then it is not the true “good news” but only a false imitation, for there “is not another.”

“Only there are certain ones disturbing you, and wishing to pervert the good news of the Christ.” ch. 1:7.

You will notice from the two verses we have lately quoted that the false teachers were at that time in Galatia trying to pervert the “good news.” They were trying, but had not yet succeeded. They were disturbing the Galatian Christians. This is the same word as in John 14:1, “Let not your heart be troubled [or disturbed]: ye believe in God, believe also in Me.” If we have true faith in Christ, then we need never be disturbed. The storms of life may beat upon us, the servants of the enemy may bring their false teaching, but through it all, if our eyes are on Christ, we need never be disturbed. “Ye believe in God, believe also in Me” (John 14:1). Trust in Me, and you will never be disturbed. Trust in Me, and nobody can ever “shake your allegiance.” (The word has also this meaning.) We find this word “disturb” again in ch. 5:10 —“But the one disturbing you [the one shaking your allegiance] shall bear the judgment, whoever he may be.”

It is a terrible thing to disturb God’s people. They are like a flock of sheep, feeding in the good pastures of the Word of God. But, alas, there are many today who, instead of feeding the sheep, are disturbing them. There are those who pass for good shepherds of God’s flock, who are very often preaching the law, like the false teachers at Galatia, instead of feeding the sheep with the true grace of God. There are many who would not preach the Ten Commandments, either for salvation or as a “rule of life,” but who are continually telling the saints of God, “Touch not! Taste not! Handle not!” (Col. 2:21). “We have such-and-such a rule”; “you must not do this; you must not do that.” The principle is the same. It is law instead of grace, and it disturbs the flock and does not feed them. Those who disturb God’s sheep will have to bear God’s judgment, whoever they may be, for this is the work of the enemy.

These enemies of the true gospel were wishing to pervert, to reverse, to change to the opposite, the true good news sent by God. If anyone tells me I must keep the law for salvation or as a “rule of life,” this is not “good news.” It is just the opposite. It is very, very bad news, for I never can keep the law, and I must perish. This was the wicked work these false teachers were doing among the assemblies of Galatia. They were perverting the good news.

“But even if we, or an angel out of heaven should announce good news to you beside [or beyond, or contrary to] what we announced as good news to you, cursed be he! As we have said before, and now also again I say, If any one announces to you good news beside what you received, Cursed be he!” ch. 1:8-9.

What a most awfully solemn word! Instead of a blessing, a twice-repeated curse! How these words should make every one of us stop and think! If I have the happy privilege and the solemn responsibility of announcing God’s good news, how earnestly I should seek to see to it that what I announce is in very truth God’s good news and not my own thoughts or ideas. Otherwise it may be that that solemn word may come to me: “Cursed be he!” Sad to say, there are tens of thousands today who preach the law, without the least idea that they are putting themselves under this terrible curse. But so it is. It would seem as though the one who was specially doing this wicked work in Galatia may have been a man of distinction. The words that Paul uses, “Even if we, or an angel out of heaven, should announce good news to you beside what we preached, cursed be he!” would seem to indicate he was a great man. Also his remark in ch. 5:10, “whoever he may be,” (Esther 4:11) would seem to give us the same meaning. Today there are men who hold high positions in the churches of men, who have many degrees after their names, but they are cursed of God because they preach a different good news, which is not another.

Only a few days ago I saw a letter from a friend who has been disturbed by such a false good news. She says in her letter, “It is Christianity with something added.” That is exactly what these false teachers brought to the Galatians. “Christianity with something added.” “Cursed be he!” says the Apostle. These are the words of the Holy Spirit: the very words of God. Words could not be more strong or more solemn. This is what God says to all who teach the law: “Cursed be he!” There are many such teachers, and their teaching is very popular. Beware! “Cursed be he!”

But, you say, surely if an angel from heaven brings me this good news, then I can believe it! No, not even if an angel brings it! Even the angel is cursed. Remember that Satan himself is changed into an angel of light. (2 Cor. 11:14.) The angel that preaches the law is really Satan changed into an angel of light, and “cursed be he!” But, you say, they are such good men, such nice people, and so earnest: surely they must be right. Will you believe Satan or God? That is the question. If you choose to believe Satan (as Eve did), then you also will be cursed.

