

George Philip Bible Readings

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PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

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1:1-2

There is much discussion as to the date and destination of this epistle, whether it was written to the churches in North Galatia (what we call Asia Minor) or to churches in the South of Galatia. These matters can be studied in detail in any good commentary or Bible Dictionary and we say little about them. We are primarily concerned with the message of the epistle which is gloriously contemporary. But the date of the epistle is an important factor which will help us to come to grips with the message. We follow the considered opinion of those who say the letter was written to the churches in the south of Galatia, an area visited by Paul in his first missionary journey, the story of which is in Acts 13-14. That dates Galatians around 47-48 AD, and certainly before the Council at Jerusalem in 49 AD (Acts 15) at which the legalistic issues dealt with in Galatians were discussed. If we read Acts 15:1-2 carefully we will see that some were saying that Gentile believers had to do certain things and experience certain things if they were to be "properly" saved. Such an attitude denies the sufficiency of Christ and suggests an incomplete salvation or a salvation that comes in instalments. This is what Paul challenges in this epistle. Truth is at stake, and in matters of truth we cannot agree to differ; we cannot give ground. In matters of salvation and Christian life Christ is all. Everything is *in Him* (Col. 1:19; 2:9-10). We will spend all our lives discovering just how full and glorious a salvation we have, but at the end we will have no more than at the beginning, because we have Christ. We start with a full and complete salvation, and if we would but remember this, false teachers would not have such success in distracting us.

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1:1-2

Keep some dates in mind in order to learn a serious lesson. If our Lord's death and resurrection are dated AD 33 and Galatians was written by AD 48 then we have the situation that within fifteen years of the great Pentecostal outpouring, with the church growing and expanding in astonishing numbers, there is a situation of spiritual crisis. Paul spoke in strong terms because he was aware that there was such a confusion about the authentic Gospel message that it was in danger of being lost completely. We will see within a few verses that Paul saw the situation as a clear work of the Devil against the Gospel. This is why he set about the business of making plain that there is only one way of salvation., and that way is Christ *alone*. From the reference in Acts 15:1-2, 5 we must see that the false teachers opposed both Paul's message and his authority as an apostle. Later in the chapter we see Paul's wisdom in going right to the headquarters of the church in Jerusalem to get the matter cleared. In the debate Peter spoke up, siding with Paul, and emphasising that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone (Acts 15:9,11). The church council stood by the true doctrine of the Gospel and wrote a letter to the various congregations (Acts 15:23ff) commanding both Paul and his ministry. No doubt Paul could have fought out the issue personally in certain congregations where he was accepted and honoured, but Paul's vision was always wider than mere congregationalism. His burden was for the *whole* church and ours must be the same. That is why we must learn to take a stand and to fight battles for the truth in the right places: and that will often mean costly witness in the courts of the church. It is easy to defend sound doctrine in a conference called for that purpose and attended by those who agree. But it is the battle-ground not the play-ground that counts.

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1:1-2

We come now to the first words of Galatians in which Paul affirmed his apostolic authority *before* the Jerusalem Council had taken place. He was not in any sense despising the organised church, nor must we. There is an independence that is carnal rather than spiritual, and there are too many "self-ordained" preachers around who speak as if they were "apostles". Now Paul knew that an apostle was one who had seen the Lord and had been taught by Him. Of course, Paul had seen the Lord in His risen glory (Acts 9:3ff), and he affirms that he had been taught by the Lord (1:11-12). He had every right to regard himself as a God-appointed messenger with a God-given message. This was something the church had recognised and ratified (Acts 13:1-4; Gal. 2:7-10). It was necessary

for the Galatians to be reminded of Paul's authority. We acknowledge that there can be a wrong "admiration" of ministers and at times an "idolising" and an over-dependence. But nowadays there tends to be even more of a devaluing of the office of the ministry and of those called to it. This is nothing new, because as far back as Num. 12:1-3 we find those, who were not satisfied with their own calling, insisting that "we all are God's ministers". But note how Paul called himself an apostle and those with him he called brethren. As far as salvation is concerned we all stand on the same level: there is no difference. But in terms of service we have different callings and functions, and it is God who decides and appoints.

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1:1-2

In most of his epistles Paul begins by affirming his apostleship and here he does so in a radical way. We spoke yesterday of the church recognising his calling, but Paul insists that it was God Himself through Christ who *made* him an apostle. His apostleship came from God through Christ and not by the mediation of any man or system. This does not devalue the "ministry" as now organised and guarded by the various denominations, because ministers are not "apostles" in the biblical sense. The apostles were "unique in their experience of the Jesus of history, unique in their sight of the risen Lord, unique in their commission by Christ's authority and unique in their inspiration by Christ's Spirit. We may not exalt our opinions over theirs or claim that our authority is as great as theirs. For their opinions and authority are Christ's. If we would bow to His authority, we must therefore bow to theirs." (Stott) This is an issue of immense importance with regard to the inspiration and final authority of the Scriptures. We are not allowed to place our opinions and our modern assessments over against Scripture. It is because so many have done so that there is in the church such confusion and ignorance. The apostolic age was unique and with that age there was concluded the Canon of Scripture. For all the history of the church, whatever people say, especially if they claim to speak by the Spirit of God, must be tested by the clear truth of Scripture. It is popular these days to say, "We must listen to what the Spirit is saying to the church." True. But the Spirit will not speak in contradiction of Scripture. It is time we were saying, "Let us listen to what the Bible is saying to the church." We need to beware of those who in practice, and sometimes in actual speech, say "We do not need the Bible. We have the Spirit."

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1:3-5

Right at the start Paul greets the Galatian believers and in doing so presents a magnificent summary of his Gospel message. The source of salvation is the grace of God, and the fruit of salvation is peace with God, peace through the blood of the Cross (Rom. 5:1; Col. 1:20). From that God-made, God-sealed, peace there flows the peace of God which passes understanding (Phil. 4:7). Once at peace with God and at peace within ourselves we can begin to be at peace with others. Think of the wonder of God's amazing grace: the grace that sought and found us, the grace that alone can keep us clean. It is grace with wonderful variety (1 Pet. 4:10); it is all-sufficient and never-failing (2 Cor. 12:9; Eph. 1:7); it is never ending grace and out of its fulness we receive grace upon grace (John 1:16). We have the assurance that where sin abounded grace much more abounded (Rom. 5:20) and God gives more grace as it is needed (2 Cor. 9:8 AV). Think of the wonder of the peace that Jesus promised and has brought. It is the peace that marked His whole life, a peace the world can neither give nor take away (John 14:27). "Peace" was the word spoken by the risen Christ to the frightened disciples (John 20:19-21). We must keep our minds and hearts alert to grasp every reference in Scripture to God's peace, not least in order that we might learn to let the peace of God rule in our hearts (Col. 3:15). After all, God promises to keep us in perfect peace when our minds are fixed and settled on Him (Isa.26:3AV). We must not look for peace through our circumstances because things change so quickly. We look to the Prince of Peace who still has the power to still the storm (Mk. 4:35-41). Think of the words of the hymn, "Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin." One verse says,

"Peace, perfect peace, our future all unknown,
Jesus we know, and He is on the throne." (Bickersteth)

What comfort and assurance that is!

