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**Comments on
the Epistle to the Galatians**

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Introduction

IN HIS EPISTLE to the Galatians the Apostle Paul is not so much concerned with expounding his Gospel as with defending it. The mischief-makers were evidently certain Jews who professed conversion to Christianity, and yet were more zealous of the law than they were of Christ; men of the same stamp as those we have mentioned in Acts 15:1 and 5.

We find allusions to their mischievous activities in some of the other epistles. They had gained a certain measure of success amongst the Corinthians, for instance. There are faint allusions to them in the first epistle, but in 2 Cor. 11, the Apostle denounces them in no uncertain terms. They were Jews right enough, as 2 Cor. 11:22 shows, but he does not admit their being truly Christian, as we may see by reading verses 13 and 14. The Colossian Christians were warned against their beguilings in the epistle addressed to them, (Col. 2:14-23), and even the faithful Philippians had a word thrown in about them in, "Beware of evil workers, beware of the concision" (Phil. 3:2).

Evidently however their greatest success was with the Galatians, who were a people of fickle temperament. The "churches

of Galatia" had very largely embraced the ideas they pressed, hardly realizing how they cut at the root of that Gospel which they had first heard from the lips of Paul himself. This the Apostle shows them in the epistle. Consequently he stresses just those features of the Gospel which exposed the falsity of these newer ideas. He shows them moreover what a fall from grace, as regards their own thoughts and spiritual state, it had involved them in. The seriousness of this fall accounts for the restraint and even severity of language which characterizes this epistle.

Chapter 1

IN OPENING HIS letter Paul not only announced his apostleship but emphasized the fact that he held this place directly from God. It had reached him from no man, not even the twelve who were chosen before him. Men were not the source of it, nor had he received it by means of them as channels. God was the source of it, and it had reached him by Jesus Christ. Hence he had a fulness of authority not possessed by the Judaizing teachers who were troubling them, for they at best could only pretend to be the emissaries of brethren in Jerusalem. Moreover, as he points out, all the brethren in his com-

pany at the moment of his writing associated themselves with what he said in the epistle. There was ample weight behind his utterances!

He writes, you notice, not to one assembly of Christians only, but to the assemblies of the province of Galatia, who all had evidently been affected in the same way. Now the Gospel had reached them through Paul's labours, as is intimated in Gal. 4:11-15. They had given him a wonderful reception and had seemed to be most devoted to him. Miracles were wrought amongst them (Gal. 3:5), and it was a most enthusiastic time. There is no record of any opposition. Nobody appears to have hurled stones at Paul's head! Yet in the Acts all this is ignored. We are only told that they went "through ... the region of Galatia" (Acts 16:6), preaching the Gospel, and that later they "went over all the country of Galatia ... strengthening all the disciples" (Acts 18:23).

This is significant! Evidently it was one of those times when there was too much surface work — too much of the stony ground element. We must not disparage the Apostle's work because of this, for the Lord assumed that this shallow work would be found even when He Himself was the sower. It all

looked so wonderful and yet the Holy Spirit knew from the outset what lay beneath the surface, and when Luke was inspired to write his second treatise this apparently wonderful time in Galatia is dismissed with the barest mention.

In the opening salutations (verses 3-5) the Lord Jesus is presented in a very significant way. He truly gave Himself for our sins, but the purpose in view was our being delivered from "this present evil world." As we proceed with the epistle we shall see how the law, the flesh and the world go together; inasmuch as the law was given to put a curb on the flesh and thus to make the world what it should be. In effect it did neither, though it revealed both in their true character. We shall find on the other hand, that the grace of the Gospel brings in faith and the Spirit, and delivers from the world, which is treated as under condemnation.

The "world" here has the sense of "age" or "course of this world." It is the world system rather than the people in the world. It is a very present system today, and it is a judged and condemned system; hence it is the will of God that we be delivered from it, and to this end the Lord Jesus died for us.

With verse 6, Paul plunges straight into the main burden of his letter. The Gospel which he had preached to them had called them into the grace of Christ, and now they had turned aside to a different message which was no true gospel at all. He was filled with wonder at their folly, indeed as we read these solemn words we can feel the hot indignation which lay behind them. They were following "a different gospel, which is not another," — as it should read. They may have imagined that they were receiving a new and improved version of the old message. They were not. It was a radically different message, and a false one at that.

In verse 8, Paul contemplates himself perverting God's Gospel in this way, or even an angel from heaven doing so; not a fallen angel, but an angel hitherto unfallen and coming from the presence of God. Upon either or both he solemnly pronounces the curse of God. Having done so it seems as though he anticipates that some will regard him as extreme in his denunciation and wish to remonstrate with him. He anticipates this by repeating the curse, only this time making its force even plainer. As a matter of fact neither he nor an angel from heaven would so

pervert the Gospel, but certain men had been doing so amongst the Galatians, so now he says, "If any man ..."

If any are inclined to think that this was just a petulant outburst against a set of rival preachers, let them consider what was involved in the matter, and they will soon see that the curse was the curse of God, with all the weight of His might behind it.

What then was involved? Let us answer by asking a question by way of illustration. Do you think that a person who surreptitiously tips a dose of poison into somebody's teapot is worthy of condemnation? You most certainly do. What then do you think he is worthy of, who should in the dead of night shoot a whole cart-load of virulent poison into the waterworks supplying a town? You have no language in which to express your abhorrence of such an awful deed. But here were men who were perverting the message which is the only river of salvation and spiritual life for a fallen world. In what language can the Spirit of God express His abhorrence of a deed like that? Only in pronouncing upon them the solemn curse of God.

You will notice that these men did not contradict the Gospel, but perverted it. For one who utterly denies the Gospel you will

find many who pervert it. They dexterously give it just that subtle twist which completely falsifies its true character. Let us be on our guard against them.

The real motive which underlay the teachings of these men was the desire of pleasing man. This is exposed for us in verse 10. Later on in the epistle we shall see that they desired to glory in the flesh, and to capture the Galatians as followers of themselves. They wished to please men in order that, being pleased, the men might run after them and become their followers. Thus at the back of everything lay the desire for self-exaltation.

In contrast to this the Apostle Paul was the true servant of Christ. It was Christ he aimed at pleasing and not men. Men might censure or they might praise, it was no great matter to him. This was specially true if he thought of men at large, yet it was true even when it was a question of the judgment of his fellow-apostles, as we see in the next chapter. The Gospel that he preached he had received directly from the Lord Himself, and this lifted him far above all human opinion.

As to this matter no preacher of today can possibly be in Paul's position. It would therefore ill become us to adopt his tone of

authority. We have all been taught the Gospel through men. The Word of God has not come out from us, but to us only (see 1 Cor. 14:36); and hence we do well if we listen with deference to what our brethren have to say, should they feel it right to take us to task as to any matter. Even so the final court of appeal is of course the Word of God.

Still we do well when we do not set before us as an object the pleasing of men. The very Gospel which we have believed, and which perhaps we preach, should preserve us from that; inasmuch as it is "not after man," as stated in verse 11. If the Gospel has reached us in a defective or mutilated form, then doubtless we may not have realized this, but it was the case with the Gospel that Paul preached. Man was not the source of it, nor had he received it through man, as a channel of communication. He received it by direct revelation from the Lord Jesus. It came to him first-hand from God, as did his apostleship, as we saw in considering verse 1. Consequently it had upon it the stamp of God, and not the stamp of man.

The characteristic feature of the Gospel therefore is "after God" and "not after man." What is after man honours man, flatters

man, glorifies man. The Gospel tells man the humbling truth about himself, but glorifies God and accomplishes His ends.

This fact alone provides us with a very pertinent test as whether what we hear as gospel is really Gospel. "I like hearing Mr. So-and-so," is the cry, "He speaks so reasonably. There is such common sense. He has such faith in humanity, and makes you feel so much more hopeful and content in this rather discontented world." Quite so! The fact is it is all so thoroughly after man. Consequently it is all so pleasing to the natural man. Yet it is false. It is not the Gospel of God.

At first sight it might appear as though what Paul says, in the last verse of 1 Corinthians 10, is a contradiction of this. If however the whole of the chapter be read, and the previous chapter also, it will be seen that his point there is that the Christians should have the greatest possible consideration and care for their weaker brethren, and indeed for all men. Hence they should avoid all occasions of offence and seek the profit of all. Here, on the other hand, it is a question of the truth of the Gospel. The tendency to alter it, or whittle it down in order to please men, must be resisted at all costs. There cannot be a moment's compromise here.

From verse 13 to the end of the chapter the Apostle recounts a little of his history; evidently in order to support what he had just stated in verse 12.

First he recalls what marked him while unconverted. In his life he united great zeal for Jewish tradition, and a progress in Judaism which outstripped his contemporaries, with great persecution of the church of God. Twice in verses 13 and 14 he speaks of "the Jews' religion." This is significant, for the Galatians had fallen into the snare of trying to bring the very essence of that religion into the Gospel. He would have them realize — and us also — that far from being supplementary to the Gospel it is antagonistic to it. He had been brought clean out of it by his conversion.

Three steps in Paul's history are plainly marked for us. First he was set apart by God even before his birth. Then he was called by the grace of the Gospel. Thirdly God revealed His Son in him that HE might be the theme of his testimony among the nations. Though Paul was born of the purest Hebrew stock he needed to be set apart as much as if he had been a heathen, and was set apart from his Judaism — a point of much moment to the Galatians. Moreover he was set apart for God's service, the

character of which was determined for him by the nature of the revelation which reached him.