Notice that little word “beside,” or “beyond”—“good news beside the good news which we brought to you.” There is no good news beside the good news. God does not allow any rival good news. And God will not allow any mixture with His good news; nor will He allow anything to be added beside the good news that He has given to us. You cannot have the gospel of God and the law added to, or mixed with, it. God’s good news stands alone.

Although words could not be stronger or more solemn than God’s curse on those bringing a different good news, yet now, to add force to these words, the Apostle solemnly repeats them. And he reminds the Galatians that “we have told you before these very things.” He does not mean he has just told them (v.8), but that on his last visit to them he saw this danger and warned them most solemnly. He saw this evil teaching beginning to come in among them and he told them then. Anyone bringing good news beside what you received, cursed be he! He had told them before, and now he repeats it twice: “Cursed be he!” “A threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Eccl. 4:12).

The Apostle had warned the Galatian Christians, but alas, they did not heed his warning. They gave heed instead to the false teachers, and they deserted Christ for the law.

You also have been warned. God Himself is warning you by this book. Will you follow the Galatians and take no heed to such solemn warnings? Or, will you hear and return to your allegiance and loyalty to Christ—and to Christ alone?

Meditations on the Epistle to the Galatians: Beautiful Grace, Galatians 1:2-5: The Greeting

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

“And all the brethren with me, to the assemblies of Galatia. Grace to you, and peace, from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, so that He should rescue us out of the present wicked age, according to the will of our God and Father: to whom be glory to the ages of ages. Amen.” ch. 1:2-5.

Although Paul writes the letter and speaks with the authority that the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father had given him, yet he includes with his own name “all the brethren with me” (vs. 2). You will remember that Paul often chose other brethren to travel with him, and to labor with him in the work of the gospel. You will remember that Timothy (Acts 16:3), Titus (Titus 1:5), Silas (Acts 15:40), Luke (Acts 16; compare “they” in v.8 with “we” in v.10) and others traveled with Paul and helped him; you will remember Mark started on this happy path, but turned back from it. (See Acts 13:5, 13; 15:37.) How good would it be today if some young men were willing to go forth and labor with their older brethren. Not only could they often make the load lighter for the older men and help in the happy work of preaching the gospel, but it is also very good training for these young men. Now Paul includes all these in his message to the churches in Galatia. They have all one mind about this matter. The Bible says, “That in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established” (Matt. 18:16). So Paul includes “all the brethren with me” (vs. 2). We do not know their names or who they were, but they all had one mind. If we compare Phil. 4:21, 22, we see that Paul makes a difference between “the brethren which are with me” (vs. 2) and “all the saints.” “All the saints” in the epistle to the Philippians would mean all the saints who lived in Rome (from where Paul wrote). “The brethren with me” (vs. 2) would include those fellow-laborers, of which we have spoken.

We must notice that although Paul includes all the brethren traveling with him, yet he does not mention them again, and throughout the epistle he generally uses the singular; as, for example, v.6: “I marvel.” These false apostles and teachers have challenged Paul’s authority, and Paul himself replies to their challenge.

“To the assemblies of Galatia” (vs. 2). It was always Paul’s custom to find some word of praise for the ones to whom he is writing, as, for example, 1 Cor. 1:4-9. Although the Corinthian Christians were wrong in so many ways, yet Paul delights to find something he can praise, and so he gladly writes, “I thank my God always on your behalf!” (1 Cor. 1:4). But in this letter to the assemblies of Galatia, there is not one word of praise or commendation. There is nothing for which he can give thanks. This tells us how very serious Paul considered the case of the assemblies of Galatia. And yet this same teaching which made Paul so indignant is the common teaching of Christendom today. Let me ask, Are you trusting in Christ alone, or in Christ and something else? Christ and your good works? Christ and your overcoming? Christ and your watching? Christ and the law? If you have added any of these, or any other thing, to Christ, then you are just as bad as these Galatian Christians; you have “fallen from grace” (ch. 5:4); you have a “different gospel” (vs. 6), and you are cursed (vss. 8, 9).

“Grace to you, and peace, from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.” v.3.

Though Paul cannot praise them, yet he can offer to them grace and peace. It may be they refuse grace and choose law, turn from peace and obtain a curse; but grace and peace are sent to them. That grace and peace come from the highest source, even “God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ” (vs. 3). We have just seen the Son and the Father together giving Paul his authority. Now we find the Father and the Son together offering grace and peace to the Galatians. It is very beautiful to see the Father and the Son linked together in their loving care of the believers, and in v.4 we again see this beautiful unity of the Father and the Son. “Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, so that He should rescue us out of the present wicked age, according to the will of our God and Father.”