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1:3-5

Having declared the grace of God to be the source of the Gospel and the peace of God the blessing of the Gospel, Paul goes on to give a brief, factual and accurate summary of the substance of the Gospel. He declares that the death of Jesus Christ was the sacrifice for sin. He gave Himself as the sin-offering to deal with our sin. Paul does not elaborate this statement but returns to it later in the epistle. It is simply stated here that Christ died in relation to our sin, to deal with it and to take it away. He took our place (1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18; Isa. 53:4-6). He was substituted for us. He took all our infinite liabilities because of sin and He paid the price and settled the debt. We must never lose our sense of wonder at the heart of the Gospel. We read and quote John 3:16 far too easily. We glory in the fact that while we were still sinners (and not waiting for us to repent or improve) Christ died for us (Rom. 5:6-8). We grasp at the glorious completeness and finality of the work of redemption as stated in Heb. 9:11-14, 24-28. But we must always stand in awe at the tremendous cost it was to the Saviour. He who knew no sin, and who saw the sinfulness of sin as no other has ever done, was "made sin for us." (2 Cor. 5:21). Christ was "closed up" with sin, "left alone with human sin" as one of our hymns states it, brought to such a point of identity with sin that His Father averted His face from the scene of the Cross and caused the awful cry, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" We must never forget the cost. It was dearly paid (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

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1:3-5

The Gospel proclaims not only forgiveness of sins and reconciliation to God, but also deliverance from bondage. When we speak of sin it is not just the acts of sinning that constitute the problem, it is the fact that we are sinners by nature and are under bondage. Our problem is threefold: sin, self and Satan; or the world, the flesh and the Devil. Just as the Exodus in the Old Testament was a deliverance from bondage and entry into newness of life and experience in the grace and power of God, so salvation in the New Testament has the same glorious dimension. To a great extent our lack of appreciation of the Gospel stems from a lack of awareness of what it means to be a sinner. The following passages of Scripture help to highlight just how helpless and hopeless we were and are by nature, apart from Christ: Rom. 3:9; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:1-3 (note how v.3 tells us we are trapped by what we are and we cannot change ourselves); Col. 1:12-14 (and only the strong power of God can effect the deliverance and transfer. Only Jesus is stronger than Satan); 1 John 5:19. The last thing Paul says in this summary of the Gospel is that Christ died according to the will of God the Father (Acts 2:23). We must never think of the Cross as a tragedy or just as a miscarriage of justice, and certainly never as a triumph of wicked men, even though men will be judged for their wicked actions. The death of Christ is something rooted in eternity and built into the very throne of God (Rev.5:6). Little wonder Paul ascribes the glory to God for ever and ever.

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1:6-9

Paul used very blunt words and took a very radical attitude, charging the Galatian converts with deserting God who had called them in the grace of Christ. This is astonishing language when you think that these were Paul's own converts. But there is no warm greeting in this letter, no thanksgiving to God for them, no assurance of prayer for them, and no request that they should pray for him. The situation was serious and such was the burden of Paul's heart, not only for them but for the integrity and progress of the Gospel, that there was no time for niceness and friendliness. Paul charged them with being "turncoats", turning away, changing their allegiance, deserting the Christ who had saved them. Their error ("sin" is a better word) was not simply a moving away from sound doctrine, it was a personal defection from Christ. What had led to such a solemn accusation? These Galatians had truly believed the Gospel, had been justified by faith, had been born anew by the Spirit of God. They were in Christ and Christ was in them by the indwelling Spirit. But some legalistic Jewish teachers were insisting that as well

as having Christ they had to be circumcised and had to obey the Law (Acts 15:1). That is, they had to add certain things to their spiritual experience before they could be considered "proper" Christians. But Christ is everything and to "add" to Christ is to deny the sufficiency of Christ, and that is to depart from God and the Gospel. The same situation arises when people insist that a certain form of baptism, or a certain experience of sanctification, or a certain manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit is necessary in order to be a truly spiritual Christian. Paul took this matter seriously and we must study it again.

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1:6-9

Christian magazines and letters to secular newspapers both testify that our modern generation does not see the need for this kind of dogmatic insistence on holding to sound doctrine. People seem to say, "so long as we have a good experience" (that is the language of the drug scene) and "so long as we love Jesus" there is no need to argue about doctrine. This has led to an evangelical situation in which there is not only confusion and uncertainty about the message of the Gospel but a danger of losing the essential truth of it. It seems possible and acceptable nowadays for someone to claim to be and to be accepted as an evangelical believer even though he or she no longer holds to the full inspiration and authority of Scripture, or to the divinity of Christ, or to the substitutionary atonement, or to the personal return of Christ in glory. We need to challenge ourselves. How many, who in early days gladly signed such affirmations as the Doctrinal Basis of UCCF or affirmed the glorious ordination vows of the ministry of the Church of Scotland, can do so now *only* with tongue in cheek and with many heart reservations? We need to take stock. We need to beware lest creeping unbelief in heart is in fact causing us to depart from God (Heb. 3:12). We also need to be careful whom we listen to because not all who speak biblical language are of God. Paul speaks here of some who were troubling the church. They were exercising influence in a way that was destroying the peace, unity and fellowship of the church and that is always a sign of the Devil's work. The enemy loves to infiltrate and to do his evil work from within (Acts 20:28-30; Jude 3-4; 2 Tim.2:14-19; 3: 6-9; 4:1-5).

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I:6-9

The troublers of the church were perverting or changing the Gospel. Their influence was being exercised on converts who were young in the faith, imposing on them rules and requirements that took their eyes and their trust away from Jesus. These false teachers were, of course, claiming superior spirituality but Paul insists they were defective and spiritually dangerous. They were preaching a "gospel" that was not the Gospel. They were saying "your obedience to Christ requires this ..., and this ..., and this if you are to be complete." Now, says Paul, "nothing you can do and nothing man can do for you has any part in salvation. Salvation is all of God's free grace and is complete in Christ. Everything God is and has and gives is in Christ and you are complete in Him (Col. 2:9, 10)". Now think of the severity with which Paul speaks of God's "anathema" or curse on those (who themselves are "saved") who speak and act against the Gospel. Think of Jesus' stern words about those who cause His young disciples to stumble (Matt. 18:5,6). Note how Paul says that if he changes his ground and comes to them preaching a different message of salvation they are not to listen. He says that even if an angel from heaven, or a human messenger speaking like an angel and claiming visions and revelations, comes with a different gospel they are not to listen. The Galatians must have been shocked into startled awareness by the passion of Paul's words. They would listen! The false teachers would be roused in anger because their persons and their ministry had been challenged and exposed. There would be conflict. But then, truth and error are always in conflict. It cannot be otherwise.

