

Notes on Galatians

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Galatians 1.

The Epistle to the Galatians was written to defend the truth of the gospel against the inroads of error. In this respect it differs from the Epistle to the Romans, which is the orderly unfolding of the gospel, in the way of simple instruction. It also differs from the other epistles inasmuch as it is a letter not to a church, nor to an individual, but to a group of churches comprised in one of the ancient provinces of Asia Minor — "the churches of Galatia" (verse 2).

In the course of Paul's second missionary journey he went "throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia" (Acts 16: 6), and there it was that he appeared amongst these Gentiles preaching the gospel, "through infirmity of the flesh," but this temptation in his flesh they did not despise, but received him "as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus" (Gal. 4: 13, 14). They were evidently an impulsive and enthusiastic people, receiving the gospel he announced with such joy that had it been possible "they would have plucked out their own eyes, and have given them to him" (verse 15).

It is usually the case that the person easily impressed is not very stable, and so it was with the Galatians. Along came other teachers when Paul had departed and these "troubled" them with law teachings constraining them to be circumcised (Gal. 5: 12, and Gal. 6: 12); they were evidently men of the kind we read of in Acts 15: 1. The Galatians swung round and readily embraced these new ideas and started off to make Jews of themselves; if not exactly seeking *salvation* by law, at least seeking *holiness* by law.

These Judaizing teachers came from Jerusalem and, of course, presented themselves as coming with all the authority of that great apostolic centre behind them. Paul they represented as an upstart apostle, not embraced in the original apostolic band, and therefore lacking full and proper authority. Hence the apostle begins his letter by a certain amount of personal history. In verse 1 he declares that his apostleship is not "of man, neither "by man." In verse 12 he states the same two things, in slightly different words, of the gospel he preached. If not "of men," then men were in no sense the *source* or originators of either his apostleship or message. If neither were "by man," then both were received directly from the Lord, and man was not even the *channel* of their communication.

Paul's apostleship, then, sprang from a higher source than Jerusalem, even from Jesus Christ the risen One, and God the Father who raised Him, and the apostle is careful to add quickly the object

before the Lord in giving Himself to death for our sins — "that He might deliver us from this present evil world" (verse 4).

Of old, God did not shelter Israel in Egypt through the blood of the paschal lamb in order to leave them in Egypt. He took them clean out of Egypt and brought them to Himself. That was the type, and the antitype is still more wonderful. To-day God is gathering individuals out of the nations, and not a nation out of the house of bondage, (see Acts 15: 14), and those individuals are thereby brought to God as 1 Peter 3: 18 says, and consequently they are delivered from the world, as we find here. This is an affecting thought. The great object our blessed Lord proposed to Himself in dying for us was to introduce us to God, His Father, setting us before Him in the nearest of relationships and thus establishing the happiest communion and intercourse between our souls and Him. Are we really in the enjoyment of this? Do we live in the happy consciousness of the relationship and of the communion?

But here in Galatians the converse of all this is pressed upon us. These blessed links with God being established, we are consequently severed from the world and our old links with it are snapped. To deliver us from the world was equally His object in dying for us. This great truth, alas! we often shrink from. We hanker after the world and its injurious joys and are very reluctant to break our links with it. Consequently our enjoyment of God and His things is but small. We all know that one great secret of harnessing electricity in the service of man is wrapped up in the one word *insulation*. If insulation breaks down and the live wire runs to earth, much electric energy may be generated and yet all is lost. Links with the world and its evil mean a breakdown in the believer's spiritual insulations, and then, as a result, feebleness in his communion with God — and good-bye to spiritual energy and power.

In verse 6, the apostle comes straight to the main theme of his letter. He does not mince his words, but speaks with tremendous energy in denouncing these false workers who were perverting the gospel of Christ. He had tremendous and dogmatic certainty as to the gospel he had carried to them. From verse 11 and onwards he recounts the way in which he received his message from the Lord. His course at the time of his conversion and for years after was such as to preclude any idea of his having sat at the feet of other apostles and having learned his message through them. No! he got what he got direct from God. He was raised up as a fresh and original witness to the glorified Lord Jesus. God revealed "His Son," not merely "to" him, but "in" him. The revelation made was, as it were, written on the fleshy table of his heart and thus impressed upon his very being — a profounder and deeper thing than merely receiving an external revelation written upon tables of stone.

It is a very certain thing that Paul did not think one gospel as good as another. He was no believer in what is miscalled "charity" in the twentieth century, which exists in an easy-going toleration of any and every theory however false. He knew THE TRUTH, he preached it fearlessly, and here he anathematises all, men or angels, who lend themselves to the propagation of the lies that deny the truth.

Incidentally, we may gather from this chapter what are the marks of the genuine and authentic gospel of God. Let us gather them up ere we close.