It was our Lord Jesus Christ who gave Himself for our sins, but God the Father gave His only begotten Son, and our Lord gave Himself according to the will of God and our Father. Thus three times in these four verses we find the Father and the Son linked together for our blessing. It reminds us of John 10:27-30 where the Son and the Father together hold fast the Lord’s own sheep, and of the father and the son who went both together in Gen. 22:6, 8.

The two great subjects of the epistle to the Galatians are the attack on Paul’s authority and the attack on the grace of God which saves poor lost sinners without their works. We have seen that v.1 immediately met the first attack, and now v.3 meets the second attack. “Grace to you” who have despised God’s grace, who have fallen from grace, who have chosen law instead of grace. God delights to once again send to the assemblies of Galatia His grace and His peace. And though they may seek to be justified from their sins by works, yet Paul reminds them that Christ gave Himself for their sins. So even in his greeting Paul meets both attacks of the enemy. These two subjects (Paul’s authority as an apostle and the grace of God) are like two threads running all through the epistle, and in these opening verses they are knotted together in Paul’s greeting to the Galatian assemblies.

Christ “gave Himself for our sins” (vs. 4). I love to repeat these words to myself. As I look back over the years and see the multitudes of sins all along the pathway sins that nothing I can do will ever remedy or remove—these sweet words answer all. Christ “gave Himself for our sins!” (vs. 4).

In Gal. 3:1 we read: “O senseless Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes has been placarded [displayed, or painted, or portrayed, or depicted] Jesus Christ crucified.” Paul had told them the story of that terrible day at Golgotha outside the gates of Jerusalem when the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified. Paul had told them that story till the Galatians saw it all. They saw the mocking, the scourging, the crown of thorns, the purple robe. They saw the holy Son of God go forth bearing His cross. They saw Him stripped of His clothes, and those cruel nails driven through His hands and feet. They saw Him hanging on the cross between two thieves and they gazed on all His agony. Then they had watched the sun darkened, and they had heard that bitter, bitter cry, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?”. “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46). They had seen all this, even placarded before their very eyes. They had heard it all. They had heard that cry, “It is finished.” John 19:30. But how little had it entered into their souls! True, no living man has ever known the depths of sorrow and anguish that our Lord Jesus suffered when the Lord “laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6). No eye has ever seen the load our Savior bore in those hours of darkness and not one can ever measure the depths of bitterness in that bitter cry, “Why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (Mark 15:34). But this had been placarded before the eyes of the Galatians. They had seen it. They knew what Paul meant when he wrote, “Grace to you, and peace, from... our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins.”

That is the price their sins had cost our Lord Jesus Christ. That is the price my sins and your sins have cost—"HIMSELF!"

God is satisfied with that price, but the "senseless Galatians" (ch. 3:1) had forgotten that great Savior placarded before them and they wanted to add their own works, circumcision and the law to the price that Christ had paid.

If I owe a mighty debt, and my friend pays every cent of it for me and hands me the receipt, how can I add a further payment? This is what the Galatians were doing.

If a man pays a great price to set a slave free, why should the freed slave add to the price that has already been paid?

But this is what the Galatians were doing.

In Gal. 1:4 we read that our Lord Jesus Christ "gave Himself for our sins" (vs. 4). But in Gal. 2:20 we read, "The Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

Not only has my Savior paid my mighty debt, but He has bought me. I am His, altogether His and His only. What love! What grace! How can I doubt Him? Yet this is what the Galatians were doing. They could not or they would not, trust in Christ alone. They wished to add their own wretched works. "O senseless Galatians!" (ch. 3:1).

This salvation was all "according to the will of our God and Father" (vs. 4). On the one hand Christ "gave Himself," on the other hand "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). They have one mind in rescuing poor lost sinners. Well may the Apostle exclaim, "To whom be glory to the ages of ages. Amen" (vs. 5). Gladly do we who believe also say, "Amen!"