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1:10

In the previous two verses Paul repeated his stern warning, given in the name of God, to let it be seen that what he was saying was not an angry outburst but a carefully considered statement. He made it plain that he himself was

not excluded from the warning and if he ever played false to the God-given Gospel, then he too would be accursed. But Paul stood by the Gospel even if no-one believed it and even if no-one regarded or respected him. This is the burden of today's verse. His critics were accusing him of being a man-pleaser, trying on his travels to curry favour with the Gentiles by preaching a Gospel that would be acceptable to them, and then later at Jerusalem trying to keep in with the Jews. Their accusations were false, but they do highlight a constant temptation to all who are called to preach. It is all too easy to keep back the unpleasant parts of biblical truth, the parts that expose pride and challenge self, in order to be a welcome and popular preacher. It is a temptation to preach with such eloquence and cleverness that the message is drained of its power and becomes just a form of evangelical enjoyment to the hearers (1 Cor. 1:17). It is possible for an uncrucified heart to intrude into all our ministry so that people's attention is focused on the preacher rather than on the glorious Christ who is Saviour. But here Paul is saying that if he is speaking so plainly to them it is proof that his concern is with truth and with pleasing God not men. Recall his testimony to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 2:1-2). No man can serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). Paul was Christ's man, and to that end he was willing to lose everything (Phil. 3:7-11).

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1:11-12

Paul had no doubts about his own integrity and he had no hesitation in declaring it (10). His person and his ministry were validated by the message he preached and by the fruit of that message in many different places. God does not bless with abiding results that which is not of Himself. Now Paul affirmed that his message and ministry were not of men but of God. The message he preached was not the result of man's assessment of and man's prescription for the human situation. It was not a man-made philosophy nor a mere religious inheritance from the past. It was a "given" Gospel "revealed" to him from God through Jesus Christ. Paul did not in any sense devalue the past nor did he despise the religious privileges of the chosen race. He made that clear in Rom. 3:1-2; 9:1-5, and went on in Rom. 10:1-4 to show how the Jews had misunderstood God's Word to them and God's ways with them because they had persisted in going about, to establish their own righteousness. They, like most of our own generation, were blighted and blinded by the idea of getting to Heaven by human effort, by being religious, and by keeping God's law. But there is no salvation that way (Rom. 3:19-20). The whole of the Old Testament pointed to Christ. Salvation was in Him, and it was this that was revealed to Paul in his astonishing experience on the Damascus Road. He had earlier seen something of the mystery of faith and salvation in the angelic countenance of Stephen at his martyrdom (Acts 6:15). But that had just enraged him and he had refused to believe that he, a prominent Pharisee, had any need of the despised Jesus of Nazareth. Then he was met and spoken to by the risen Christ, and after that he had to think it all through in relation to the whole revelation of the Old Testament.

More of this tomorrow.

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1:11-12

Read Rom. 1:1-7,14-17 and 1 Cor. 1: 17-2:5 and see how thoroughly Paul had thought through his "given" message. Read 1 Cor. 15:1-11 and see there the emphasis on the Old Testament Scriptures and also the way in which Paul insists that his remarkable conversion experience was not to be regarded as normative. His spiritual birth was in some ways like an abortion (1 Cor. 15:8), it was not straightforward. We are not to look for that kind of thing, although God is free bring us to faith by any means He chooses. In today's s verses Paul was not making a "private" experience the basis of his whole life. That is what heretics and frauds do. You cannot really argue with someone who claims to have had a vision, and some who do claim extraordinary experiences become unteachable and seem to regard all they say and do subsequently as infallible. Paul's experience on the Damascus road was not some inner psychological or spiritual experience. It was an objective revelation. The Risen Christ was there, speaking to him personally, and from that point on Paul knew beyond doubt that Jesus was God. No doubt Paul had heard this truth preached by the early apostolic church but he had refused to believe it. God stopped him in his tracks. Paul was confronted, converted and commissioned and it was all God's doing. Paul being "struck down"

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was not proof of some spiritual superiority in him. It happened because of his pride and unbelief. He never spoke of his mighty spiritual experiences and certainly never boasted about them (2 Cor. 12: 1-10). Like the disciples in the Gospels, Paul was met by the Saviour, risen and glorious, and he was commissioned to go and tell. He was only the messenger. The message was given by God.

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1:13-17

Paul now recounts his personal history and he does so to demonstrate the sovereign work of God's grace whereby the enemy of Christ and of the Gospel had been brought to saving faith. Paul's reputation as a dedicated and extreme enthusiast for the Law of God was well known. He had indeed been a Pharisee of the Pharisees, with an impeccable pedigree (Phil. 3:4-6). We are not to think of Paul in terms of the shallow, bigoted, hypocrites that Jesus chastised so severely (Matt. 6:1-7; 23:1-7, 13-15, 23-28) but rather in terms of a man like Nicodemus (John 3:1). However, while Nicodemus was confused he was still open to instruction; Paul was blinded by his own dedication. He could see nothing but what he wanted to see. Anything that seemed to contradict what he had set himself to do aroused intense reaction. That is what is meant by fanaticism. What he says here is that if ever a man could have been saved by keeping the Law he was such a man. But in fact, his idolising of the Law had made him a man set against God because he persecuted Christ and all who belonged to Christ. There was no explanation for the radical change in him other than the intervention and action of God. Now, note very carefully exactly what Paul says about his conversion. We tend to think of his "crisis" experience on the Damascus Road but that is not Paul's primary emphasis. He saw now that the grace of God had been working in him far longer than he realised. He spoke of being set apart by God and for God's service before he was ever born. He said the same kind of thing in Eph. 1:3-6, and God said the very same kind of thing to Jeremiah (Jer. 1:5). Such is the wonder of salvation that we must consider these verses more carefully.

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1:13-17

It is by grace alone through faith alone that we are saved (Eph. 2:1-9). It is the work of God by His Spirit, through His Word. We who were dead in sins were quickened, made alive, and born anew to a living hope by the agency of the living Word of God preached and heard (1 Pet. 1:3, 23; Rom. 10:17; 1 Cor. 1:21). Every conversion is a total miracle in which the dead hear the voice of the Son of God, and live (John 5:25). In Paul's case the decisive working of the Spirit did not start at his baptism after he had believed and confessed Christ, nor earlier as he lay on his face on the Damascus road, nor when he was moved and disturbed at Stephen's martyrdom; nor even in his earlier years when he was under the influence of godly Jewish teachers (Acts 22:3 - Gamaliel represented the more liberal school of the Pharisees and was highly respected as Acts 5:33-40 makes plain). Paul saw now that he had been selected before he was ever born and destined to be God's spokesman to the Gentiles. Try to imagine how the early, persecuted Christians must have feared this man. How few of them would ever have imagined that *he* would be converted Acts 9:1-2. Think of how his own kith and kin must have prayed, perhaps despairingly, for his salvation. The more they prayed the worse he seemed to get. What an encouragement for us to go on praying for the salvation of loved ones. The very fact that *we* are converted signifies that the grace of God has broken into our family unit. Don't ever narrow down the sphere of operation of God's grace as if everything depended on our choices. Are we not compelled to make testimony and say,

"But while I passed my Saviour by,
His love laid hold on me." (B.E.)