First, then, it has God's Son as its theme. He is preached as glad tidings among the heathen (verse 16).

Second, His death and resurrection (verses 1 and 4) are its foundation and "our sins" are in view, not our trials, nor our troubles, nor the injustices of our social systems, or any other of the thousand and one minor ailments that afflict sinful men. The so-called "social gospel" is just another of those "other gospels" which are NOT another real gospel but a spurious deceit.

Third, the true gospel is not "after man" (verse 11). It is not the kind of message that would have

originated with man. It does not flatter him nor conform to his standards. Hence the herald of it cannot expect to please men. Those rational "gospels" which men applaud as being so eminently reasonable are not the gospel of God.

Fourth, the true gospel when received has the effect of delivering the recipient *from* the world (verse 4). The false "gospels" invariably have the effect of confirming those who believe them in the world; they leave their votaries as part and parcel of the world system. The true believer is crucified to the world as Galatians 6: 14 says, and that because he is "crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2: 20).

With these marks of the true gospel before us we shall have no difficulty in discerning it when we hear it, nor of detecting the false gospels when they are presented to us.

Galatians 2.

In the opening part of this chapter Paul continues the story of his early years of service with the object of showing how little contact there had been between himself and the other apostles. In the providential ordering of God, no less than fourteen years elapsed between the fifteen days he spent with Peter, a few years after his conversion (see Gal. 1: 18), and the visit to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus. This is, of course, the visit of which Acts 15. speaks, and hence during those fourteen years had come his time of service at Antioch (Acts 11: 25, 26), and his first missionary journey (Acts 13 and 14). Hence when he went up he was no mere novice who wished to be instructed in what he was to preach, but rather a well-trying apostle with a definite and original message.

Yet, as Acts 15 shows, the contention that arose at Antioch, and necessitated this journey to Jerusalem, all raged around the gospel which he preached. It was just because there was in his preaching a note which was barely audible, if not altogether absent, in the preaching of the twelve that the dissension arose.

In those early years at Jerusalem there was the fullest possible proclamation of forgiveness and salvation in the name of the risen Christ, and the preaching was powerfully blessed of God. From the beginning thousands believed and gladly identified themselves with the rejected Messiah without cutting their links with "Judaism," i.e., the whole system of things instituted through Moses, which was a shadow only of "the good things to come" (Heb. 10: 1). We read, for instance, such things in the Acts as "a great company of priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6: 7). "Certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed" (Acts 15: 5). "Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law" (Acts 21: 20). Doubtless these believers, whether priests, Pharisees, or zealous lovers of the law, were in the main true souls with sincere faith in Christ, yet nothing that they had heard in the gospel to which they had listened had made them feel it to be inconsistent to link up the faith of Christ with priestly service in the worn out and desolate temple or with Pharisaism, or with zealous law-observances. They had listened to the gospel melody, indeed, but the note which involved their being lifted up and out of all these things had not as yet clearly sounded in their ears.

Now it was just that note which the Apostle Paul fearlessly and distinctly struck. If we read the first eight chapters of the Epistle to the Romans wherein he gives us an orderly exposition of his gospel, we shall see. He proclaimed both Jew and Gentile equally "guilty before God," shutting both alike up to God's mercy. He proclaimed God's righteousness as unto *all* and upon *all* who believe, irrespective of their Jewish or Gentile origin. He further declared that now the fundamental cleavage on

racial lines amongst men was not as to being of Abraham's seed or not of Abraham's seed, but as to being in Adam or in Christ; and that this being in Christ involves identification with Him in His death, and consequently the crucifixion of "our old man" — the judgment of all that we were as men in the flesh — and the finding of both new life and power in the Spirit of God now given to all who believe.

Here was doctrine, to the Jewish mind, of a most revolutionary order! It cut at the roots of all their ancient prejudices. It showed the whole Mosaic economy, in which they so boasted, to be but "a shadow," a provisional system introduced whilst awaiting the arrival of the substance in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. It consequently aroused bitter hostility from some "Christians" who were no true believers at all — "false brethren unawares brought in" (Gal. 2: 4) — and even opposition from those who were true believers.

In our chapter Paul makes it plain to us, firstly, that he took up a most inflexible attitude in regard to the matter, for he knew that in it the whole truth of the gospel was at stake (verse 5); and secondly, that in conference with other apostles and leaders, they were not able to add anything to him, as though he were deficient in his teaching or had omitted any detail. Rather they gladly recognized the grace given to him of the Lord, and the special sphere of his service, and gave to him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship. Acts 15 bears full witness to this, for in the circular letter issued by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem at the close of this conference they maintained the liberty of grace as declared by Paul's gospel as against the Jewish bondage advanced by others, and spoke of "our beloved Barnabas and Paul."