It was the revelation of the Son of God, and not merely of Israel's Messiah. The Lord Jesus was both of course, but it was in the former character that He appeared to Paul and, as we know from other Scriptures, He appeared to him thus from glory. From that great moment on the road to Damascus Paul knew that the Jesus of Nazareth, whom he had despised, was the Son of God. And this was revealed not only to him but in him.

The use of the preposition, "in" would indicate that the revelation was made thoroughly effective in Paul. If you went to an observatory you might be permitted to view the moon through a large telescope. You would perceive the wonders of its surface, its mountains, its craters. Yet though revealed to your eye they would not be in your eye, for the moment you remove your eye from the telescope everything vanishes. But let the astronomer attach a camera to the eyepiece of the telescope and expose therein a sensitized plate for the necessary time. Now under suitable chemical treatment something appears in the plate. That which was only revealed to your eye has now been revealed in the plate, and permanently so. It was like this with

Paul. The Son of God who was in glory had produced a permanent impression in Paul, and so he was able to preach Him as One whom he knew and not merely knew about.

It was this that characterized the Apostle's unique ministry and service, and from the outset lifted him above reliance upon other men, even the best of them. Consequently he did not need to make his way to Jerusalem immediately after his conversion. Three years elapsed before he saw any of those who had been apostles before him, and then he only saw Peter and James for a short period.

There is no mention of this visit to Arabia in Acts 9 and hence one can only surmise where it comes in. Very possibly it comes in between verses 22 and 23 of that chapter, and the episode of his escape from Damascus, by being let down over the wall in a basket, occurred when he had returned there from Arabia. If so, it was just after that happening that his visit to Peter took place. At all events the Apostle is very emphatic as to the correctness of that which he writes to the Galatians, and that the churches of Judaea only knew of his conversion by report; while glorifying God for the grace and power, which had trans-

formed the raging persecutor, under whom they had suffered, into a servant of Christ.

And all these historical details, be it remembered, are given in order to impress us with the fact that the Gospel of which he was the herald, had reached him direct from the Lord Himself.

Chapter 2

OUR CHAPTER FALLS quite simply into two parts. First, verses 1 to 10, in which the Apostle recounts what happened on the occasion of his second visit to Jerusalem after his conversion. Second, verses 11 to 21, in which he tells of an incident that happened at Antioch not long after his second visit to Jerusalem, and which had a very definite bearing upon the point at issue with the Galatians.

The first visit was about three years after his conversion (Gal. 1:18), so the second, being fourteen years later, was about seventeen years after that time, and is evidently the occasion as to which we have much information in Acts 15. That passage therefore, may profitably be read before proceeding further. From a careful reading several interesting details appear.

Acts 15 begins with mentioning "certain men who came down from Judaea," who taught circumcision as essential to salvation. They are not termed "brethren," we notice. In our chapter Paul unhesitatingly labels them "false brethren unawares brought in." Thus early do we find unconverted men getting amongst the saints of God, in spite of apostolic vigilance and care! It is sad when they are brought in unawares in spite of care. Sadder still when such principles are professed and practised as leave the door open for them to enter.

In Acts we read that "they determined" that a visit to Jerusalem was needful. But here Paul gives us a view behind the scenes of activity and travel, and shows us that it was "by revelation" that he went up. The temptation might have been strong upon him to meet these false brethren and vanquish them at Antioch, but it was revealed to him by the Lord that he should stop disputation and carry the discussion up to Jerusalem, where the views his opponents pressed were most strongly held. It was a bold move; but it was one which in the wisdom of God preserved unity in the church. As a result of his obedience to the revelation the question was settled against the contentions of these false brethren in the very place where most of their sym-

pathizers were. To have so settled it amongst the Gentiles at Antioch might easily have provoked a rupture.

Further, in Acts 15 it is just stated that "certain other of them" went up with Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem. Our chapter reveals that amongst these "certain other" was Titus, a Greek. This of course raised the point at issue in its acutest form. The apostle gave no quarter to his opponents. He did not submit to them for an hour, and in result Titus was not compelled to be circumcised.

This being so, Paul's action in regard to Timothy, related in Acts 16:1-3, is the more remarkable. It is an illustration of how that which has to be strenuously resisted under certain circumstances may be conceded under other circumstances. In the case of Titus circumcision was demanded in order to establish a principle which cut at the very root of the Gospel.

In the case of Timothy no such principle was at stake, the whole question having been authoritatively settled, and Paul did it that Timothy might have liberty of service amongst Jews as well as Gentiles. By birth Timothy was half a Jew and the Apostle made him completely a Jew, as it were, that he might

"gain the Jews" (1 Cor. 9:20). To Paul himself and to the Corinthians, and so to us, both circumcision and uncircumcision are "nothing" (1 Cor. 7:19).

It is possible that you might observe some servant of Christ acting after this fashion today. Pause a moment before you roundly accuse him of gross inconsistency. It may after all be that he is acting with divinely-given discernment in cases where you have as yet perceived no difference. The apostle speaks of "Our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus." It was liberty to refuse circumcision where legal bondage was involved, and yet a year or so later to practise it when nothing of principle was involved.

Then again during this visit to Jerusalem Paul took opportunity to convey formally to the other apostles the Gospel which he had preached among the Gentiles. Though he had received it directly from the Lord he was not above conceiving that possibly error might have crept into his understanding of the revelation. This is indicated in the latter part of verse 2. In effect however it was far otherwise. The most instructed amongst the apostles and elders at Jerusalem had nothing to add to Paul's gospel when they conferred upon the point. The rather they re-

cognized that Paul was clearly called of God to carry the Gospel into the Gentile world, while Peter had a similar commission in regard to the Jew. Hence the three apostolic leaders, perceiving the grace given to Paul, expressed the fullest fellowship and sympathy with him in his work.

This fact had a very definite bearing on the point at issue with the Galatians. If the men who had been at work in Galatia attacked Paul as being an unauthorized upstart, he was able to counter this by showing that he had received his message from the Lord by first-hand revelation. This established his authority. If on the other hand they attacked him as a man proceeding thus on his own authority and so being in opposition to those who were apostles before him, he countered this lie by the fact that James, Peter and John had shown fullest confidence in him and fellowship with him after thorough conference had taken place.

It remained for him to show that there had been a time when even Peter had yielded somewhat to the influence of men similar to those now opposing Paul, and to relate how he had opposed him then, and the grounds on which he had done so.

There is no mention in the Acts of this visit of Peter to Antioch, but it evidently happened after the decision of the council in Jerusalem as narrated in Acts 15. In that council Peter had argued in favour of the acceptance of Gentile converts without the law of Moses being imposed upon them. He had then spoken of the law as "a yoke ... which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear." At Antioch however when certain came down from James holding strict views as to the value of circumcision he no longer would eat with the Gentile believers but withdrew himself. His example had great weight and others followed it — even Barnabas who had formerly stood with Paul, as recorded in Acts 15:2, and 12.

To many doubtless such action would have seemed a very small matter — just a little prejudice to be condoned, a fad to be smiled at. To Paul it was far otherwise. He perceived that under this apparently small question of how Peter took his food, grave principles were at stake, and that Peter's action was not upright "according to the truth of the Gospel."

Oh, that we may all seize the point so strongly enforced here! Departure from the truth, even of the gravest kind, is generally presented to us under cover of seemingly trifling and innocent

circumstances. Most of us would have been tempted to exclaim, "Oh, Paul, what an exacting man you are! How difficult to please! Why make such a fuss over a small detail? If Peter wants now to eat only with Jews, why not let him? Why disturb our peace at Antioch and make things unhappy?" We are so often ignorant of Satan's devices. He sees to it that we shall be diverted from truth over something of an apparently harmless nature. The railway engine runs from the main line into a siding over very fine points.

Incidentally let us at this point take note that the idea that church in the apostolic age was the abode of peace and free of all contention has no support from Scripture. From the outset the truth had to be won and maintained through conflict — a great deal of it internal, and not merely with the world without. We have no right to expect absence of conflict and trouble today. Occasions are sure to arise when peace can only be purchased by compromise, and he who sees most, and hence is constrained to raise his voice in protest, must be prepared to be accused of uncharitableness. Failing such protest peace is maintained, but it is the peace of stagnation and spiritual death.

The quietest spot in the throbbing heart of London is the city mortuary! So beware!

If we find ourselves in a position where we feel morally bound to raise our voices, let us pray earnestly that we may be able to do it in a way similar to Paul. "When I saw ... I said to Peter ..." Our tendency always is to launch our complaints into the ear of someone other than the culprit himself. Notice, for instance, in Mark 2, that when the Pharisees object to the action of Jesus they complain to His disciples (ver. 16), and when to the action of His disciples, they complain to the Lord (vers. 23, 24). We shall do well to make it a rule, when remonstrance is needed, to make our remonstrance directly to the person concerned, rather than behind his back.

Paul however did this "before them all." The reason for this is that Peter's defection had already affected many others and so become a public matter. It would be a mistake in a multitude of cases to make public remonstrance. Many a defection or difficulty has not become public, and if met faithfully and graciously in a private way with the person concerned it may never become public at all, and thus much trouble and possible

scandal be avoided. Public defection however must be met publicly.