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1:13-17

We are dealing here with Paul's testimony to God's effectual calling which the Shorter Catechism defines as: "the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of

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Christ, and renewing our wills, he persuades and enables us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the Gospel." Paul is affirming that his salvation was the work of God's grace from beginning to end, but this does not devalue a host of other influences through which God prepared His chosen man not only for salvation but for service. Of course, we may be quite unaware of God's working in our lives and situations, unaware of His merciful protection, deliverance and preservation. But the time comes when our eyes are opened, and then we can look back and "bless the hand that guided and the heart that planned." We must learn to marvel at God's grace and also to rejoice in it. Paul speaks of God revealing His Son to him or in him. Both terms seem to be needed to emphasise the opening of the spiritual eyes to see Jesus and to see the wonder of Christ dwelling in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 4:6; Col. 1:27; Eph. 3:14-19). Note finally in v.16 how clearly Paul states that this great salvation was not simply for his own blessing and satisfaction, but for service. Long before the time came for the great forward move of the Gospel into the Gentile world God had His man marked out and prepared. This was something that Paul never forgot. He speaks in Eph. 3:7-8 of the inestimable privilege of being called to preach the Gospel. He never forgot what he had once been and done (1 Tim. 1:12 -17). Little wonder that he wanted to be the best he could be for the Son of God who loved him and gave Himself for him (Gal. 6:14; Gal.2:20; Eph. 5:1-2).

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1:18-24

At the end of yesterday's passage (16b-17) Paul began to recount exactly what happened after his conversion. He knew he had been laid hold on by God for specific ministry (Acts 9:10-19) and he knew something of the tremendous implications of this calling. He knew also that nothing must be allowed to cloud the fact that his calling was from God, and that is why he followed the course that he did. He was not being proudly independent (as many tend to be), refusing to ask advice from anyone and refusing to recognise any church authority (as many tend to do). Paul's actions are not a warrant for private judgment. If the grace of God had overshadowed this man from before his birth right until the Damascus road, we cannot possible think that God's grace now forsook him and left Paul to work out everything on his own. That is not God's way of doing things. God has far too much concern for His Gospel and His work for that. Paul needed time to think if he was to be able to exercise a true ministry and he knew full well that if he, as a new and notorious convert, was to burst in on the church scene at once and as a significant instrument of God he would simply cause complications and misunderstandings, not least among the apostles who were at that time suffering cruel persecution for the Gospel's sake at the hands of the Jewish Sanhedrin. Paul knew there was a time to be quiet and, constrained by God's Spirit and obedient to that Spirit, he withdrew to obscurity. What a contrast to the present-day tendency to catapult untried and unproven youngsters into the public gaze, sometimes simply because they have been figures in the entertainment or criminal world. To be in the public eye is to be in great danger. That is one reason why ministers are hemmed in with so many humbling and harrowing circumstances. It is to keep them safe.

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1:18-24

Note (17) that Paul does not detract at all from the place and the authority of the apostles. It is difficult to be specific about when Paul went to Arabia, how long he spent there, and just when the three years of v.18 fitted in. We are told some details in Acts 9:19-22. Some people suggest that the three years correspond in some way to the three years the disciples spent in the company of Jesus. The visit to Jerusalem (18) is referred to in Acts 9:26-31 and we see that even after three years there was real hesitation on the part of the church to accept Paul ,until Barnabas spoke up for him. Think of what would have happened if Paul had appeared as a leader three years earlier! From the reference in Acts 9 it is clear that Paul did some preaching during his fortnight's visit, but the main purpose seems to have been simply to introduce himself personally to Peter and to James (who was now apparently counted as an apostle). Such a visit could not be interpreted as a time when Paul "received" his gospel from the church. In v.20 Paul seems to be giving his word that only the two apostles mentioned met with him. It

was not a church council. We do not need to dwell on the geographical details of v.21 but we emphasise v.22-24. Paul was still not a "headline" figure. People heard of his conversion and his ministry and they praised God. But no-one so far had any thought of this man being or becoming a key figure in the advance of the Gospel and the building of the church. God prevented the coming together of Paul and the other apostles because the time was not yet ripe. This is an important lesson. Far too often we go barging in with an urgency that is carnal rather than believing. That is reaction not faith. God has His times and He will not be hurried. If many in our day took more time to think and to wait upon God there would be less confusion, and fewer "short-term" works.

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2:1-2

It was fourteen years after his conversion that Paul went up to Jerusalem to have formal consultation with the apostles regarding his ministry. By this time Paul had carried out his first missionary journey along with Barnabas (Acts 13:1-3), and the seal of God had already been set on his ministry. Paul had also discovered just how much opposition to and perversion of the Gospel message he would have to meet and counter. It is in this context that we see, ever more clearly, the need for the long spell of preparation. Paul could well have had a crowded programme of preaching activity right from the beginning, but activity is not always service, and activity can often be the main barrier to growth and maturity. Premature service leads to premature drying up, and the church of our day is full of middle-aged Christians who are "nowhere" spiritually, and Christian teenagers who are already "past their best" because they have chosen immediate service rather than prepare for life-long dependability. We need to remember that unprepared preachers are a danger to the church, especially if they are talented and enthusiastic. Think of the story in Exodus of how Moses burst in on the scene, killed the Egyptian, enraged both the Egyptians and the Israelites, and then had to spend the next one-third of his life (40 years) in the obscurity of the desert. There, out of the public eye, he learned to be a dependable shepherd of God's people. If we say, "Lord, use me in service," we are also asking the Lord to train and prepare us. He is the Master. We are the disciples, and we must be willing to do what we are told, when we are told, and for as long as we are told. Remember God always knows best. He is always right. And His plans have been laid for a long time. That is not always the case with us.

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2:1-2

Paul had been a Christian for fourteen years. His change of life and his commitment to Christ were manifest. His ministry in the local church and in the mission-field of the Gentiles was manifestly sealed by God and yet his critics and detractors were constantly after him, denigrating his person, questioning his motives (saying he was in it for the money 1 Cor. 9:3-7,15-18) and charging him with preaching a message that was different from that of the apostles in Jerusalem. God decided the time had come for matters to be brought out into the open and that is why Paul went to Jerusalem. He was not summoned by the church authorities nor did he go for personal vindication. It was in order that the Gospel, in its full and free welcome to the Gentiles, might be affirmed. It was natural that Paul took Barnabas with him because the church at Jerusalem regarded him as a trusted man of spiritual discernment. Barnabas had been sent by the church in Jerusalem to assess and evaluate what had emerged as a movement of revival among the Gentiles in Antioch and he had recognised at once that it was an authentic work of God's Spirit through the Gospel. Furthermore, he recognised that the new converts needed a true spiritual teacher and he went in person to look for Paul and bring him to Antioch (Acts 11:19-26). The church at Jerusalem would certainly have had an interim report of the whole matter. But Paul also took Titus, an uncircumcised Gentile, a living proof of the work of the Gospel and a seal on Paul's ministry. Clearly Paul expected the church at Jerusalem to accept Titus as a true believer and to do so without hesitation or qualification, regardless of the fact that he was not circumcised. They could scarcely do otherwise because they had earlier received and welcomed a report by Peter regarding his ministry in the house of Cornelius (Acts 11:1-18). In this context Paul laid before a private group of leading men the Gospel that he preached. It would have been a masterly summary of what he later wrote in his epistles.