In verse 11 of our chapter Paul proceeds to relate what happened at a later date, when Peter was visiting Antioch. The liberty of the gospel had been clearly established *in principle* by the decision reached at Jerusalem, yet under the pressure of contrary opinion Peter fell into a snare brought by the fear of man. Wishing to stand well in the eyes of certain who came from Jerusalem, he denied *in practice* what he admitted in principle. Others followed his bad example, until even Barnabas was carried away, like an anchor which begins to drag. Paul, however, proved himself to be the sheet anchor and stood firm. He withstood Peter to his face.

Formerly Paul had firmly withstood the Judaizers, "that the truth of the gospel might continue." Now he perceives that Peter's action was "not . . . according to the truth of the gospel." Hence in rebuking Peter and convicting him of his inconsistency, he takes care to make very manifest the *truth of the gospel*, both doctrinally and experimentally.

We might almost call verse 16 "the gospel in a nutshell," and that particularly as it presents itself to a Jew. It begins by exposing the utter futility of law-keeping for justification. No flesh is justified by the works of the law. (The next chapter, notice, carries the point a step further, and shows that all flesh under the law is under the curse, verse 10.) Justification is only possible by the faith of Christ, and we Christians have believed in Jesus Christ that we might be so justified.

But in the last three verses of the chapter the apostle shows the working out of the truth of the gospel in an experimental way, and hence he speaks in the first person singular. He drops the "we" of verses 15, 16 and 17 and adopts "I" The truth experimentally realized comes to this, that "I am crucified with Christ." In my case crucifixion was richly deserved, and was but the carrying out of the just sentence of the law. But then, in thus dying under the law's sentence I have died out from under its power, and that in order that I may now live *unto* God; that is, with God as the great End and Object of my every thought and movement.

All this, however, involves a paradox which the apostle states in verse 20. "I am crucified," says he, "nevertheless I live." Crucifixion has reached me, yet has it left me a living man. It has reached me

in identification with Christ, and its effect is the displacing of *self*, the old "I," in favour of Christ; so that He, vitally in us now by His Spirit (see Rom. 8: 9 and 10), may live in us characteristically — that is, that His character may be seen in us.

Such a life is not possible apart from instant and continuous dependence upon Himself. If Christ is to live in me, and consequently be displayed as to His character by me, He must be abidingly my Object. Hence Paul adds, "The life which I now live in the flesh [that is, in *the body*, as a man in this world] I live by the faith of the Son of God." By-and-by, when out of the flesh, and in bodies of glory, we shall live by the *sight* of the Son of God; now we live by the *faith* of Him. Faith makes Him a living, bright reality to us, and that which acts as the motive force in it all is His *love*. "The Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Thus Paul speaks to us of that which was livingly and experimentally true to him at that moment. He does not say, "*I was crucified with Christ*," as referring simply to what was accomplished at the Cross. That would have been perfectly true, and is what he virtually says in Romans 6: 6. It is "I AM crucified with Christ." The great fact wrought outside him at the Cross was a living and present reality in the experience of his soul.

In conclusion, notice the way in which verses 19 and 20 may be summarized by the prepositions used: —

1. "I . . . live *unto* God."
2. "I am crucified *with* Christ."
3. "Christ liveth *in* me."
4. "I live *by* the faith of the Son of God."
5. "Who . . . gave Himself *for* me."

Each preposition has its own peculiar force: —

"Unto" expresses the *end* in view.

"With" expresses *association* or *identification*.

"In" expresses *life* and *character*.

"By" expresses *object*.

"For" expresses *substitution*.

How happy for us each if we can simply say: "Christ the Son of God became my Substitute in His mighty love, that, identified with Him in His death and with Himself in glory before me as my Object, He might be livingly displayed in my life, and thus my whole life and existence have God and His glory as its end."

Galatians 3.

Having thus vindicated the truth of the gospel the apostle appeals to the Galatians in a very forcible way. Their folly was very manifest in the light of what he had just stated, and he brings it home to them by a series of rapid questions, appealing to what had already been accomplished in their midst and in their hearts. Christ crucified had been set forth among them, and they had believed in Him, and received the Spirit of God, and suffered for their faith. Had all this been ministered to them, and even

miracles wrought in connection with it, by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? and on which of these two principles had they received it all?

There was but one answer possible. It was all by faith and not by works, and the apostle might well clinch his argument by crying out, "Are ye so foolish? — having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" Again there was but one answer, No. God's ways with us are not haphazard, nor the subject of caprice. They are based upon His own determinate counsel, and what He starts with that He continues with. If He saves us by the hearing of faith, on that principle He will continue with us to the end, and we shall not be made perfect by the flesh.