Paul began his protest by asking Peter a question based upon his earlier mode of life, before the sudden alteration. Peter had abandoned the strict Jewish customs in favour of the freer life of the Gentiles, as he himself had stated in Acts 10:28. How then could he now consistently retreat from this position in a way that was tantamount to saying that after all Gentiles should live after the customs of the Jews? This question we have recorded in verse 14.

In verses 15 and 16 we have the apostle's assertion which succeeded his question. In this assertion Paul could link Peter with himself and Peter could not deny it. "WE," he says. "We, who are Jews by nature" have recognized that justification is not reached by "the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ," and hence have turned from law to Christ and been justified by Him. Thank God, that was so!

Now comes a second question. If it were true, as Peter's action seemed to suggest, that even when standing in all the virtue of Christ's work we still need something, in the way of law-keep-

ing or the observance of Jewish customs, to complete our justification, is not Christ then discredited? He puts the proposition with extreme vigour of language, — is He not even "the Minister of sin" instead of the Minister of justification? To ask such a question is to answer it. It is impossible! Hence he adds, "Away with the thought," or "God forbid."

This was followed by a second assertion in verse 18, a statement which must have fallen as a sledge-hammer on Peter's conscience. Peter's action had inferred that Christ might be the Minister of sin; but it also was without a doubt of the nature of building up again the wall of partition, between Jew and Gentile who are in Christ, that the Gospel had thrown down, and which Peter himself had destroyed by his former action in the house of Cornelius. Whichever was right, Peter was wrong somewhere. If he was right now, he was wrong formerly. If right formerly, he was wrong now. He stood convicted as a transgressor.

As a matter of fact he was wrong now. Formerly he had acted as instructed of God in a vision. Now he was acting impulsively under the influence of the fear of man.

In these few words from the lips of Paul the Spirit of God had revealed the true inwardness of Peter's action, however innocent it may have appeared to most. Only two questions and two statements, but how effective they were! They quite destroyed Peter's false position.

Not content with this however the Spirit of God led Paul to forthwith proclaim the true position. He had perceived at the outset that Peter and his followers "walked not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel," so now he very plainly, yet in fewest possible words, states the truth of the Gospel. He states it moreover not as a matter of doctrine but as a matter of experience — his own experience. He does not now say "we," but "I," which occurs no less than seven times in verses 19 and 20.

In the Acts we have striking examples of the preaching of the Gospel through the lips of Paul. In Romans 1-8 we have the exposition of the Gospel from his pen. In Galatians 1 we have the defence of the Gospel — by setting forth its characteristic features, which hall-mark it, as it were. Now we are to consider the truth of the Gospel.

In the closing verses of this second chapter, Paul speaks for himself alone. Previously (verses 15 to 17) he had said, "we," since he spoke of truth generally acknowledged by Christians, Peter included. But now he comes to truth which Peter's action had challenged, and so he could not assume that Peter acknowledged it. However truth it was, and Paul standing in the enjoyment and power of it could set it forth in this personal and experimental way.

At that moment Peter had the law before his soul: he was living to the law. "For myself," says Paul, in effect, "I have God, and not law before my soul, and am living to Him." How much greater is God, who gave the law — God, now revealed in Christ — than the law He gave. But what set Paul free from the law, under which once he had been, as well as Peter? Death had set him free. He had died to the law, and that by the law's own act! This is stated in verse 19.

Nevertheless, here he was very much alive, and boldly confronting Peter! How then had he died to the law? And in what sense was it true that he had died through the law? Both these questions are answered in that great statement, "I am crucified with Christ."

In those words we have Paul seizing upon the truth of the Gospel, and giving it an intensely personal application to himself. The Lord Jesus, in His death, not only was the believer's Substitute, bearing his sins, but also thoroughly identified Himself with us in our sinful state, being made sin for us, though knowing no sin Himself. So really and truly did this take place that one of the things we are to know, as a matter of Christian doctrine, is that "our old man is crucified with Him" (Rom. 6:6). The crucifixion of Christ is therefore the crucifixion of all that we were as fallen children of Adam. But here we have Paul's personal appropriation of this. As crucified with Christ he had died to the law.

Then again the crucifixion of Christ was not merely the act of evil men. Viewed from the divine standpoint, the very essence of it is seen to be that act of God whereby He was made sin for us, and wherein was borne for us the curse of the law (see Gal. 3:13). As dying under the curse of the law, Christ died through the law, and as crucified with Christ Paul was able to say that he had died to the law through the law, in order that he might live to God.

The force of this great passage may perhaps become clearer to us if we consider the five prepositions used.

1. Unto, which indicates the end in view. To live to God is to live with God as the End of one's existence.
2. With, indicates identification, or association. We are crucified with Christ by reason of that complete identification which He effected in His death for us. Consequently His death was our death. We died with Him.
3. In, which here signifies character. Though crucified we live. We are still living people on earth, yet we no longer live the old character of life. We live a life of a new order, a life, the character of which, summed up in one word, is CHRIST. Saul of Tarsus had been crucified with Christ. Yet the individual known as Saul of Tarsus was still living. Still living, yet in another character entirely. As you observed him you saw not the Saul-of-Tarsus character coming into expression, but Christ. In keeping with this he did not retain his old name, but soon after his conversion he became known as Paul, which means, "Little one." He must be little if Christ is to live in him.

4. By which introduces us to the Object that controlled Paul's soul, and made this new character of life possible. Presently, when the life we now live in the flesh — that is, in our present mortal bodies — is over, we shall live by the sight of the Son of God. Meanwhile we live by the faith of Him. If faith is in activity with us He is made a living bright reality before our souls. The more He is thus before us objectively, that is, as

*"... the object bright and fair,
To fill and satisfy the heart."*

the more will He be seen in us subjectively.

The Lord Chancellor's "Great seal" is a remarkable object. If you wished to see it however, you would probably find it impossible to get access to it. Possibly they would say, "No, we cannot let you see the seal itself, but look at this large spot of wax affixed to this state document. Here you virtually see the seal, for it has been impressed into it." The wax has been subject to the pressure of the seal. You see the seal subjectively expressed, though you could not see it objectively. This

may illustrate our point, and show how others may see Christ living in us, if as Object He is before our souls.

5. For, which here is the preposition of substitution. It introduces us to that which was the constraining power and motive of Paul's wonderful life. The love of the Son of God constrained him, and that love had expressed itself in His sacrificial and substitutionary death.

We may sum up the matter thus: — Paul's heart was filled with the love of the Son of God who had died for him. He not only understood his identification with Christ in His death, but he heartily accepted it, in all that it implied, and he found his satisfying Object in the Son of God in glory. Consequently the sentence of death lay upon all that he was by nature, and Christ lived in him and characterized his life, and thus God Himself, as revealed in Christ, had become the full End of his existence.

Thus it was with Paul, but is it thus with us? That our old man has been crucified is as true for us as for Paul. We have died with Christ even as he had, if indeed we are really and truly believers. But have we taken it up in our experience as Paul did, so that it is to us not only a matter of Christian doctrine (highly

important as that is in its place) but also a matter of rich spiritual experience, which transforms and ennobles our lives? The plain truth is that most of us have only done so in a measure which is pitifully small. And the secret of this? The secret clearly is that we have been so little captivated by the sense of His great love. Our realization of the wonder of His sacrifice for us is so feeble. Our convictions as to the horror of our sinfulness were not very deep, and hence our conversions were comparatively of a shallow nature. If we track things back to their source, the explanation lies just here, we believe. Let us all sing with far more earnestness,

"Revive Thy work, O Lord!

Exalt Thy precious Name;

And may Thy love in every heart,

Be kindled to a flame!"

If in each of our hearts love is kindled to a flame, we shall make progress in the right direction.

The Apostle's closing words, in the last verse of our chapter, plainly implied that the position Peter had taken was of such a nature as to lead to the "frustration" or "setting aside" of the grace of God. It would imply that after all righteousness could

come by the law, and lead to the supposition that Christ had died "in vain," or, "for nothing." What a calamitous conclusion!

Yet it was the logical conclusion. And, having reached it, the moment had arrived for a very pointed appeal to the Galatians. This appeal we have in the opening verses of chapter 3.

Chapter 3

THE APOSTLE CALLS them "foolish" or senseless, for they had not themselves had the spiritual sense to see whither these false teachers had been leading them. They had been like men bewitched, and under a spell of evil, and they had been led to the brink of the awful conclusion that Christ had died for nothing — that His death had been in fact a huge mistake! On the edge of this precipice they were standing, and the Apostle's pungent reasoning had come as a flash of light amidst their darkness, revealing their danger!

What made their folly so pronounced was the fact that formerly there had been such a faithful preaching among them of Christ crucified. Paul himself had evangelized them, and as with the Corinthians so with the Galatians, the cross had been his great

theme. It was as though Christ had been crucified before their very eyes.

Moreover, as a result of receiving the word of the cross, which Paul brought, they had received the Holy Spirit, as verse 2 implies. Well, in what way and on what principle had they received the Spirit? By the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? There was but one answer to this question. For the Galatians to reply, "We received the Spirit by the works of the law," was an absolute impossibility, as Paul knew right well.