But there is another little word in this verse that we have not looked at yet. Christ "gave Himself for our sins, so that He should rescue us out of the present wicked age." What does the present age mean? V.5 tells of the coming ages, but the present age means the age in which you and I are living. We say it is the age of progress. It is the age of airplanes, of radios and of the atomic bomb. It is the age of war and jealousy among the nations. It is an age of fear and perplexity, when no one knows what will happen next— "men's hearts failing them for fear" (Luke 21:26). The present age means all the opinions, the hopes, the fears, the aims and aspirations at any time in the world. These make a very great power; they are like the air we breathe, for they are all around us and even unconsciously they affect our lives. As we read the newspaper, we breathe in, or drink in, the spirit of the present age, and how often our hearts are filled with fear and dread after reading it. That is the power of the present age. Thanks be to God, Christ gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from the present age and all its wickedness. (The original Greek makes the word "wicked" very emphatic.) It is not "in order that He might rescue us," but the result of having given Himself for our sins is "He has rescued us." We may turn back again to this "present wicked age," but Christ has rescued us from it. We are not of the world, just as Christ is not of the world. (John 17:14.) And amid all the fear, strife and hatred, the Christian may go quietly on his way because Christ has rescued him from this present age and all its wickedness. What is the meaning of "rescue"? It tells of great danger and a great salvation from that danger. So we were in danger of being swallowed up by the present age, but Christ has saved us from it. He has rescued us. Thanks be to His name! Again truly may we cry, "To whom be glory to the ages of ages. Amen" (vs. 5).

Very often "this age" is compared with "the coming age" (Mark 10:30) and surely it is so compared here in vv. 4, 5. (See also Luke 16:8; 18:30; 20:34, 35; Rom. 12:2.) "This age" is passing away quickly. "The coming age" is eternal. "This age," "the world," is under "a god" (2 Cor. 4:4), the devil, or under "princes" or "rulers" (1 Cor. 2:6). These are against the eternal God, "the King of the ages" (Ezek. 21:21).JND. (See also Eph. 2:2-7.) We in China often feel greatly the power of the god of this age. He is the devil, Satan, the dragon, that old serpent. (Rev. 20:2.) He is the serpent that deceived Eve. In China we see his "image and superscription" (Matt. 22:20) everywhere. On the old postage stamps and money, on the ornaments, even on the clothing and roofs of the houses, on everything, everywhere we see the image of the dragon. He is the god of this age, and he rules in China with a very heavy hand and with very little to resist him.

This is the reason that China suffers such sorrow and misery. The service of the dragon, of the god of this age, is very, very bitter service. How different from the service of Christ, who says, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30). But China refuses Jesus, the Lamb of God, and chooses the dragon, the god of this age, instead.

Meditations on the Epistle to the Galatians: Beautiful Grace, Galatians 1:1: Paul an Apostle

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

"Paul, an apostle, not from men, nor by means of a man, but by means of Jesus Christ, and God (the) Father, the One-having-raised Him out from among (the) dead (ones)." (vs. 1).

Immediately, in the very first words of the epistle, Paul replies to the attack of his enemies. They had said, "Paul is not an apostle. He is not one of the twelve apostles. He has not seen the Lord. The apostles at Jerusalem did not send him out nor did they give him authority to go. He has not been properly ordained."

The Greek word "apostle" means "a sent one." But it means more than that, for it has the meaning "sent from," and so it carries in the name "apostle" the authority of the one who sends him. Paul writes, "Paul, an apostle" (vs. 1). That is, "Paul, one sent from," and then he adds, "not from men, nor by means of a man, but by means of Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead."

Paul's enemies had said, "You were not sent from the apostles at Jerusalem." Paul replies, "You are right! I was not sent from any men, nor by means of any man, but by Jesus Christ." What an excellent answer! The enemies said, "The source of your authority is not the apostles at Jerusalem." Paul replies, "The source of my authority is not at all from earth, but from heaven. I have the highest authority: the authority I

carry is from Jesus Christ Himself, and from God the Father, the One who raised Him out from (among) the dead." Could any man have higher authority?

One of the proofs of an apostle was that he had seen the Lord. In 1 Cor. 9:1, Paul says, "Am I not an apostle?... have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?". The twelve apostles had seen the Lord Jesus, a Man on earth, and had received their authority as apostles from Him then. Paul also truly had seen the Lord; but he had seen Him in the glory. And it was from the glory, from the Lord Himself in the glory, that Paul had received his authority as an apostle.