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2:3-5

Take these verses slowly so that we may recognise how important it is in all generations to set ourselves not just for the preaching of the Gospel but for the defence of the Gospel against those who would confuse, compromise or contradict it. Paul's concern was that the church should not be divided but should stand in glorious unity *in the faith of the Gospel*. There is no other unity. To create an ecclesiastical unity in a way that simply ignores the substance of the Gospel and the way of salvation is false, and is the way of disaster. Now note Paul's strong words in v.4 where he speaks of false brothers secretly infiltrating the church. We must never think of the early church as being "pure" with every member and office-bearer a true believer. There have been hypocrites in the church from the beginning, as the story of Ananias and Sapphira makes plain (Acts 5:1-4ff.; cf. Acts 20:29-30; Phil. 3:1-3, 17.-19). Paul is blunt. He speaks of those who are Christians in name only. They do not stand in Christ or for Christ. Eventually they can always be recognised, because they disturb the peace of the church and they never yield personal inclinations and preferences so that the work might go ahead in harmony. Note also that Paul discerns deliberate deceit in this situation. It seems that the private consultation (2:2) had been enlarged. No doubt someone in the "inner circle", the "executive" or the "business committee" had suggested (plausibly, no doubt) that others should be co-opted in order to have a broader assessment of the matters being discussed. They saw to it that those being co-opted would not be in favour of Paul. But Paul was wide awake to what was going on in church councils and realised that this was indeed the time to make clear statements and to give no ground whatever. The truth of the Gospel must be preserved for our generation, else the next generation will grope in uncertainty. The generation after that would be in the dark. Think of the church in Britain in the twentieth century.

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2:6-10

Whenever God raises up great men in the work of the Gospel there are two dangers. We can despise them, failing to recognise that God's hand is indeed on them to speak to and to influence a whole generation; or we can idolise them, regarding their every utterance as being the final word on every subject. It would appear that some were adulating Peter, James and John (9) to an undue degree. Paul was not scorning their calibre nor their God-given place in v.6 for he had already made rightful acknowledgment of them (1:17, 19; 2:2, 6a, 9). James was the Lord's brother (but he did not emphasise that in Jas. 1:1). Peter and John had been in the inner-three group of Jesus' disciples but their past history had not been without flaws. It may have been Paul was looking to the three men of repute to speak out more clearly and not to be so cautious about the other strong voices in their own party. There can be "party politics" even within the evangelical wing of the church and it is something to be guarded against. Indeed, all of us need to be careful lest our judgments are too influenced by our liking or distaste for individuals. God's truth is more important than personalities. Lest we think Paul was holding too high an opinion of himself, read his searching words in 1 Cor. 3:1-9. It is right to recognise and respect those who have been God's instruments for our blessing but there is no place for "fan-clubs" in the fellowship and partnership of the work of the Gospel. We are inter-dependent and must never forget it. What Paul says is that the very men whom his critics idolised gave him the right hand of fellowship, recognising his message and his ministry, and declaring their equal partnership with him, under God.

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2:6-10

If we would keep ever in mind that the work is God's, the Word is God's, the grace is God's and the whole plan of salvation in all its outworking is God's and God's alone, we would be preserved from a great deal of mutual criticism and saved from a lot of the demoralisation that comes from comparing ourselves and our work with others. It is God who sets us in our respective places and it is God who gives us our work to do. The only way to please God is to do faithfully what has been entrusted to us. To envy another's "patch", and to intrude on it, is to grieve God and to doubt the wisdom and integrity of His ways. We are told here that the church recognised that both Peter and Paul had been entrusted with a particular task. One was sent to the Jews and one to the Gentiles, but

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the work was one work; enabling was from God and the glory belonged to God. Read 1 Cor. 4:1-7. Think of the great testimony and example of our Lord when He said to His Father, "I have finished the work you gave Me to do" (John 17:4 AV). What we must always remember (and it will keep us from pride) is that others have laboured and we enter into their labours (John 4:36-38). Few, if any, are ever entrusted with a complete work from beginning to end. And in every individual piece of work every member, especially those who might be regarded as less important, is necessary (1 Cor. 12:14-22). Another thing we must remember is that we are fellow-workers with God (1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:1). That keeps us from being demoralised and from feeling inferior. We need each other as individual believers and we need each other in fellowship, congregation with congregation, because the church is one. We need each other's prayers and we owe each other a debt of gratitude. What we must never forget is that God works and fulfils His will in many and varied ways. Who are we to adulterate one work and devalue another?

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2:11-13

We have here the account of two great preachers of the Gospel in open confrontation and we must examine the reasons why Paul places this on record. It cannot be mere personal criticism because Paul has already acknowledged Peter's calling under God to be the missionary to the Jews. The story of Pentecost and the fruitful ingathering of souls is a marvellous account of how blundering, impetuous, complicated Peter became a man God could use to a remarkable degree. But that same Peter was very slow to recognise that the grace of God in the Gospel was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. The story of Cornelius in Acts 10, especially v.9-16, speaks volumes about Peter's prejudices, hesitations and limited spiritual perception. But, as we have noted in earlier readings, Peter testified to this extension of the Gospel, while at the same time recognising, apparently, that his particular calling was to the Jews. Some suggest that God condescended to Peter's limitations in giving him the specific task of working only among his own people. Whether this is so or not we must recognise that our chosen way of life, our chosen preferences, and our chosen refusals to die to self can and do narrow down our usefulness to God. Some decide that they will serve God at home but not abroad. Some decide they will work only with young people. Some decide they will do a work in which they can gather together only those of a cultural and economic life-style like their own. Some, in consequence, never reach their true capacity for service. God is not perverse, and He sets us in places that are right for us. But we must be careful lest cultural, educational and traditional factors influence us more than God's will. Show me your ways, O Lord, and teach me your paths (Ps. 25: 4). It is a necessary prayer.

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2:11-13

Note the dramatic tension in our passage. "When Paul visited Jerusalem, Peter gave him the right hand of fellowship (1-10). When Peter visited Antioch, Paul opposed him to the face (11-16)". (Stott) It was not because Peter denied the doctrines of the Gospel but because he acted or behaved in a way that was a contradiction of the Gospel. What we see here is an example of Peter's besetting sin, namely fear of man. We see also how one prominent character can set the example to others. Not only did other converted Jews separate themselves, even Barnabas, with whom Paul had a close spiritual relationship in ministry, backed away. What a hurt that must have been! But it was the defence of the Gospel and not personal hurt that caused Paul to charge them all with insincerity. We cannot help wondering if this incident had some bearing on the difference of opinion between Paul and Barnabas at the start of the second missionary journey (Acts 15:36 ff). Paul may have felt that Barnabas was allowing blood relationship to cloud his spiritual judgment. After all, the good of the Gospel and the health of the church is more important than family ties. Remember Jesus' words about loving fathers and mothers more than Him (Matt. 10:37-39). Grasp clearly how necessary it was for Paul to challenge Peter. If these Judaising, legalistic teachers had been successful, making it necessary for believers to undergo Jewish circumcision, and if there had been a splitting away of a group who felt they were the truly spiritual ones in the church, it would only have been a

matter of time before some other secondary issue was made "necessary" for true spiritual life. That is the road that leads to bondage, legalism and a life that is dominated by man-made rules. The glorious, all sufficient Jesus is lost sight of.