Before leaving these early verses notice two things. First, the way in which the *law* and the *flesh* are linked together, as also *faith* and the *Spirit*. The law was originally given that it might curb the flesh (that is, the sinful nature which attaches to man as a fallen creature) and act as a corrective, and hence in result it made very manifest the true nature of the flesh, which is "not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8: 7). Still the law recognized the flesh and assumed for the moment that it might be capable of improvement. Faith, on the other hand, fixes its gaze altogether upon God and His work, and recognizes the condemnation of the flesh in the cross of Christ, and the Spirit is given as the seal of faith.

Secondly, notice that the question in verse 3, "Are ye now *made perfect* by the flesh?" infers that the particular error which was troubling the Galatians was not so much justification by the works of the law, as *holiness* by the works of the law. They had been beguiled into thinking that though justified by Christ and by faith, they were to reach sanctification by law-keeping. Still sanctification involved justification, and hence the apostle proceeds to go into the whole question of justification, and to show the place that the law held in the ways of God.

He begins with Abraham in verse 6. He believed God and was accounted righteous in virtue of his faith, and the true children of Abraham are those who are "of faith," that is, believers. But this blessing of Abraham by faith had in view what God would introduce many centuries after, what is being verified amongst the heathen to-day, and all who have Abraham's faith are blessed equally with him, whoever they may be (verses 8 and 9).

After Abraham came the law, but 430 years had elapsed, as verse 17 points out; and when the law was given no man was justified by it in the sight of God (verse 11). Verse 10, however, goes further than this in stating that to be under the law is to be under the curse, for the curse of the law rests on everyone who fails in the least of its demands.

Verses 13 and 14 bring us to the two great realities which characterise Christianity, viz., redemption accomplished in the death of Christ and the consequent gift of the Holy Spirit. It will be for our soul's good if we lay hold of these things in a very clear way. The blessing of Abraham was *righteousness*, so that he stood before God a justified man. This blessing of his was to extend even to the Gentiles, as the Scripture had foreseen. But presently the law was given through Moses, and all who came under it fell under its curse. The Lord Jesus Christ appeared and wrought redemption, not only from sin and Satan but also from the law and its curse. As a consequence, the blessing of righteousness comes to all who believe, even though they be Gentiles; and further, they receive the Spirit who also had been promised before. Into what a wonderful place of security and privilege we Christians are brought! How great the folly of the Galatians in turning back to law-keeping, even for holiness, in the light of this.

The rest of the chapter is taken up with a further developing of the effect of Christ's advent and work as regards the law. The effect of the gift of the Spirit is dealt with in the early part of Galatians 4.

There was this definite promise to Abraham which centred in Christ, for He was "the seed" contemplated (verse 16). The coming in of the law in no way nullified this earlier promise. It might then be asked, What was the object of the giving of the law? The answer of verse 19 is very striking. It was not given to men as a possible way of getting to heaven. It was not given to enable men to inherit even the earth. "It was added because of transgressions," or "for the sake of transgressions." Men had from the beginning been sinners, but the coming in of the law made their sins positive transgressions, and hence they stood convicted in a degree impossible before. Moreover it was given provisionally "till the seed should come." It was, as verse 24 expresses it, "our schoolmaster" up to Christ.

The fact is, under the law before Christ came, the choicest saint that lived was treated as a child under age, and hence was kept under the schoolmaster, convicted of sin and shut up to the faith to be revealed by the coming of Christ. Now faith being come, inasmuch as Christ, the Object of faith, is revealed, we are taken out of our tutelage and take our place as sons in the Father's house. We are "all the sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (verse 26).

Such is a very brief outline of the contents of this wonderful chapter. May every reader of these lines enter into the blessedness of this place of relationship which is ours through the work of Christ.

Do not omit to notice how, in verse 16, the Apostle Paul founds his argument as to Christ being the "seed" of Abraham upon the word in the Old Testament being in the singular and not in the plural. By that slight difference the Spirit of God indicated His real meaning. Paul evidently believed in the full and verbal inspiration of Scripture, an inspiration extending to so minute a matter as that.

Let us stand with Paul in this vital matter of the verbal inspiration of Scripture.

Galatians 4.

In the previous chapter the apostle had likened the position of the believer under the law of Moses before Christ came to that of a child of noble parentage kept under a schoolmaster. To this figure he reverts in the opening verse of our chapter.

Whatever a child may be, even if he be the heir, yet is he kept in a place of subjection and under rules and regulations, so that in that respect he differs nothing from a servant. He cannot as yet be entrusted with the freedom of his father's house. When, however, he comes of age all is changed. He then leaves the nursery regime behind, and the time of his tutelage is over. He takes his place as a son, in the liberty and nearness which befits that intimate relationship.