Hence he does not pause to answer his own question, but at once passes, in verse 3, to further questions based upon it. Having received the Spirit by the hearing of faith were they going to be made perfect by the flesh? Does God begin with us on one principle and then carry things to completion on another and opposing principle? Men are erratic enough. They change about in this fashion when their earlier plans miscarry. But is God erratic? Do His plans ever miscarry so that He needs to change? The Galatians were senseless, but were they SO senseless as to imagine that? And were they themselves prepared to change, and to throw away as worthless all they had previously held and done; so that their earlier sufferings for Christ had all

to be treated as in vain, as null and void? What questions these were! As we read them are we not conscious of their crushing force?

But why did the Apostle speak of our being made perfect by the flesh? Firstly, because it is that which is particularly opposed to the Spirit; and secondly, because it is closely related to the law. It completes the quartette contained in verses 3 and 4. Faith and the Spirit are linked together. The Spirit is received as the result of the hearing of faith, and He is the power of that new life which we have in Christ. The law and the flesh are linked together. The law was given that the flesh might fulfil it, if it could do so. In result it could not. Nor could the law put an effectual curb on the propensities of the flesh; for the flesh "is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). Yet here were the Galatians inclined to turn from the all-powerful Spirit to the flesh, which though powerful for evil was wholly impotent for good. It was folly indeed!

In verse 5 the Apostle repeats his question of verse 2, only in another form. In verse 2 it concerned the Galatians. How did they receive the Spirit? Here it concerns himself. In what way and on what principle did he labour when he came amongst

them with the Gospel message? Miracles were wrought amongst them and when the Gospel was believed the Spirit of God was received. Was it all on the ground of works, or of faith? Once more he does not pause for a reply, knowing right well that only one answer could be given by the Galatians. Instead he at once appeals to the case of Abraham, that they might realize that before ever the law was instituted God had established faith as the way of blessing for man.

From the very outset faith was the way of man's blessing, as Hebrews 11 reveals so clearly. With Abraham, however, the fact came clearly to light even in Old Testament times. Genesis 15:6 plainly declared it, and that verse is quoted here, as also in Romans 4:3 and James 2:23. Abraham was the father of the Jewish race, who had circumcision as their outward sign, but he was also, in a deeper and spiritual sense, "the father of all them that believe" (Rom. 4:11).

The Judaising teachers had been trying to persuade the Galatians to adopt circumcision, that thereby they might put themselves into a kind of Jewish position, becoming children of Abraham in an outward way. It would have been a poor imitation thing, if compared only with the true-born Israelite. And all the

while, if they were "of faith," that is, believers, they were children of Abraham, and that in the deepest possible sense, as verse 7 makes manifest.

Every believer is a child of Abraham in a spiritual sense; and not only so, but as verse 9 shows us, every believer enters into the blessing of Abraham. Verse 8 indicates what it is that is referred to as the blessing of Abraham. It was not merely his own personal blessing, but that in him all nations should be blessed. Not only was he to be accounted righteous before God and to stand in the blessings connected with righteousness, but myriads from all nations were to enjoy similar favour, which was to reach them in him.

But why in Abraham? How could this be? It will be worth while reading the passages in Genesis which refer to this matter. The promise of the blessing was first given when God's call first reached him. This is in Genesis 12:3. Then in Genesis 18:18 it is confirmed to him. Again, in Genesis 22:16-18 the promise is amplified, and we discover that the accomplishment is to be through "the Seed" who is Christ, as verse 16 of our chapter in Galatians tells us. Then further, the promise is confirmed to Isaac and Jacob respectively, in Genesis 26:4, and

Genesis 28:14; and in both these cases "the Seed" is mentioned. Once introduced, the Seed is never omitted, for in truth everything in the way of fulfilment is dependent upon Him.

The blessing then was only in Abraham inasmuch as, according to the flesh, Christ sprang out of Abraham. The Jews boasted themselves in Abraham as though he were of all-importance in himself. The Galatians had been tempted to ally themselves with Abraham by adopting his covenant of circumcision. But the real virtue lay not in Abraham, but in Christ. And the very circumcision which would outwardly ally them with Abraham, would virtually cut them off from Christ (see Gal. 5:2) in whom everything was found, not outwardly, but inwardly and vitally.

From the outset God intended to bless the heathen (or, the nations) through faith. It was no after-thought with Him. How gracious was His design! And how comforting it is to us to know it! He called Abraham out from the nations that had fallen into corruption, that He might, in spite of all the defection that marked His people, preserve a godly seed out of whom might spring in due season, the Seed, in whom all the nations should be blessed, and Abraham as well. Hence the na-

tions are to be blessed by faith, as Abraham was, and not by the works of the law.

God is omniscient. He can foresee what He will do, in spite of all eventualities. But here this omniscience is attributed to the Scripture! A remarkable fact surely! God's Word is of Himself, and from Himself, and is therefore to be very closely identified with Him. Let men beware how they handle it. There are those who utterly deny and deride the Scripture; and there are those who honour it in theory, and yet corrupt it. Both will ultimately have to reckon in judgment with the God whose Word it is. And, woe betide them!

The Scripture itself foresees, and it foretells their doom!

From beginning to end this third chapter is filled with contrasts. On the one side we have the law and the works that it demanded, the flesh, upon which the law's demands were made, and the curse which fell when the law's demands were broken. On the other side we find the faith of the Gospel, the Spirit given, and blessing bestowed. We have spoken of contrasts, but after all the contrast is really one, only worked out in a variety of different ways.

The Spirit and the flesh are brought into contrast in verse 3. Now in verse 10 we get the curse of the law in contrast with the blessing of believing Abraham. The curse was pronounced against every one that did not continue doing all things that the law demanded. No one did so continue, and hence all who were placed under the law came under the curse. It was enough to be "of the works of the law" — that is, to have to stand or fall in one's relations Godward by the response one gave to the law's demands — to be under the curse. Man being what he is, the moment any one has to stand before God on that ground he is lost.

The Jews, who had the law, hardly seem to have realized this. On the contrary they looked upon the law as being the means of their justification. Contented with a very superficial obedience to some of its demands, they were "going about to establish their own righteousness," as Paul puts it in Romans 10:3. In this of course they utterly failed, for in their own Scriptures it had been put on record that, "the just shall live by faith." And faith is not the principle upon which the law is based, but rather that of works. The whole matter briefly summed up stands

thus: — By law men come under the curse and die. By faith men are justified and live.

The curse which the law pronounced was a perfectly just sentence. The Jew having been placed under the law, its curse rested upon him, and it had to be righteously borne ere it could be lifted off him. In the death of Christ the curse was borne, and hence the believing Jew is redeemed from beneath it. In the days of Moses, the curse had been specially connected with the one who died as a transgressor by hanging on a tree. Many a one in ancient days, reading Deuteronomy 21:23, may have wondered why the curse was thus linked with death on a tree, as distinguished from death by any other means, such as stoning, or the sword. Now we know. In due season the Redeemer was to bear the curse for others, thus honouring the law, by hanging on a tree. It is another case of how the Scripture foresees!

The bearing of the curse was in view of the bestowal of the blessing. Verse 14 speaks to us of this, presenting the blessing in a twofold way. First, there is "the blessing of Abraham," which is righteousness. Second, there is the gift of the Spirit, a blessing beyond anything bestowed upon Abraham. The won-

der of the work of Christ is this, that righteousness now rests upon Gentiles who believe, as well as upon believers who are Abraham's children according to the flesh. All who believe are in a spiritual sense the children of Abraham, as verse 7 informed us.

In Old Testament days the Spirit was promised, as for instance in Joel 2:28-29. We who believe, whether Jews or Gentiles, receive the Spirit today. Thus by faith we anticipate the blessing so fully to be enjoyed in the millennial day.

For the moment however the Apostle does not pursue the subject of the Holy Spirit. When we enter Gal. 4 we learn something as to the meaning of His indwelling, and in Gal. 5, we have an unfolding of his operations. In our chapter is pursued the subject of the law, and the place it had in the ways of God, and this in order to lead up to the unfolding of the proper Christian position — as stated in the early verses of chapter 4, — which is the central theme of the epistle. And first of all certain difficulties are cleared out of the way; misconceptions and objections flowing from a false view of the functions of the law, held by the Judaizing teachers and doubtless instilled by them into the minds of the Galatians.

The first of these is taken up in verses 15 to 18. In so many minds the covenant of law had completely overshadowed the covenant of promise made with Abraham. But as we have just seen the covenant of law inevitably brings nothing but its curse. Blessing can only be reached by way of the covenant of promise which culminates in Christ. It cannot arrive partly by law and partly by promise. Verse 18 states this. The inheritance of blessing if by the law is not by promise, and this of course is true vice versa. The fact is, it is by promise. Thanks be to God!

But was not the law intended as a kind of revision of the original testament, a kind of codicil, so to speak? Not at all, for as verse 15 says, it can be neither disannulled nor added thereto. It is an old trick of dishonest men to procure the rejection of a disliked document by foisting into it an addition so contradictory of its main provisions as to stultify the whole. This is not allowed amongst men, and we must not conceive of God's covenant of promise as being less sacred than human documents. The law, which was not given until 430 years after, has not disannulled it. Nor has it been added to it in order to modify its blessed simplicity. It was never intended to do either of these things.