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2:14-16

Spiritual pride is a terrible danger and spiritual insincerity must be challenged. The legalism which Paul challenged Peter about is still seen in our day. In some groups sons are not allowed to carry their father's coffin at the funeral either because they are not converted, or not baptised by immersion, or not observing the Lord's Supper in a certain way. This is done on the basis of Acts 8:2 which says that devout men carried Stephen to his burial. The father who died may have spent his life making money, but because he conformed to certain required "shibboleths" he was regarded as "spiritual". But Paul makes it plain that nothing and no-one must be allowed to confuse the truth of the Gospel. (14). Peter had eaten with the Gentiles, thus making a radical break with all the argument in favour of imposing the ritual laws of the Jews upon Gentile believers. How could Peter now require Gentiles to conform to the rite of circumcision when, after all, they had been baptised in Jesus' name? Now, says Paul (15-16), we who are Jews know, confess and preach that a man is not justified by the works of the Law. This is the Gospel by which both Peter and Paul had believed unto salvation. This is *the* heart of the Gospel, justification, that is acceptance by God, is by grace alone through faith alone. We cannot emphasise it too often because people get confused and lose both their peace and hope. Read Rom. 5:1-2 and Rom. 8:1. If God accepts the sinner, be he Jew or Gentile, through faith in Christ, then no-one is entitled to place any other condition upon him. Read Rom. 3:19-30. Christ is everything (1 Cor. 1:30). We must trust in Him alone. Christ is the solid Rock of salvation. All other ground is sinking sand. Give Peter credit. He accepted the rebuke and in the church council in Jerusalem, before all the leading Jewish believers, he took his stand (Acts 15:6-11).

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2:17-19

As we struggle with these difficult verses, pause for a moment to think of Paul as the defender of the faith. For Christ and the Gospel he suffered the loss of all things (Phil. 3:7ff); he was willing to become all things to all men (1 Cor. 9:19-23); and he was willing to be made a laughing-stock and to be treated like refuse (1 Cor. 4:9-13). His Christian faith was not, an "extra". It was life itself. When we come to v.17, "This difficult verse can only be properly understood by keeping it close to the purpose of Paul's argument. 'Sinners' here refers to Jewish Christians violating their Jewish law in the matter of eating with the Gentiles and therefore exposing themselves to the danger of eating food which is ceremonially unclean." (Still) This would have put them "in the wrong" with God. If this was still the case, then Christ had led them astray. Are we in a worse position now than before we came to Christ? Certainly not, says Paul. What pleases God more, our holding to the law and trusting to our efforts for salvation, or turning from the law and trusting Christ? The answer is obvious, and Peter knew that full well when he went and stayed and ate with Simon the Tanner. Paul learned the same thing on the Damascus Road when he turned away from the whole idea of salvation by the works of the law (Rom. 10:1-4). He goes on to speak to the Galatians in the first person, taking his stand with Peter, Barnabas, James and all the other believing Jews. Look, he says, if I build up again a platform of salvation by the works of the law, that would just prove that I am a condemned sinner, because the law condemns. It cannot do anything else.

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2:17-19

We have still to consider v.19. If ever a man could have been saved by keeping the law it was Paul because such was his standard that he was considered blameless (Phil. 3:4-6). But all his efforts and earnestness and dedication had not brought him peace with God nor assurance of acceptance by God. By his very dedication to the law he had been persuaded by the law that this was not the way to God. The law had brought him the knowledge of sin and the

awareness of condemnation (Rom. 7:7). The law had left him with demands and threats. The law had consigned him to death. The law stood between him and God, declaring, "No Entry." It is at that point we begin to see the glory of Jesus' words, "I am the Way" (John 14:6). Paul sees now that the law's demand of death for the sinner was in fact met by Jesus Christ when He died on the Cross. But Paul's words here speak of Christ not just as the "substitute" who died "in his place", but as the "representative". Think of how many people can be reckoned to have voted at a big meeting simply because their representative was there in person to vote. Each person represented can rightly say, "Yes, I voted." In the same way every believer must see that. Christ represented them in all He did when He died on the Cross. The guilt of sin was dealt with. The demands of the Law were met and so finished. Neither "sin" nor "the Law" have any right to interfere with us any more. Everything has been settled and discharged and we are free. In that freedom we can now live unto God. Read Paul's words in Rom. 6:3-4, 10-11,14; 7:1-6. In today's verse (19) Paul says the Law got what it asked:- death. The written code with its regulations that stood opposed to us was taken away and nailed to the Cross (Col. 2:14). Life must come and does come from God alone.

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2:20-21

Paul has already declared in v.16 that a man is justified by faith alone. Now he goes on to state the truth about those who have responded by faith to the Gospel and who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ unto salvation. In one verse Paul declares the pattern and the power of the life we now have in Jesus Christ. All the benefits of the death and resurrection of Christ are now ours. Note how Paul holds closely together all we mean by justification and sanctification. Note also that Paul declares that a basic, elemental, radical and permanent change *has been* worked in the believer from the very moment he or she first believed. Paul declares, "I, the man I once was, have been crucified with Christ." He is speaking of the believer's union with Christ in His death and resurrection. He says, simply but gloriously, "When Christ died, I died." That is what he says also in Rom. 6:2-11 and in Col. 3:3. It is the same theme as in 2 Cor. 5:17 that "the man in Christ (the believer, the converted man, the justified sinner) is not the same as he once was. He is a totally new creation; the old has passed away; everything about that man is new. It has nothing to do with feelings, nor, in the first instance, with actual experience; it has to do with the theology, the spiritual facts of salvation. Note very carefully that Paul is speaking not only of something decisive, something that *has been* accomplished, but something that had to be done for him. This is important because some, misunderstanding this verse, try to crucify themselves, denying every human feeling, and doing themselves psychological and even physical harm in order to "kill sin". Now, there is a battle and a struggle, and a mortifying of the flesh that is real and costly, *but* it can be done *only* on the basis of what has in fact been accomplished. Read Rom. 6:11 again and see clearly that we are called to reckon on fact not fiction.

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2:20-21

Keep clearly in mind that Paul is not describing his day by day Christian experience (in which there was plenty conflict and struggle as Rom, 7:15-20 makes plain) but expounding the doctrine of salvation. All that he once was had been put to death and had been buried with Christ. But Christ did not stay dead. He rose again, and we who have believed have in fact been raised to newness of life in and with Christ (Rom. 6:4). A new person now exists who is no longer in the realm of or under the dominion of sin, law and death (Col. 1:12-24). Now, neither Paul nor the Law nor any man brought this new situation to pass and *therefore* neither self, nor law nor man has any right to impose rules and regulations, restrictions or requirements on the man who is "in Christ". When you recognise this, you learn to refuse all the "old" claims, inclinations and pressures. Paul insists in v.19 that he should live unto God and this he does by the power of the living, victorious Christ who lives in him. Now, if Christ in all His risen power lives in us by the Holy Spirit, then there is no limit to the possibilities of victorious Christian living. "Think what Spirit dwells within you." It is Christ who dwells in our hearts by faith (Eph. 3:17). It is Christ in whom all the fulness of God dwells, who lives in us (Col. 1: 19). It is Christ through whom sin, death and hell lost their power

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who lives His life in us (Rom. 8:11). It is Christ the eternal Son of God, the Lord of glory, the Lord of creation, providence and redemption, the Christ to whom every knee must bow who lives in our hearts (Phil. 2:9-11). This, says Paul, is my life and your life. This is what it means to be a Christian.