So it has been for us, as the apostle indicates in verse 3, "we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world." The "we" here indicates the believer of Jewish stock; and the apostle speaks impersonally, as though there had been wrought out in the lifetime of one saint what actually transpired in a period covering many generations. Such, in their days of "childhood" under the law, were in bondage to the elements or principles of the world. It is worthy of note that according to this the principles on which the law was based were the principles of *the world*. This helps to explain why, in spite of the curse it pronounces, the law and the root principle of it, viz., all our blessing or otherwise depending upon what we can be and do for God, is so persistently clung to by sinful men. The law does not totally condemn and displace the world. It recognizes it, and assumes it *may be* of some worth by its very recognition.

The great divide between the old dispensation and the new was when Christ appeared. Then was the "fulness of time" and the Lord Jesus came "made of a woman," i.e., really and truly *Man*; "made under the law," i.e. come of the chosen stock of Israel, who were by Divine appointment under law's

dominion. He came under the law, not that He might keep it for us, and atone for our failure to keep it by so doing, but that He might redeem those that were under it. How He thus redeemed has been told us in verse 13 of the previous chapter. It was by "being made a curse for us," that is, by bearing the penalty which the law inflicted. This is redemption by death or by blood, after the type of Abel's offering. The idea that disobedient sinners can be redeemed by another producing the fair fruit of obedience on their behalf is more after the type of Cain's bloodless offering.

By death, then, we are redeemed from the curse of the law. Galatians 4: 5, however, carries us on a further step. We are redeemed not only from the law's curse but also from its dominion. We are set free from the reign of the schoolmaster and from schoolroom regime, in receiving the "adoption of sons." We leave the schoolroom for the liberty of the son of full age, who knows the mind of his father and moves without restriction in every apartment of the house.

But not only are we redeemed by the death of Christ and brought into Sonship as knowing the Father, but God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. The Holy Spirit is here spoken of as "the Spirit of His Son" because just as the Lord Jesus took up His place as God's Son, even as Man in this world (see Luke 1: 35), in the energy of the Spirit, so is that same Spirit the source and energy of the life and thoughts and feelings of a son of God in each believer whom He indwells. By Him we cry "Abba, Father." He gives us the consciousness of the relationship and a suitable response to the Father's love. A wealthy philanthropist might lift a poor child out of some charitable institution and legally adopt him as his son. He could not, however, beget within him the proper feelings of a son of his, nor create a suitable response on the child's part. That might be forthcoming in some degree from the child, or it might be almost totally lacking to the distress of the benefactor. What man cannot do, God has done.

The Divine order is — first the relationship established as the fruit of redemption; then the consciousness of, and response to, the relationship as the fruit of the Spirit's indwelling, and work in our hearts. We have received the Spirit *because we are sons*, and not *vice versa*.

Notice in passing that in verse 5, it is "we" — only those believers who were of Israel's race could properly be spoken of as redeemed from the law, and Paul, the writer, was one of them. In verse 6 it is "ye," for the Galatians were Gentiles and they as redeemed (though not exactly from *the law*) had equally with the Jews received the Spirit of God. The Christian, whether Jew or Gentile, is no more a servant like the saints of the bygone dispensations, but a son, and even an heir of God through Christ.

What an astounding dignity! What unparalleled relationship and privilege! We read and write the words, but how little do we take it in. What holy elevation would it give us if we did, and how should we appreciate the warm and almost indignant expostulations of the apostle which follow in verses 8 to 18.

Once the Galatians had served false gods (verse 8) and now they had been brought thus to know and be known of the living and true God, and known of Him in such wonderful fashion as this. Were they, after this, going to turn back to the old order of things which he characterizes as "weak and beggarly elements"? Strong language this, yet not too strong. The law was holy, just and good, yet just as the moon is a weak and beggarly affair in the presence of the sun, so is the law in the presence of the grace and power of the gospel. In the language of the great parable of Luke 15, the Galatians had been received into the Father's house and set in the son's place and not among the hired servants, and here they were with false humility going back, not exactly to the care of the swine in the far country, but to the drudgery of menials in the kitchen, as though *that* were the way to retain the love which the Father had showered on them!

Yet, apparently the Galatians were guilty of no very great lapses. The apostle specifies here only the matter of observing "days and months and times and years"; a thing which we might have considered beneath notice. It was, however, a symptom of a deep-seated disease. The Apostle James has told us that though a man keeps the whole law save one point which he breaks, yet he is guilty of all. On the same principle a man may wish to have the benefit of grace, but if he takes up the law in regard to one point, he must be under it in regard to all; as indeed verse 3 of Galatians 5. explicitly states. This is something that we must bear well in mind. We cannot put a patch of grace on the old garment of law, nor put the new wine in the old bottles. In our relations with God we must be either altogether under law and its curse, or under grace and its blessing. But then grace makes absolutely nothing of us, and everything of Christ.