Verse 16 is worthy of special note, not only because it declares in such an unmistakable way that from the outset the covenant was in view of Christ and His redeeming work, but also because of the remarkable way in which the Apostle argues as to the Old Testament prediction. The Holy Spirit inspired him to hinge the whole point upon the word, "Seed," being in the singular and not in the plural. Thereby He indicated how fully inspired was His earlier utterance. Not merely was the word inspired, but the exact form of the word. The inspiration was not merely verbal, i.e. having to do with words, but even literal, i.e. having to do with letters.

Accepting Paul's argument, stated in the verses we have just considered, a further difficulty might well present itself to any mind. If then the law, given over 400 years after Abraham, had no effect upon the earlier covenant, neither annulling it nor modifying it, does it not seem to have lacked any definite purpose? An objector might declare that such doctrine as this leaves the law shorn of all point and meaning, and feel that he was propounding a regular poser in simply asking, Why then the law?

This is exactly the question with which verse 19 opens. The answer to this is very brief, and it appears to be twofold. In the first place, it was given in order that men's sins might become, in the breaking of it, definite transgressions. This point is more fully stated in Romans 5:13. In the second place, it served a useful purpose in connection with Israel, filling up the time until the advent of Christ, by proving their need of Him. It was ordained through angels, and through a human mediator, in the person of Moses. But then the very fact of a mediator supposes two parties. God is one; who is the other? Man is the other. And since the whole arrangement was made to hinge upon the doings of man, the other party, it promptly failed.

In definitely convicting men of transgressions the law has done a work of extreme importance. What is right, and what is wrong? What does God require of men? Before the law was given there was some knowledge, and conscience was at work, as is indicated in Romans 2:14-15. But when the law came, all vagueness disappeared; for all, who were under it, the plea of ignorance totally disappeared and, when brought into judgment for their transgressions, not a shred of an excuse remained. We Gentiles were never formally placed under it, but as a matter of

fact we know about it, and our very knowledge of it will make us amenable to the judgment of God in a way and degree unknown to the savage and unenlightened tribes of the earth. So let us take care.

In verse 21 another question is raised, which springs out of the foregoing. Some might jump to the conclusion that if, as shown, the law was not supplementary to the covenant of promise it must necessarily be in opposition to it. This is not so for one moment. Had the law been intended by God to provide righteousness for man, He would have endowed it with power to give life. The law instructed, demanded, urged, threatened and, when it had been broken, it condemned the transgressor to death. Yet none of these things availed. The one thing needful was to bestow upon man a new life, in which it would be as natural to him to fulfil the law, as now it is natural to him to break it. That the law could not do; instead it has proved us all to be under sin, thus revealing our need of that which has been introduced through Christ.

Thus the law, instead of being in any way in opposition, fits in harmoniously with all the rest of God's great scheme. Until Christ came it has played the part of "the schoolmaster," acting

as our guardian and maintaining some measure of control. In verse 24 the words, "to bring us," are in italics, there being no corresponding words in the original. They should not be there. The point is not that the law leads us to Christ, but that it exercised its control as tutor until Christ came. When Christ appeared, a new order of things was instituted, and there was justification for us on the principle of faith, and not by works.

This new order of things is spoken of in verse 23 as the coming of faith. Again in verse 25 we have the words, "after that faith is come." Faith was found of course in all the saints of Old Testament days, as is shown by Hebrews 11, and by the passage from Habakkuk, quoted in verse 11 of our chapter. When Christ came, the faith of Christ stood revealed, and faith was publicly acknowledged as being the way, and the only way, by which man can have to do with God in blessing. In that sense "faith came," and its coming marked the inauguration of an entirely new epoch.

By faith in Christ Jesus we have been introduced into the favoured place of "sons of God." The word in verse 26 is "sons," and not "children." The saints under the law were like children in a state of infancy; under age, and hence under the school-

master. The believer of the present age is like a child who has reached his majority, and hence, leaving the state of tutelage behind, he takes his place as a son in his father's house. This great thought, which is the controlling thought of the epistle, is more largely developed in the early verses of chapter 4. Before reaching them however, we have three important facts stated in the three closing verses of chapter 3.

By our baptism we have, as a matter of profession, put on Christ. Had we submitted to circumcision we should have put on Judaism, and thereby committed ourselves to the fulfilling of the law for justification. Had we been baptised to John's baptism we should have put on the robe of professed repentance and committed ourselves to believe on the One that should come after him. As it is we have, if baptised to Christ, put on Christ and committed ourselves to that practical expression of the life of Christ which in the next chapter is spoken of as "the fruit of the Spirit." As sons of God, having now the liberty of the house, we put on Christ as our fitness to be there.

Further, we are "in Christ Jesus," and consequently we are "all one," with all distinctions obliterated, whether national, social, or natural. When we get to the last chapter we shall find that in

Christ Jesus there is new creation, which accounts for the removal of all the distinctions belonging to the old creation. This new creation work has reached us as to our souls already, though not yet as to our bodies. Hence we cannot as yet take up these things in an absolute way. For that we must wait until we are clothed upon with our bodies of glory at the coming of the Lord. Still even now we are in Christ Jesus, and hence can learn to view each other apart from and as lifted above these distinctions.

Let us take note that what is taught here is the abolition of these distinctions in Christ Jesus, and not in the assembly. We say this to safeguard the point and preserve from misconceptions. In the assembly, for instance, the distinction between male and female is very definitely maintained, as is shown in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.

We have already had three things which mark the believer of today in contradistinction from believers before Christ came. We are "sons of God;" we have "put on Christ;" we are "in Christ Jesus." The last verse of our chapter gives us a fourth thing: we are "Christ's," and belonging to Him we are in a spir-

itual sense Abraham's seed, and consequently heirs, not according to law, but to promise.

Chapter 4

THE OPENING VERSES of chapter 4 gather up the thoughts that have occupied the latter part of chapter 3, and summarize them in very crisp fashion. The custom that prevailed in the houses of the nobility — and that still in measure prevail in such circles — are used as an illustration. The heir to the estate, so long as he is in infancy, is placed under restraint, just as the servants are. Tutors and governors hold him in what appears to him to be bondage. He just has to do as he is told, and as yet he knows not the reason why. He cannot yet be given the full liberty of his father's house and estate, for his character and intelligence is not yet sufficiently formed. However his father knows when the time will arrive, and the day is fixed when he will come of age and enter into the privileges and responsibilities of life.

It was thus with God's people in the former day under the law, which was as a schoolmaster to them. Children they might be, but they were treated as servants, and rightly so. It was no

question of their individual eminence as saints of God, but simply of the dispensation in which they lived. No greater man than John the Baptist was ever born, yet as the Lord has told us, "he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matt. 11:11). In their days God had not yet been fully revealed, redemption had not been accomplished, the Spirit had not been given. Until these three great events had come to pass, the conditions were not established which permitted the "coming of age" of the people of God. All three did come to pass when on the scenes there arrived the Son of God.

When He came God's people passed from under the schoolmaster of the law, whose control was exercised according to the "elements," or "principles," of the world, and they came under the control of the Spirit of God, exercised according to the principles of grace and of God.

The trouble today with a good many of us is that we have been brought up on loose and easy-going lines, and consequently we know very little of the stern dealings of the righteous old schoolmaster! If only our consciences had been brought more fully under the righteous admonition and condemnation of the law, we should possess a far keener sense of the mighty eman-

cipation which has reached us through the advent of the Son of God.

The coming forth of God's Son was the event which marked the commencement of a new epoch in God's dealings with men. The steps, by which that new epoch was inaugurated, are given to us in verses 4 to 6.

First, the Son of God was sent, "made of a woman," or, more literally, "come of woman." Thus His incarnation is expressed, the guarantee to us that He was a Man, in the full and proper sense of the word.

Second, it could be said of Him, "come under law." When He came God's attention was focused upon the Jew, as upon a people who were in outward relationship with Him and responsible as under His law. Amongst that people He came, assuming all the responsibilities, under which they had wholly failed.

Third, He wrought redemption for those under the law, thus delivering them from its claims, in order that a new position might be theirs.

Fourth, as thus delivered we receive "the adoption of sons," or, "sonship." This wondrous position in regard to God is ours as a free gift, according to His eternal purpose.

Fifth, being made sons, God has given to us the Spirit of His Son, in order that we may be enabled to enter into the consciousness and enjoyment of this new relationship, and respond to God as our Father. By the Spirit given we cry, "Abba, Father!"

The above is a brief summary of these remarkable verses, but now let us notice in them a few points of importance.

The redemption spoken of in verse 5 goes further than the truth which we met with in Gal. 3:13. We might have been redeemed from the curse of the law and yet left under the law, and consequently left still in the place of servants. The glorious fact is that the believer is not only redeemed from the curse, but also from the law that righteously inflicted the curse; so that now we stand in the liberty of sonship and the days of bondage under the "schoolmaster" are over.

Notice also the change from the "we" of verse 5 to the "ye" of verse 6. Only the Jew had been in the bondage of the law,

hence redemption from law applied to Jewish believers of whom Paul was one. Consequently he says, "we." But, on the other hand, the place of sonship, in which Christians are set, is the portion equally of all, whether Jew or Gentile by nature. Hence the change to "ye." The wonder is that those, who once were degraded Gentiles far from God, should now be sons and happily responding to God the Father's love by the Spirit given to them.