But there is more in this first line of this epistle. "Not from men, nor by means of a man, but from Jesus Christ, and God the Father." This tells me that Jesus Christ is not "man" in the way that Peter or Paul, or you or I, are "man." This tells me that Jesus Christ is infinitely more than man. Jesus Christ is truly God. And as I see the name of "Jesus Christ" in this verse linked with "God the Father," I know that Jesus Christ is equal with God. And as I read on in this epistle, I find three times in the first four verses that Jesus Christ and God the Father are thus linked together on an equality; and I remember the old proverb, "A threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Eccl. 4:12).

Yet only a few verses further down in this same chapter I read the words, "James, the Lord's brother" (vs. 19). Paul says he saw "James, the Lord's brother" (vs. 19). He writes quite naturally, as he might have written, "I saw Timothy" or "I saw Peter." It was probably only a little over thirty years since James shared the same humble home with "the carpenter" of Nazareth. We have heard the people ask in scorn, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James?" (Mark 6:3). And now Paul writes, I saw "James, the Lord's brother" (vs. 19). These simple words tell me that my Lord is truly Man. If the first verse of Galatians tells me with trumpet tones that Jesus is truly God, the nineteenth verse tells me with equal certainty that He is also truly Man. I may not understand it, but I believe it, and I adore and worship Him who was the "Child," whose name is "Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." Isa. 9:6.

As I ponder those years at Nazareth, and think of James growing up with that One whom they called his "brother," I recall that James himself has written an epistle, and I turn to see what he will say of Him whom he knew so intimately. I read, "James, bondman of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (James 1:1) JND. James and Paul bear the same witness. James, the brother of the Lord, links together the holy names, God and the Lord Jesus Christ, just as Paul does in the epistle before us. We have a proverb that says, "You must live with a person to truly know him." James had lived for years with Him whom they called "a Nazarene" (Matt. 2:23). Notice he does not speak of Him as "my elder brother," but "James, bondman [or, slave] of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ."

But we must turn back to our epistle. Notice that Paul says he is "an apostle, not from men [plural], nor by means of a man [singular]." In our day, a servant of Christ is generally sent out by a missionary society, or by a committee, or by some group or company of men. They are the source from whence his authority comes. But it is generally one man who actually sends him forth. It may be the Chairman of the Committee, or the President of the Society, who acts for the whole body in sending this man forth. Paul says, "I am an apostle, neither from a company of men, nor by means of a single man."

What a grand and glorious commission! Reader, is your authority, like Paul's, from Jesus Christ and God the Father? Or are you sent out from a company of men, by means of one man? Is your authority from heaven or from earth? Are you sent forth "from men?" from a society? from a mission board? from a committee? We all do well to ponder these words of the Apostle: "not from men, nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father." These servants who are sent forth from men, or by a man, can never know the happy liberty of which we read in the epistle to the Galatians.

There are few today who can follow Paul through the first verse of our epistle! On the contrary, today men consider it necessary, and even an honor, to belong to a society and to be sent forth by a board of men. Today, men must be ordained by means of a man and hold a degree from a college or Bible school, proving they are "from men," in order to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. How different the Apostle Paul! And he glories in the fact that he had none of these things. Are our methods today really an improvement on God's methods as set forth in this scripture? The Lord Jesus said, "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go..." (John 15:16). How true this was of Paul. Is it true of me? of you? May we be able to say with one of old,

Let us read those blessed words once more and may they find a lodging place in the depths of our hearts: "Paul, an apostle, not from men, nor by means of a man, but by means of Jesus Christ, and God (the) Father, the One-having-raised Him out from among (the) dead (ones)."

Paul was an apostle from the resurrection side of the cross: an apostle from the glory; and we will find that all his writings bear this character. Our citizenship is in heaven. (Phil. 3:20.) Our inheritance is in heaven. (Eph. 1:11.) We are to seek those things which are above; our affections are to be on things above. (Col. 3:1, 2.)

Power and authority to raise the dead is certain proof of power and authority to send forth His servants. It was after His resurrection that the Lord said, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore" (Matt. 28:18-19). May we each be able to say: That is the mark; that is the badge; that is the sign of the authority that sends me forth, even the resurrection power, the mighty power of God, the One that raised our Lord Jesus out from among the dead. This is the first time the epistle refers to the death of our Lord Jesus Christ and it is to tell out that Paul's authority and apostleship are in resurrection power. It is this power, this authority, that we need today.