The Apostle proceeds to recall how the Galatians had at first received him, and now, alas! they had swung round and almost treated him as an enemy. But all this came to pass under the influence of these false Judaizing teachers. In verse 17 the apostle alludes to them, though he does not name them. They were very zealous in their attentions to the Galatians but with no good intent. They simply wished to exclude them from the apostle Paul so that they might become zealous partisans of themselves. This is always the way of the false teacher. He does not aim at attracting souls to Christ, but to himself. The true servant of God, on the contrary, is like Paul, and travails in an agony of spiritual desire that CHRIST may be formed in those amongst whom he labours. The false servant aims at placing his own impression on the plastic heart of the convert; the true servant labours that Christ may be formed there.

As a closing argument, Paul goes back to what the law itself recorded in an allegory. The Galatians seemed so enamoured of the law that perhaps they would listen to it. In the history of Hagar and Ishmael, of Sarah and Isaac, we have an allegory. Abraham's first son, born according to the flesh of the bondwoman, was a figure of the legal system and its bondage. Isaac, the child of promise, born by resurrection-power of the free woman, typified grace and those who are under it. In this allegory furnished by the law, the first was superseded by the second. The legal system had to go that grace and the children thereof might be supreme. Even in the law itself there were these intimations that it was only a provisional system and to be set on one side when God introduced that which had been His thought and purpose from the beginning.

We Christians whether formerly Jews or Gentiles are "children of the freewoman," children of grace and not of law. We are not "servants" but "sons," as the earlier part of the chapter stated. No credit attaches to us in connection with this wonderful privilege. It is all, from first to last, the grace of God.

Galatians 5.

Having unfolded the true place of relationship and privilege in which the believer is set, the apostle exhorts the Galatians to stand fast in it. He speaks of it as "the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free." The law he calls "the yoke of bondage"; and anyone who slips away in his mind from the liberty of Sonship before the Father, to the bondage of law-keeping as determining his relations with God, has indeed become "entangled." In his own mind he may intend to take up only one small item of the whole number of legal observances, such as-circumcision, but if he touches law-keeping for justification at all, he becomes entangled in the whole system and cannot free himself.

Moreover, he thereby becomes "fallen from grace" as verse 4 says. He takes up a ground before God which practically makes Christ of no effect unto him. The words "fallen from grace" are sometimes wrongly used as though they meant that a believer who once stood in the grace of God has

now been ejected from it by God because of his bad behaviour. The point of the passage is rather that anyone who has once taken up his position before God in grace, as these Galatians had, and then abandons it *in his own mind and consciousness* for law has had a bad fall. To step off the grace platform on to the law platform — if we may so speak — involves a descent that amounts to a fall, for the one is far lower than the other. In the case of a true believer being entangled thus, the fall, we repeat, is in his own mind and consciousness. God's grace and the relationship established by grace remain the same, for "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11: 29).

In the case of one who has professed Christianity without being a true believer, he was never in any vital relationship of grace with God out of which to fall.

In contrast to all this, verse 5 gives the attitude that properly marks the believer. We, through the Spirit — given to us as the Spirit of Sonship — wait by faith for the hope of righteousness, which is the shining out of the glory at "the manifestation of the sons of God," as Romans 8: 17-19 puts it.

Now the Galatians had once run well. They had been, however, hampered in the race by the adoption of the legal ideas which the apostle is combating. From the point of view of the athlete these ideas were like entanglements, from another point of view like leaven, a little of which leavens the whole lump. Still, Paul, when he thought of the Lord, felt confident as to the Galatians, and regarded their defection as only temporary, and he states that the individual or the men who were responsible for the mischief would have to bear their judgment in due season.

In verse 13 the apostle guards an important point. Liberty must not be taken to mean licence. Christian liberty is not licence for the flesh to act but liberty for Divine love to act. We stand in the liberty of the sons of God and our nature as "sons" is the Divine nature, which is love. The "flesh" is the nature which attaches to us as children of Adam. If we as Christians are living thus in the happy liberty that characterizes our relationship with God, and our hearts are consequently filled with love, we shall fulfil, as verse 14 tells us, what the law demanded but failed to produce from the flesh. Verse 15 seems to infer that, on the contrary, the Galatians who had turned back to law were far from keeping its demands; they were biting and devouring one another rather than loving and serving one another.

But the Galatian believer having read the apostle's argument thus far might wish to say, "Well, Paul, we thought that the way to repress the lusts of the flesh and promote holy living was by diligent observance of the law. If it is not the way, tell us plainly what is." The apostle answers in verse 16, "This I say then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." In verse 17 he adds that there are the two opposing forces in the believer, the flesh and the Spirit. They are contrary and totally opposed, and the Spirit of God is the superior power, so that under His influence we may not do the things that otherwise we should.