The Spirit of God's Son does not give us the place of sons. That is ours as the fruit of God's purpose and gift on the basis of redemption. The Spirit gives the consciousness of the relationship and the power to respond to it.

In verse 7 the Apostle brings home the fact of this wonderful relationship to us each individually. And not only is sonship an individual blessing, so that he can say, "thou art ... a son," but heirship is individual also. Each of us is, "an heir of God through Christ." This shows us that when the Apostle used "the heir" in verse 1 as an illustration of his theme, he was using an illustration which applied in a very exact and literal way. Such is the amazing grace of God to us as believers, whether we were Jews or Gentiles. How little we have taken it in!

We call upon our readers to pause at this point and to meditate upon this truth. It is an established fact, and so stated without any qualification. The Galatians were not in the enjoyment of the fact. They were actually behaving themselves as though they were servants and not sons, yet the Apostle does not say, "Wherefore thou oughtest to be no more a servant but a son," but, "Thou art no more a servant but a son." Our relationship does not flow from our understanding of, or our response to, the place we have, nor from behaviour suitable to it; but rather our behaviour flows from the relationship, once it is understood and responded to. Let us each say to ourselves again and yet again, "I am a son and heir of God through Christ." Let us take time that this wonderful truth may sink into each heart.

When once the fact has really laid hold of us we shall be able to appreciate how Paul felt as he penned verses 8 and 9. The Galatians were formerly in bondage, not to the law indeed, but to false gods; and now having been brought to know God, as the fruit of God having taken them up and brought them into this wealthy place, what possessed them to turn again to the old principle of standing before God in their own merits — or rather demerits? What indeed?

The principle of the law of Moses was that each should stand before God according to his own doings. This too is a root principle with every false religion, and thus the Galatians had proceeded in their former days of paganism. In now turning aside to Judaism they were slipping back into the old principles which are weak and beggarly. What expressive adjectives! Weak, since by them man accomplished nothing that counted for good. Beggarly, because they left him stripped of all merit and of all excuse. But if we wish to realize how weak and how beggarly we must view them in contrast with the principles of the Gospel, and its results in making us sons and heirs.

In verse 10 the Apostle gives an instance of what he alluded to, when he spoke of their turning back to legal principles. They were taking up Jewish feasts and customs. That might seem a small matter, but it was a straw which showed the way the wind was blowing, and it made him afraid lest there should be with them a lack of reality — lest their professed acceptance of the Gospel were not sincere after all; and consequently the labour he had expended upon them should be in vain.

This was a sad thought, and it leads directly to the touching appeal which follows in verses 12 to 20. He beseeches them in

the first place to be as he was as to their experience and practice, inasmuch as both he and they were just on the same footing as to their place before God. Alike they had been brought into sonship, and therefore alike they should all be walking in the liberty of sons. It was not a personal matter at all. He nursed no sense of personal injury against them.

This leads him to recall the great reception that they gave him when first he came amongst them with the Gospel message. He was at that time in much infirmity of a physical sort, and it would seem that his eyesight was particularly affected. On turning to Acts 16:6 we note that his first visit to Galatia was during the early part of his second missionary journey. The stoning of Paul even to the point of death took place at nearly the end of his first journey, as recorded in Acts 14:19. It is more than likely that there is a connection between the two events, and that this "temptation ... in my flesh" resulted from the ill-treatment that he received, and is the same as the "thorn in the flesh," of which he writes in 2 Corinthians 12:7. Be that as it may, he arrived amongst them in fullness of power and they received him with great gladness. Now it would appear that in speaking the truth to them he had become their enemy!

The fact was of course that the Judaizing teachers, who had got amongst them, were aiming at producing alienation between the Galatians and Paul, their spiritual father, in order to capture them as followers for themselves. In verse 17 the Apostle in few words unmasks this, their real objective. "They are very zealous after you" he says, "but not in the right way. They are simply anxious to shut you away from us, in order that you become zealous adherents, following them." What Paul wanted was to see them always zealous after the things that are really good, and that as much when he was absent as when he was with them.

As things were however he could but stand in doubt of them. When first he visited them it was with great exercise and travail of soul. He did not preach himself but Christ Jesus as Lord, and their spiritual birth only came to pass when Christ was formed in them. The photographic artist takes care to have a good lens in his camera, that will throw on the screen a very accurate picture of the features of the sitter. But the photograph only comes to the birth when the sitter's features are formed in the sensitized plate as the result of the joint action of light and certain chemicals. This may serve as an illustration of the

point. Paul travailed that as the fruit of Gospel light Christ might be formed in them. Then his birth pangs on their behalf were over.

But along come these Judaising teachers, and lo! instead of Christ these men, their sabbaths, their new moons, their circumcision, seem to be forming themselves in them. No wonder that Paul, in his ardent affection for them as his children, felt as though he must go through birth pangs again on their behalf, and was perplexed about them. Under these circumstances he wished that, instead of being at a distance and having to communicate by writing, he were in their midst, able to judge of their exact state and to change his voice, speaking to them in instruction, in rebuke, or even in severity, as the occasion demanded.

However as they seemed to be so anxious to place themselves under the law, they would at least be prepared to listen to what the law had indicated! Hence from verse 22 to the end of the chapter he refers them to the allegorical significance of an occurrence in Abraham's life.

Abraham was the great example of faith and promise, as we saw when reading Gal. 3. Yet before ever he received by faith the child of promise, there was the episode in which by works he obtained a child through Hagar. Ishmael was born after the flesh, whereas Isaac was by promise.

We can now see that there was an allegory in this, and that Hagar and her son picture for us Sinai, whence was proclaimed the law system which results in bondage, and also "Jerusalem which now is," i.e., the Jewish people, who though under law are still in virtual unbelief. The Christian, on the other hand, is in the position of the child of promise, and connected with "Jerusalem which is above", which is free.

The proud orthodox Jew might rightly boast that according to the flesh he was a true-born son of Isaac. Yet in a spiritual sense he was only a son of Ishmael and in bondage under the schoolmaster. True the schoolmaster regime came first, and later came the promise, which materialized in the advent of the Son of God. But that only confirmed the type, for Ishmael came before Isaac. The type was further confirmed by the fact that it was the proud Jews who persecuted the humble Christians, as verse 29 points out.

Again, the truth of the allegory finds a corroboration in the words of Isaiah 54:1. That verse indicates that Israel in the time of her desolation would be more fruitful than she had ever been when she was acknowledged as in relationship with Jehovah. But then that verse is the immediate consequence of the glorious truth predicted in Isaiah 53. It was to be as the fruit of the advent of the suffering Messiah, and not as the result of law keeping.

When the law was imposed from Sinai no one broke forth into song. Very soon there were cries to the effect that such words should not be spoken any more into the ears of the people. Yet when Isaiah unfolds before us the marvellous story of the Christ who suffers and rises again for sins not His own, the first word that follows is, "SING." Bondage is over, liberty is come!

Of old there was the inevitable clash between Ishmael and Isaac, just as now there is between the Judaiser and the believer who stands in the liberty of the grace of God. And yet it is not the clash that decides the question, nor even the persecution of the one "born after the Spirit" by the one "born after the flesh." What decides the matter is the voice of God. And that voice reaches us in the Scriptures.

"What saith the Scripture?" That is the decisive question. And the answer is that, "the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." The servant is displaced in favour of the son. He, who would stand before God on the basis of the law, falls. He, who stands in the fullness of grace, stands indeed.

Happy indeed it is for us if we can truly say, "We are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free." Then indeed we stand in Christ, and Christ Himself is formed in us. We are in the liberty of sonship, and that is liberty indeed.

Chapter 5

IN THE FIRST verse of chapter 5 we have the main point of the epistle compressed into a few words. Christ has set us free in a wonderful liberty, and in that we are to stand fast, refusing to be again entangled in bondage.

Let us refresh our memories as to the extent and character of the liberty into which we have been brought.

In the first place we have been set free from the law as the ground of our justification before God. This was previously stated in Gal. 2:16. We are "justified by the faith of Christ."

Further, we have been set free from the law as the basis of our relationship with God. The "adoption of sons" is ours as having been redeemed from under the law. This is stated in Gal. 4:5.

Consequently, in the third place, we are set free from the law as the rule or standard of our life. This came out in the whole passage, Gal. 3:23 to Gal. 4:7. For as long as God's children were in the place of servants, the rule of life for them was the law. Now, as full-grown sons in the house of their father, possessing the Spirit of God's Son, we have a higher rule or standard than the law of Moses — even the "law of Christ," of which Gal. 6:2 speaks.

The liberty into which we are brought, then, is the complete emancipation which has reached us as being made the sons of God. It is the freedom of which the Lord Jesus spoke when He said, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). We are no longer like servants of the household, who rightly have their conduct regulated by the

rules suitable to the servants' hall; and to put ourselves in our thoughts and behaviour back into that position is to sadly entangle ourselves. It is indeed to fall from grace, as verse 4 has it.

The words "fallen from grace" are often taken to mean that such have fallen out of the gracious hand of God — that such are no longer saved. The phrase however, refers to what was produced in their consciousness, not to what is true as before God. The verse begins, "Christ is become of no effect to you." Is Christ of no effect REALLY? — that is, IN THE SIGHT OF GOD? Far be the thought — an impossible supposition! But to them — in their experience and consciousness? Yes. If they considered themselves as justified on the principle of law, Christ was most evidently disallowed in their minds, and they had descended from the divine and lofty principle of grace to the far lower level of law. And the descent between the two is so pronounced and precipitous that it can only be described as a fall!