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2:20-21

The person who has believed in Christ unto salvation has undergone a spiritual death and resurrection. He must grasp the fact that "this life of Christ becomes so inalienably my own that it is *my* life lived in *my* flesh, Christ communicating and expressing all His will through the normal channels of my mind, feelings, conscience and will." (Still) The life-giving spirit of Christ within us is so united to our spirit that it becomes increasingly *natural* for us to say, "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15,-16). This new life is lived by faith, a recognising of and a total dependence on all that God has done for us and given to us in His dear Son who loved us and gave Himself for us. Again and again in the hot battles of life we must make the deliberate decision of faith to stand in and live by Christ. We must take our stand and reckon on the *facts* of salvation and at the same time refuse the claims of the world, the flesh and the Devil. It is a costly way of life and yet it is warmed and sweetened by keeping in mind this altogether amazing truth, that the Son of God, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, loves us in a personal way and died for us personally. He loves us in the same way and to the same extent as the Father loves Him (John 15:9). It is an amazing salvation and it is all of grace. Now, says Paul, (21) if salvation was in any sense accomplished by or dependent on our conforming to the requirements and the prohibitions of the Law, then Christ died to no purpose. If anyone says that any "works of the law" are necessary, that person is saying that the death of the Son of God was a waste of time. What a terrible thought.

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3:1-5

Throughout chapters 1 and 2 Paul has been recounting the facts of his own spiritual experience, how God had dealt with him, and how both his message and his ministry had been given to him by God and not by men. Now he begins to be more directly concerned with the clear statement of the theology of the Gospel of salvation and he deals with this in great detail in order to save the Gospel message from the distortions and contradictions that were already doing great damage. He speaks passionately of how the Galatian converts had been "bewitched", "deceived", or "hypnotised" and of how they needed to be awakened to the fact that far from being led on into a better, deeper or higher spirituality they were in fact being led away from Christ into error. This is an issue in our own day when matters of doctrine are being relegated by many into a very secondary place while matters of "experience" are being exalted to a place of almost infallibility. Once a person has claimed to have had a particular experience, especially an "experience" claimed to be of the Holy Spirit, it is virtually impossible to reason with that person or to teach him. And some who claim an experience of the Spirit can hold a defective and even false doctrine of Scripture, of the Person of Christ, of the nature of the atonement and of the moral requirements of Christian life. Now, since the Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, any spiritual experience that is not in accord with the Truth cannot be of God. What we have to see here is the clear evidence of the need to defend the truth of the Gospel of salvation as well as to preach it. This was a real and rigorous part of the experience of the early church. It is not ungracious or un-Christian to contradict error and to expose it. It is in fact necessary.

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3:1-5

When Paul tells the Galatians that they had lost their senses and that they had been bewitched, he is undoubtedly affirming that behind the activities and influences of the false teachers there was the work of the Devil. He is the Deceiver (Rev. 12:9) and the Father of lies (John 8:44). Paul calls the Galatians back to consider their own conversion. We have already referred to such passages as Acts 13:26,38-39, 48, 52 which tell the story of the converting work in Galatia and we could read also 1 Thess. 1:2-10. These narratives make plain that independent

of circumcision or any other "work" of the Law of Moses, those who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul challenges the Galatians, asking them if they received the Spirit as a direct result of anything they did, or anything they stopped doing, or whether it was simply by hearing the Gospel in faith. If then they received the Spirit and with Him the gift of eternal life on the basis of faith alone, how can they possibly think that "going on with the Spirit" or the "blessing of the Spirit" or the "fulness of the Spirit" was dependent on the "works of the Law"? These "works" include being circumcised, or being re-baptised, or abstaining from certain unclean foods or doing any other thing that certain teachers were insisting on. All of this has contemporary application. Paul is saying that it cannot possibly be right or pleasing to God to abandon the very message and ministry that was the means of our salvation, that had worked such a total transformation in our lives, bringing them from darkness into light (1 Pet. 2:9) and from death to life (John 5:24). If God has been pleased to bless with the power of the Spirit the ministry that has brought you the power of God unto salvation, be very careful before you criticise it or abandon it. You may be turning your back on Christ

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Finished here

3:1-5

Continue the study of this passage and see in v.1 that the heart of Paul's Gospel was Christ crucified (1 Cor. 1:18, 21-24,30-31; 2:1-5; 15:3-11). His saving work was complete and nothing needed to be added to it (Heb. 9:24-28). For salvation we stand by faith alone in Christ alone, "all other ground is sinking sand." See also in v.2 that standing in Christ for salvation is inseparable from receiving the Spirit. You cannot be a Christian without having received the indivisible person of God the Holy Spirit. Paul makes this very clear by using in Rom. 8:9-11 several terms that are interchangeable. "Being in the Spirit", "the Spirit in you", "Christ in you", "the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead in you", are different ways of saying the same thing. And it is God who gives the Spirit to those who have faith unto salvation. Indeed it is that Spirit at work who enables the sinner to hear and to believe. The "gift" of the Spirit is the source from which any and every other gift of the Spirit flows and no-one is entitled to say that the Spirit always works or manifests Himself in certain ways. Nor can anyone say that this, that or the other "requirement" is necessary if we are to know the fulness of the Spirit. Jesus said plainly that the Spirit works and acts with sovereign freedom (John 3:8). Sometimes the Spirit works with miraculous signs, as Paul acknowledges in v.5, but at other times the Spirit works without miraculous manifestations and no-one has the right to say that one working is better than another. But the heart of what Paul is saying is that they were given the Spirit not because of anything they did or submitted to, but only because of faith.

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3:1-5

For our final study in this important passage, see how in v.3 Paul is speaking of growing, or going on in the Spirit. Continuance in Christian faith and life is not by self-effort nor by the energy of the flesh nor by a series of things given to you or done to you. It is growth from within, the growth of the life of Christ in you by the energy of the Holy Spirit, and the objective is, as Paul will say in 5:22, to produce in each believer the fruit of the Spirit. This holy growth and progress will only go on as we believe, rest in and reckon on the fact of the indwelling Spirit. It is indeed the life of faith, not the life of works. In v.4-5 Paul challenges the Galatians: "If God has given you so much in Christ; done so much for you in Christ; enabled you to suffer so much for Christ; and given you so many wonderful tokens of His presence and power, do you want to turn away from Him and go another way?" This is something we must grasp and think through. If God has dealt with us in terms of salvation solely on the basis of grace through faith, do we want Him now to deal with us in terms of sanctification on the basis of our efforts, our deserving and our "law work"? It is as if Paul is urging us all to guard our souls and to refuse to be led away from the Person, the place and the way of salvation. Never forget Christ is all, and all we need. Anyone who suggests otherwise is not of God. That is what Paul is saying with insistence.