Here then we have conflict indicated. Yet while the conflict is *inevitable*, since the nature and desires of flesh and Spirit are altogether contrary, it is not supposed that the conflict is *continuous*; but rather the reverse. The point is that walking in the Spirit one is lifted above the desires and activities of the flesh, and for so long as the believer does walk in the Spirit he is not in conflict but in deliverance and liberty.

What is it to "walk in the Spirit"? Walking indicates activity. To walk in the Spirit is to have one's activities in the Spirit; to have one's thoughts and words, one's behaviour, ways and works springing from the indwelling Spirit as their source, and energized by Him. This is a very exalted standard of practical life, surely, but it is proper Christian living and not something of an exceptional nature to be attained to by only a few. Alas! how little do we know of it in experience and practice! How little proper and normal Christian living there is amongst us twentieth-century Christians!

Walking thus, however, we should indeed be led of the Spirit, and if so, verse 18 tells us, we are not under the law. We cannot be under both regimes at the same time. It is the privilege of the sons of God to be led by the Spirit and not by the schoolmaster. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8: 14).

Both flesh and Spirit express themselves in a practical way and at once their totally opposite nature is revealed. Verses 19 to 21 give us "the *works of the flesh*." Verses 22 and 23 "the fruit of the Spirit." Those who do the works of the flesh thereby betray their nature and character and such shall not inherit God's kingdom. That nature is excluded thence, and how thankful we may be that it is. It has caused enough havoc in this world. It shall never cause like havoc there!

In contrast thereto is the fruit of the Spirit. It does not even say *fruits*, for all these excellent features are considered as a cluster of fruit, all so many varying manifestations of the same life. In nature, fruit is the highest expression and crown of vegetable life. So here the life of the Spirit comes naturally and quietly into expression as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. When we think of works we have a mental picture of bustle and noise. When we think of fruit we think of the silent processes of nature. There is no law against the fruit of the Spirit. It is rather the very thing which the law approves and desires.

At the end of the chapter we are reminded of two great facts. Firstly, we have only become Christ's as those who have solemnly ratified in our own hearts the sentence executed against the flesh with its affections and lusts. It *was* crucified in the cross of Christ, whether we realize it or not. The Christian is one who has accepted and consented to that act, and therefore has crucified the flesh so far as he is concerned. Secondly, the Christian lives in the Spirit, as verse 25 indicates. The crucifixion of the flesh is putting the death sentence on the *old* source of life. The Spirit in the believer is the *new* source of life.

Do we all realize this? Have we learned to know and treat the flesh as a condemned and crucified thing? It is only what is normal and elementary in Christianity according to the Bible. If we have, we shall recognize that our life as Christians is in the Spirit of God, and consequently, we are to walk in the Spirit, as verse 16 has already exhorted us. It is like the process of grafting. When the cultivated rose is grafted on to the wild briar stock it means death to the life of the briar, in order that the plant may live in the life of the rose. To the gardener you would say, "If that plant is now living in the life of the rose let us cultivate and encourage the rose shoots and branches, and let us ruthlessly cut back any attempted shooting forth of the condemned briar stock." Further you cannot have a *rose* so that it belongs to the gardener and is worth a place in his garden *without putting to death the old briar nature with all its buddings and sproutings*.

We trust the reader can make for himself the application of this illustration to verses 24 to 26 of our chapter.

Galatians 6.

Wonderful as is all the truth of an experimental and practical nature unfolded in chapter 5, someone might at once say, "But, Paul, you set before us a very exalted life. we are sure to fail in it." The apostle himself recognizes this and so chapter 6 opens with instructions which have failure in view.

The Scriptures never suppose that a Christian is under the power of sin, but the very reverse. The Apostle Paul elsewhere asks, "Shall we *continue* in sin . . . ? God forbid" (Rom. 6: 1, 2). The Apostle

John asserts, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin" (1 John 3: 9). The word translated "commit" has the force of "practise" — he does not practise sin, — it is not a habit with him. It is supposed, however, that a Christian may be *overtaken* in sin, as the first verse of our chapter shows. The flesh is still in the believer, and if prayerfulness and watchfulness are relaxed it will break out into open sin.

Now when such a thing occurs, what is to be the attitude of others? Do not let us miss the connection between the last verse or two of Galatians 5 and the first of Galatians 6. If the flesh is working in others, they, desirous of vain glory, will simply provoke the flesh yet more in the offending brother. If, on the other hand, there are those who are spiritual; that is, those who in their thoughts and affections, and consequently in their judgments and behaviour, are governed by the Spirit of God and not by the flesh — those who are "walking in the Spirit," then these should restore such an one in the spirit of meekness. They may well be meek in the remembrance of their own liability to temptation. In thus humbly getting down alongside the erring brother and bearing his failure on their hearts they would be fulfilling the law of Christ, which is *love*.