To fall from grace is not a difficult thing. How many a professed believer there is today that is guilty of it! Are we all

clear on the point? Do we stand in the liberty of grace in all our dealings with God?

In verses 2 and 3 Paul again alludes to the matter of circumcision as this was being used as a test question. It was the spearhead of the adversaries' attack on their liberty. It doubtless appeared to many to be a small and unimportant point, but it was quite sufficient to establish the principle. The law is one whole. If taken up in one detail it must be maintained in all details. This is quite in keeping with what James writes — "who-soever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." (James 2:10). This enforces the fact that if the law be broken in one detail, it is broken altogether. Both statements correspond and show us that the law cannot be taken up piecemeal. It is one whole and must be considered as such. If but a very small stone be thrown through a large pane of glass it is a broken pane, as really as if it were shivered to atoms by a large chunk of rock. Or, to change the figure, the law is like a chain of many links. It is as really a broken chain if one link be fractured as if a dozen were snapped. Conversely, let a boat be connected with but one link of a chain and that boat is attached to all, and may be controlled by the hand that pulls any link in

the chain. And this is the particular point that Paul is enforcing here.

Now note the contrast between the "ye" of verse 4 and the "we" of verse 5. "Ye" — such among the Galatians as were abandoning in their thoughts the place in which grace had set them. "We" — the mass of believers, standing in the grace of the gospel. It is the Christian "we" — if we may so speak; and verse 5 describes what the proper position of the believer is: not now his position of privilege before God as a son, but his position of liberty as left in the world, which is in sharp contrast with all that the Jew had ever known.

Our position is one of expectancy. We wait, but not for righteousness as was the case with the Jew, who under the law was always "going about to establish his own righteousness," and yet never arriving at it. We have righteousness as an established fact in the Gospel, and are only waiting for the hope that is connected with it. The hope of righteousness is glory, as Romans 5:2 makes manifest. Now we are waiting for glory — by the Spirit given to us; and on the principle of faith — not the principle of the works of the law.

Is not this a position of wonderful liberty? The more we have experienced the drudgery and despair of seeking righteousness by diligent efforts at law keeping, the more we shall appreciate it; and see that faith working by love is the only thing that counts in Christ Jesus.

Once the Galatians had been like earnest runners in the race, now they were hindered and no longer obeying the truth. Take note that "the truth" is not something merely to be discussed and analysed and understood, but to be obeyed. Are we sons of God? Then as sons we are to behave ourselves. Are we no longer under the schoolmaster? Then we no longer order our lives on a legal basis. Are we crucified with Christ? Then we do not aim at living to ourselves but that Christ may live in us. Every bit of truth that we learn is to have a practical expression in us. We are to obey it.

The Galatians however were turning aside not only from obedience to the truth, but from the truth itself. They had been persuaded to embrace these new ideas, which did not come from the God who had called them; and further, they had to remember that ideas and doctrines can work like leaven. They might be flattering themselves that they had only embraced a few

minor items of Judaism, yet thereby they might become wholly Judaized.

The saying which we have here in verse 9 is also found in 1 Corinthians 5:6. It states the essential nature of leaven. In Corinthians it is applied to a matter of conduct and morals. Here it is applied to a matter of doctrine; for it was virtually "the leaven of the Pharisees" which was threatening the Galatians, just as that threatening the Corinthians was in its nature near to the leaven of the Sadducees and the Herodians. Still when the Apostle thought of the Lord and His gracious working in souls, he felt confident that his letter of remonstrance and correction would have its effect on the Galatians, and that the workers of mischief, who had troubled them and perverted their thoughts, would eventually come under God's dealings in judgment.

In verses 11 to 15, Paul reinforces his appeal by one or two further considerations. He was no preacher of circumcision. Had he been he would have escaped persecution. The "offence" or "scandal" of the cross consists in the fact that it puts no honour upon man; in fact, it totally condemns him. Circumcision on the other hand, assumes that there is some possibility of merit in him, that his flesh in this way can be made profitable to God.

And what is true of circumcision would also be true of any other rite which is performed with the idea that there is virtue in it. This explains why men so dearly love rites and ordinances. They induce in men a comfortable feeling of complacency with themselves. The cross makes nothing of them. Hence its scandal.

The Apostle longed for the true liberty of the Galatians and could have desired that those who were so zealous for the cuttings of circumcision would cut themselves off. Liberty, he points out, is not licence to sin but rather freedom to love and to serve. And this love was what the law of Moses had been aiming at all the time. Yet, as a matter of fact, while boasting in the law they had been biting and devouring one another, instead of loving and serving one another. It is ever thus. Legality leads to the very opposite of love in action, and the Galatians had to beware lest their pursuit of holiness by law only led them to the unholy end of consuming one another in their contentions and criticisms. They would avoid the scandal of the cross only to come utterly to grief in the scandal produced by their own unholy conduct. We have sorrowfully to remark that this just sums up the history of Christendom. In proportion as

the scandal of the cross has been refused and avoided, the scandal of its divisions and misbehaviour has increased.

The Galatians, however, might turn round to Paul and say, "you have pretty definitely and effectively shown us that our thoughts as to pursuing holiness by law-keeping are wrong, but what is right? You have demolished what we have been saying, but what do you say?" His answer to this begins in verse 16. "This I say then, walk in the Spirit."

Walking is man's earliest and most primitive activity. It has consequently become the figure or symbol of man's activities. To "walk in the Spirit" is to have one's activities, whether of thought or speech or action, in the energy of the Spirit, who has been given to us. The Spirit of God's Son, conferred upon us as God's sons, is to govern all our activities. This is the way of liberty, a liberty which is the very opposite of licence, for walking in the Spirit it is impossible for us to fulfil the desires of the flesh. The coming in of the higher power completely lifts us above the pull of the lower.

The flesh is not thereby altered, as verse 17 makes plain. Its nature, its desires, its action remain the same, and always con-

trary to the Spirit of God. But the Spirit prevails — if we walk in the Spirit — against the flesh, so that we "cannot" (or, more accurately, "should not") do the things that otherwise we would. And then if we are "led" of the Spirit we cannot be at the same time under the leadership of "the schoolmaster" — the law.

In verse 16, then, the Spirit is regarded as the new Power in the believer, energizing him. In verse 18, as the new Leader, taking him by the hand and directing him in God's will. In Romans 8:14, the Spirit is also presented in this capacity. The sons are led by the Spirit. The servants are led by the schoolmaster.

The fact that there exists a total and absolute contrast and contradiction between the flesh and the Spirit is very manifest when we consider the outcome of each. Verses 19 to 21 give us the dreadful catalogue of the works of the flesh. Verses 22 and 23 present the beautiful cluster of the fruit of the Spirit. The former wholly under the condemnation of God and to be excluded from His kingdom. The latter wholly approved of God and hence no law existing against them. In the one list we discover the hideous features which characterize fallen Adam: in the other the character of Christ.

Notice the contrast between the "works" and the "fruit." It is easy to understand the "works." The earth is filled with the noise of them. Their confusion and disruption are visible on every side. "Fruit," on the other hand, is of silent growth, even in nature. In summer time, amidst the orchards no one is driven to distraction by the noise of maturing fruit. The wonder of its growth takes place without a sound. So it is with the fruit of the Spirit. It is "fruit" you notice, not "fruits;" and this, because these lovely moral features are conceived of as a bunch; nine in number but all proceeding from one stem — the Spirit of God.

These lovely traits of character are going to fill the kingdom of God, whilst the blatant works of the flesh are totally excluded. No true Christian is characterized by these works of the flesh, though alas, a true Christian may fall into one or other of them, and only be extricated by the advocacy of Christ and at the cost of much suffering to himself both spiritual and physical. To belong to Christ means that we have come to a definite judgment as to the evil of the flesh, and have crucified it by heartily ratifying in our own conscience and judgment the sentence against it pronounced by God at the cross.

We do well to enquire if we have really arrived at this, which is the proper attitude of the Christian. Have we definitely put the sentence of death on the flesh? Have we crucified it with the affections and lusts? Is it what we profess to have done as being Christians: but are we up to our profession? A very serious question which we must each answer for ourselves. Let us give ourselves time for conscience to answer!

Certain it is that we live by the Spirit and not by the flesh. Well, then, let us walk by the Spirit. Our walk must certainly be according to our life. A bird cannot have its life in the air and yet all its activities under the water. A fish cannot have its life in water and yet its activities on land. Christians cannot have their life in the Spirit and yet their activities in the flesh.

The last verse of our chapter is another pretty plain hint to the Galatians that the Apostle well knew what their false pursuit of holiness was coming to. Depend upon it, if we fall into their snare the same sad effects will be displayed in ourselves.

Only in the Spirit of God can we reproduce, even in small measure, the beautiful character of Christ.

Chapter 6

A CONTRAST SEEMS to be implied between verse 21 of chapter 5 and the first verse of chapter 6. The former contemplates those who are characterized by doing certain evil things. The latter speaks of a man being overtaken in an offence. Those who are characterized by evil will never enter the kingdom of God, whereas the man overtaken in evil is to be restored. It is taken for granted that he is a true believer.