Paul's authority was not Christ and Peter; or Christ and the apostles; or Christ and any man. Paul's authority and commission were from Jesus Christ and God the Father alone. No man added anything to his authority or his commission.

Perhaps we should ask, When did the Lord Jesus Christ send Paul forth? When did He ordain him an apostle? In Gal. 1:15 we read that God set him apart for this work from his mother's womb. In Acts 26:16, 17 Paul is speaking before king Agrippa, and he says that when the Lord appeared to him on the road to Damascus, He said to him, "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee" (Acts 26:16-17). So we see that the Lord gave Paul his commission to go to the Gentiles at the time of his conversion. But His servant needed training and preparation for this work, and we will see that God gave him this also.

In Acts 22:17, 18, 21 we read that while Paul was praying in the temple at Jerusalem he saw the Lord saying to him, "Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me.... Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles." In Gal. 1:18 we read that it was three years after his conversion that Paul went up to Jerusalem. So we see that then the Lord repeated His commission, sending Paul to the Gentiles.

In Acts 13:2-4 we read, "The Holy Ghost said, Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed".

The Lord had been training His servant, and now the time was come for him to go forth. Once again Paul receives a command from God, this time God the Holy Ghost, to go forth to the special work for which he was set apart. The Bible tells us plainly that the Holy Spirit sent him forth. It is true his brethren in Antioch fasted, prayed, laid their hands on him and sent him forth. This showed their fellowship in the work to which the Lord had called him, just as later on the apostles in Jerusalem gave Paul and Barnabas "the right hands of fellowship" (ch. 2:9) for this same work. But we must never forget that it was the Lord Himself, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, who sent Paul forth: so he could truthfully say, "Paul, an apostle, not of men, nor by a man." We do not read that an assembly has power or authority to send men forth to work for the Lord. It is God alone who has this authority.

It is a very happy thing when a servant of the Lord has the fellowship of his brethren, and their prayers, when he goes forth to serve the Lord. Indeed, if he has not the fellowship of his brethren, he would do well to wait on the Lord before he goes forth, to see if there is some cause in himself that has hindered that fellowship. For we must always be on the watch that we do not give the enemy an opportunity to attack us. The New Testament speaks of this as giving the enemy "a base of operations." (Gal. 5:13). If an enemy wishes to attack another country, the first thing it wants is a small place in that country as "a base of operations." Our enemy, the devil, is the same; and this is especially true for one going forth to serve the Lord. Sin, or even any "weight" in our lives, provides this "base of operations" for the enemy. So let us "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us" (Heb. 12:1), and let us value very highly the fellowship of our brethren, which cannot truly be given if we are allowing sin in our lives. Notice the lack of fellowship with Barnabas in Acts 15:39, compared with the fellowship once again given to Paul in the following verse.

Not only is it a happy thing for the servant going forth to have the fellowship of his brethren at home, but it is a happy privilege and a happy responsibility for them to freely give their fellowship unless there is cause to withhold it. How much those who have gone forth to the front lines of the battle need the fellowship and the prayers of their brethren at home. In ch. 6:6 of this epistle we read, "Let the one being taught the Word, be having fellowship with the one teaching, in all good things." The saints at Antioch showed this fellowship to Paul and Barnabas. We might truly take up the words of Samuel of old: "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (1 Sam. 12:23). But we must never forget that it is the Lord, and the Holy Spirit, who send forth the servants.

We might notice that in Acts 13:1 The Scriptures speak of Barnabas and Saul as "prophets and teachers," (Eph. 4:11) but in ch. 14:4, after being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, He then calls them "apostles." I think this is the first time the Scriptures call Paul an apostle.

Before we leave this first verse of our epistle, let us note that the word "Father" tells of the Son. Without a child, no man is a father. It is the child that gives the character of father to a man. So, as we read these words, "... from Jesus Christ, and God the Father," (vs. 1) we not only see the deity of our Lord, and His equality with the Father, but we see also His relationship of "the Son with the Father" (Matt. 4:21). As we read on in the epistle we will find this character as "Son of God" more clearly set forth.

What an amazing collection of glories for our Lord Jesus Christ do we here find gathered together in a few words. All who trust in the law, or add the law to the finished work of Christ, take away from Him these glories of which He is so worthy. How suitable, then, that the first verse of this epistle should shine so brightly with His honor and His glory!

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