If, on the other hand, instead of acting in meekness a man fancies himself to be *something*, he is sure to be *nothing* and self-deceived. Rather let him test himself and his own work and thus discover his own true value before God, for each must shoulder the burden of his own responsibility. There is no contradiction between verses 2 and 5.

Verses 6 to 13 are occupied with a fresh subject. The believers who receive instruction in the Word of God should remember the temporal necessities of those who devote their time to instructing them. Receiving spiritual things they are to reciprocate in all good things of a temporal sort, and they are not to be weary in so doing, for in due season they will reap the reward of their giving. Further, such giving should be extended towards all men, as opportunity serves; though those of the household of faith have the first claim.

Now it is in connection with this simple and everyday matter that the important principles contained in verses 7 and 8 are enunciated. The apostle knew that such is the natural selfishness of our hearts that nothing would prevail but weighty considerations, which, acting like a powerful lever, would lift us out of a niggardly spirit. We may think we see a dozen good reasons why we cannot or need not give, and thus deceive ourselves, but the law stands that as a man sows he reaps. As a matter of fact he reaps both in kind and in quantity.

That we reap in quantity as we sow 2 Corinthians 9: 6 states, whereas this scripture emphasises the former consideration. If we "sow to the flesh," that is, indulge the desires of the flesh and follow its bent and cater for its gratification, we reap its corruption. If we "sow to the Spirit," that is, yield to all those thoughts and desires of which the Spirit of God within us is the source, we reap life everlasting.

Everlasting life, be it remembered, does not only mean a new life within us of which God is the source, and the duration of which is eternal, but it also covers all those blessed relationships, all that communion, and all those joys in which the life expands and expresses itself. If it did only mean the new life within us which we possess as born again, then indeed we might quote this passage to prove that we gain new birth as the result of something which we can do. Rather the life is ours by the gift of God, and we reap the enjoyment of the relationships and communion, which is the life according to this verse, as we sow to the Spirit who is the energising power of life. It is life in the practical and experimental sense, the sense in which men use the word when they talk of "seeing life" in the world.

This verse then gives us the secret of spiritual prosperity. To gratify the flesh and deny the Spirit is the way of corruption; to deny the flesh and to gratify the Spirit is the way by which we lay hold on

the things that are life indeed.

With verse 11 we start the closing section of the epistle. The apostle's final word is in the nature of a home-thrust. He unmasks the real motive which swayed the Judaizing teachers in their opposition. It was not that they were genuinely concerned about obedience to the law, for they themselves did not keep it (verse 13). It was rather that they desired to escape the persecution connected with the cross of Christ, and they desired to glory in flesh. The apostle follows this exposure by the boldest possible declaration of his own position. For himself the Cross stood as the great line of demarcation between him and the world. Crucifixion was a death of penal judgment and of shame, and by Christ and His Cross the world had died a judicial death of shame in his eyes, and He had died a judicial death of shame in its eyes. The world and Paul mutually reprobated each other. Both were to each other a dead and worthless thing. Mutually they took leave of each other without regrets, glad to be rid of bad rubbish.

The "world" in this verse of course signifies the world system, and not the people in the world as in John 3: 16. But let us pause and ask ourselves whether we are of one mind with Paul in this matter. Is the world experimentally and practically crucified to us and we to it? Or are we finding a part, if not the whole, of our life and enjoyment in the world system, in spite of it being a judged and condemned Thing, as John 12: 31 states?

One thing is certain, the world does not count with God. Nor do such things as circumcision and uncircumcision which are outward in the flesh. What does count is "a new creature" or "a new creation." Every true Christian is a part of that new creation as the fruit of God's workmanship (*see* Eph. 2: 10) and the great thing is to walk according to that. The Galatians, as we have seen, had been entrapped into looking upon the law of Moses as the rule of their life, and walking as under it. No, says the apostle, the true rule of the believer's life is new creation. We walk, not as servants under a code of rules imposed from without, but as sons of God, a new creation in Christ Jesus, indwelt by the Spirit of God's Son. We walk according to the principles of that new creation in which we participate.

Upon all such the apostle calls down peace and mercy. These things are indeed their portion. How great the grace that has set us before God in such favour and liberty! He desires also similar blessings upon the true Israel of God's election rather than upon these mischief-makers who had been at work seeking to Judaize the Galatians.

The Epistle ends abruptly. The "marks" or "brands" of the Lord Jesus were on Paul's body, as of old masters branded their slaves. He bore honourable scars in Christ's service which branded him as His slave beyond all dispute. He could hardly let his affections flow out freely to the Galatians seeing the condition in which they were, but he desired the *grace of the Jesus Christ* to be with their spirit, which would effectually set them free from *the bondage of the law of Moses*.