The appeal to restore such an one is addressed to "ye which are spiritual." There were not many such amongst the Galatians, as the last verse of Gal. 5 infers. To approach a fallen brother in the spirit of vainglory would necessarily be provocative of all that was worst in him. To approach him in the spirit of meekness would help him. Let us take note that the spirit of meekness is a necessary accompaniment of spirituality, for there is a spurious spirituality, all too often to be met with, which is allied with a self-conscious assertiveness which is the very opposite of meekness. A truly spiritual man is one who is dominated and controlled by the indwelling Spirit of God and hence is characterized by "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:1). But even such an one as that is not beyond falling in

the presence of temptation. Hence while restoring another he has to take good heed to himself.

Verse 2 is an exhortation of a more general character. It applies to all of us. We are to fulfil the law of Christ — which in one word is LOVE — and bear one another's burdens. Very frequently the brother who falls has been bearing burdens to which we are strangers, and had we been walking in obedience to the new commandment of John 13:34, we should have been helping to lighten them.

And why do we not thus fulfil the law of Christ? What is it that so frequently hinders us? Why, we think ourselves to be something or somebody, and when we do we feel ourselves too great and important to lift other people's burdens. And all the time we are deceiving ourselves. We are nothing, as verse 3 so pointedly tells us. A man is never nearer to zero than when he fancies himself to be somebody — even a "spiritual" somebody!

The fact is we need sobriety of thought. We need preparedness to face facts; testing our own work. If we do so we shall be brought down from the high thoughts we had entertained. And if indeed we do find that which stands the test we may rejoice

in what is really our own, and not in that which we are in other people's estimation. For we must each bear the burden of our own individual responsibility before God. There is no contradiction between verses 2 and 5 save an apparent one as to the words employed. In verse 2 "burden" refers to that which presses upon us each in the way of trial and testing. In verse 5 "burden" refers to the responsibility Godward which lies upon us each and which none can bear for another.

With verse 6 the apostle passes to a specific responsibility which lies upon all who receive instruction in the things of God. They are to be prepared to give help to those who teach them, and that in all good things.

Naturally we are selfish creatures. The great majority of us are glad enough to receive, but very parsimonious when it is a question of giving. Verses 7 and 8, with their solemn warning, are written in view of this. We are plainly told that our own spiritual prosperity hinges upon this matter, and since we are very apt to invent in our own minds ample reasons for not giving, but rather hugging to our own bosoms as much as possible, the apostle prefaces his warning with, "Be not deceived." It is so easy to deceive oneself.

The principle that he lays down is doubtless true in any and every connection. Still here it stands in connection with this matter of giving, and we are brought face to face with the fact that our reaping must inevitably be according to our sowing. This is true of course as to quantity and that fact is stated in 2 Corinthians 9:6. The point here is rather that of quality, or perhaps we had better say of kind or nature; that just what we sow that we reap.

To sow to the flesh is to cater for it and its desires. To sow to the Spirit is to yield to Him His place, and lay oneself out for His things. If the former, we reap corruption. If the latter, eternal life. The corruption comes from the flesh. Eternal life, from the Spirit. In both cases it is just the proper outcome of what is sown; as normal as it is to obtain a field of thistles from the sowing of thistledown, or wheat from the sowing of wheat.

In the light of this fact how differently our lives would appear. How many things which may seem strange and arbitrary to us should we discover to be perfectly natural, just what we might have expected having regard to our previous course of action.

We wonder why such and such an experience was ours, whereas the wonder would have been had it not been ours. Happy for us it is when our sowing has been such that an abundant crop of "everlasting life" begins to appear.

No one can sow to the Spirit save he who has the Spirit; that is, is a true believer. Having the Spirit, and indeed having eternal life in the sense of John 5:24, we reap eternal life as the proper consequence of cultivating the things of the Spirit of God. This verse plainly sets "eternal life" before us not as the life by which we live, but as the life we live. As we cultivate the things of the Spirit we lay hold of and enjoy all those blessings, those relationships, that communion with the Father and the Son, in which life consists from the practical and experimental side of things.

Here, then, we are supplied with the reason why we so often have to bemoan our spiritual weakness, or the lack of vitality and joy and power in the things of God. We make but little advance, and we enquire why it is. How many scores of times have we heard this question asked and often in a kind of plaintive way that infers that God deals out His favours capriciously,

or that the whole question is wrapped in mystery! There is really no mystery about it.

The matter is simply settled by asking oneself the question, "What am I cultivating?" I shall never get figs from thistles nor reap eternal life save by sowing to the Spirit. The trouble with most of us in these days is dissipation of energy. Not exactly the cultivating of harmful things, but rather of useless and needless things. We are not like the Apostle himself who could say, "One thing I do" as he concentrated steadily on the one great thing that mattered.

Does some young believer ask us to be severely practical, and to come very close home to the point? Then we say, "Cut out of your life those 'harmless' amusements, those unprofitable frivolities, those little time-wasting engagements that accomplish nothing and lead you nowhere. Fill your heart and mind and time with the Word of God and prayer, give yourself whole-heartedly to the glad service of the Lord Jesus, and ere long your profiting will appear to all."

You notice of course that we are back again at the point we reached in verse 16 of chapter 5, only here we are carried a step

further. There the point was mainly negative — not fulfilling the desires of the flesh. Here it is positive — reaping everlasting life.

The reaping does not come directly the seed is sown. Hence the need for patience as stated in verse 9. But reap we shall — in due season, and God, not we, is Judge as to when the fit season arrives. Still arrive it certainly shall. Genesis 8:22, stands true even in this connection — "seed time and harvest ... shall not cease."

Now, as we previously noticed, all this important truth is brought in to stir up the Galatians and ourselves to generosity in our giving, and to this point the Apostle recurs in verse 10. We are to be givers and doers of good to all men; whilst the household of faith have upon us the first call. By creation we are connected with all men. By redemption and its results we are found in the household of faith. The former natural, the latter spiritual, and the spiritual has precedence over the natural.

The apostle Paul set great importance upon this letter of his to the Galatians, hence verse 11. Some render it "how long a letter" in keeping with our authorized version; others "in what

large letters." If the former be correct it indicates that instead of employing one of his helpers to write the letter he had written it all with his own hand. If the latter, it signifies that he now took up the pen to add the last few lines with his own hand and wrote in extra large letters. In either case it was to give added emphasis to his words as he commences his closing summary.

In verse 12 he has a final word as to those who had been pressing circumcision on the Galatians. He unmask once more their real object; namely, to make a fair shew in the flesh and to escape the persecution entailed by the cross of Christ. This was not a random accusation brought against them, for in verse 13 he proves it by the simple fact that while pressing circumcision on the Gentile Galatians as the sign of subjection to the law, they did not keep the law themselves! In that way they really unmasked themselves. They just wanted to be able to boast in some fleshly sign and so conform to the spirit of the world.

In contrast thereto Paul states his own position in the matter. He gloried not in the flesh but in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ which had put the sentence of God's judgment both on the flesh and on the world. The apostle speaks of the cross in its application to himself as regards the world. Crucifixion was

not merely death, but a death of shame. It was as though he said, "In the death of Christ the world-system has been gibbeted in my eyes, and I have been gibbeted in the world's eyes. I discard the world as a thing of shame, and it discards me as a thing of shame." And the remarkable thing is that in all that Paul gloried. He was not in the least depressed or lugubrious about it.

How was this? Well, he knew the value of the cross and he now had before his eyes the new creation of which the cross is the basis. In virtue of the cross he could be found "in Christ Jesus" and there new creation is, and circumcision and uncircumcision are alike of no account.

Paul walked according to this rule; that is, the rule of the cross and new creation. Such is the walk proper to every Christian. The cross is that which has put away all that is evil and offensive, whether sin or Satan, the flesh or the world. New creation introduces all that is of God and in Christ Jesus. To the new creation we, Christians, belong, so according to that rule we are to walk. Peace and mercy are on all such and on the true Israel — at present of course found incorporated in the church of God. The apostle so puts it here, we believe, to pour contempt

on the Judaizing teachers who were advocating a spurious thing.

In this sixteenth verse we read of the believer's "walk" for the last time in this epistle. We have read of walking "according to the truth of the gospel" and of walking "in the Spirit." Now we learn we are to walk according to the rule of the new creation. A lofty standard this! But not too lofty seeing we already are brought into new creation in Christ Jesus in spite of our still being in the body and the flesh still in us. Again we see how all that is true of us is to exert its influence on our lives today.

The epistle closes somewhat peremptorily, even as it opened. There is a feeling of restraint about the two closing verses. Paul had his critics, as he knew right well. They surrounded him in crowds, making all kinds of hostile insinuations, even challenging his apostleship. He brushes them and their objections aside. The Romans had a custom of branding their slaves and thus placing the question of their ownership beyond dispute. He was just like that. He was Christ's servant beyond all dispute. The floggings and stonings endured in His service had left His brand-marks on Paul's body. That was more than could be said of the sleek advocates of circumcision as they sat in

their easy chairs. They had suffered nothing. They only knew how to instigate others to inflict suffering on such as Paul.

As for the Galatians, they were not the instigators of the wrong but only the victims of it, and Paul sought their deliverance in the grace of the Lord Jesus. If His grace was with their spirit all would be well.

For us too, the conclusion of the whole matter is this: — "It is a good thing that the heart be established with GRACE." (Heb. 13:9).