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3:6-9

The critics of Paul's ministry and message, who were insisting that circumcision and other requirements of the Law of Moses were *necessary* along with faith, claimed to be standing in the true tradition of the Scriptures and the "fathers" of the faith. This is why Paul goes right back to Abraham, whose name was revered above all others as the father of the faithful. The Jews were proud to be called the children of Abraham (John 8:31-33, 39). Paul points out that long before the Ten Commandments and the Law of Moses were given (Ex. 20), and long before the rite of circumcision was instituted (Gen. 17:1-14), God in His sovereign grace spoke His promise to Abraham. Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness or salvation (Gen. 12:1-2; 15:1-6; Rom. 4:1-14). Abraham stood accepted before God on the ground of faith alone, and it is those who stand by faith in Christ alone who are and who show themselves to be the true descendants of Abraham. The mere fact of circumcision (or baptism in the New Testament) does not make you a child of God. If there is no saving faith and no personal trust in Christ for salvation, you are not right with God. No outward act, even though it be instituted in Scripture, can make you a Christian. Sitting at the Lord's Table and taking (however reverently) the bread and wine does you no good unless you rest your soul's salvation in Christ crucified. Paul is emphasising that what holds the people of God together is not the ties of race, culture, religious routine and practices but the common bond of faith in the given and written promises of the Scriptures. We do not exalt the Bible above Christ because all Scripture points to the Saviour (Luke 24:27, 44-47). But we must note in v.8 that Paul personalises Scripture, linking it very closely with the Holy Spirit in relation to the revelation and accomplishment of the purposes of God (Rom. 8:26-27; 1 Pet. 1:10-12; 2 Tim. 3:15-16).

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3:10-14

We will understand the thrust of this passage if we look at the last verse where Paul emphasises that the blessing promised to Abraham, and through him to the Gentiles (Gen. 12:1-3), is fulfilled in Christ. It is important to grasp this because there are not two different gospels, an Old Testament one and a New Testament one. God's plan of salvation is the same in all ages, and the way of salvation, right from the beginning, is the way of faith. All who try to find and to secure salvation on the basis of the works of the Law land themselves in terrible trouble. If salvation was by way of the Law, then Abraham was lost because in his life-time the Law had not been given. But more pressingly, if we take our stand on the Law, we are finished, cursed and condemned (Deut. 27:26). Make one single slip and you are pronounced guilty and no concessions are made (Jas. 2:10). Note how, in quoting from Deuteronomy, Paul is using the very Scriptures the Jews revered to demolish their position. The Law condemns. It cannot do anything else. That is its job. It cannot justify a sinner. It cannot declare a sinner righteous and accepted in God's sight. Again Paul quotes the Jews' own prophet Habakkuk (2:4) to the effect that the righteous or justified man lives by faith. And faith means taking God at His word and putting our trust in the One God sent into the world to be the Saviour of sinners. There is hope there. But when we stand under the demand and curse of the Law we are hope-less indeed. The soul that sins, it shall die. The wages of sin is death, and it is appointed unto man once to die and after this the judgment (Rom. 6:23; Heb. 9:27). It is a cursed situation indeed.

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3:10-14

It is only when we see and feel the curse and judgment of the Law that we begin to see and sense the wonder of what God has done for us in and through the death of the Saviour. Keep always in mind the devastating affirmations of Rom. 3:9-20. Guilty before God is how we stand. The wrath of God is revealed against us and all unrighteous sinners (Rom. 1:18). We are in fact condemned already (John 3:18). What can we do? Nothing. Guilty, vile and helpless we stand, and we are without hope unless someone does something for us. Someone did: Christ redeemed us from under the curse by taking our curse on Himself; by accepting all our liabilities and paying them off. Let the hymn-writers express it for us:

"Bearing shame and scoffing rude,

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In my place condemned He stood,
Sealed my pardon with His blood:
Hallelujah! what a Saviour!" (P.Bliss)

"There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven, and let us in." (C.F.Alexander)

"And on His thorn-crowned head,
And on His sinless soul,
Our sins in all their guilt were laid,
That He might make us whole." (H.W.Baker)

Now consider how well grounded in the words of Scripture these hymns are. Read 1 Pet, 2:24; 3:18; Heb. 9: 12-14; Isa. 53; 2 Cor. 5:21. What depths are here: the hymn-writers speak of Him being left alone with human sin; Rom. 8:3 (what magnificent all-embracing action). But we must not forget the cost. Remember the cry from the darkness of Calvary, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" It was because God had made His Son the curse-bearer.

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3:15-18

Paul is still concerned to defend the truth of the Gospel and his theme is still salvation as a free gift received by faith. He is affirming this over against those who insist that man must make some contribution to his own salvation. Again Paul refers to Abraham and points out that between the giving of the promise to Abraham and the giving of the Law by Moses four full centuries elapsed. He insists that we should think of this in terms of a man's last will and testament, or covenant, (15,17), and should recognise that once something is signed and sealed it cannot be changed and no-one has the right to try to change it. Now, God made His covenant of gracious promise with Abraham. It was settled. It stood unchallenged over the centuries, and since God cannot lie (Heb. 6:18) and since His gifts and calling are without any change of mind (Rom. 11:29), nothing Moses spoke, even though he spoke from God and with the authority of God, could change what God had said at the beginning. God had said to Abraham, "Believe My promise and it will be counted to you for righteousness, justification, salvation". Then in v.16 Paul emphasises that the promise was not given to the many "seeds" or natural descendants of Abraham, but to his "seed", to one specific descendant, even Christ. All the promises of God have their fulfilment in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20) and all who would share in the promises and their blessings must do so in Christ and through Christ. Remember how Jesus said that the proof of being a true descendant of Abraham was that a man would believe in Him as God's promised Saviour. This is Paul's point in v.18. The Galatians must choose between God's way of salvation by faith or man's way of salvation by works. If they choose the way of the works of the Law then they depart from God.

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3:19-20

We must imagine Paul's critics saying that if the way of salvation is totally and exclusively by faith in God's promises what was the point of God giving the Law. Was the giving of the Ten Commandments of moral law and all the other laws of religious ceremonial a mistake on God's part and a waste of time? Of course not. The Law was added, brought into the human situation because of human transgression, and in order to bring home to the human conscience and spirit, the sinfulness of sin. The function of the Law is in relation to sin not salvation. Read Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 5:20; 7:7. The law brings sin out into the open and tears down all its camouflage. The law shows and

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persuades man of his sin and need, not just in terms of acts of transgression but also in respect of the rebel spirit within fallen human nature. Think of our instinctive sense of rebellion when we see notices, "Keep Out" or "Do not touch". Think of the stupidity and perversity when, seeing the notice, "Wet paint, do not touch" we put out our finger; touch, and then say, "Oh, it is wet." The law exposes what we *are* as well, as what we *do*, and it is only when we begin to see our sinner nature, to sense our guilt, and to feel the enslaving power of sin together with our own helplessness that we are ready to cry out for salvation . We fly to Christ, not to plead innocence, for we know we have none; not to ask for justice, for that would mean condemnation; not to offer our moral efforts or our religious observances; not to say weakly that we have tried and we hope all will be well in the end since God is love; but to come with nothing to say for ourselves except that Christ died to save sinners, and I am one of them.

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3:21-22

The previous two verses are needed to understand today's reading. Paul has said that the Law has a glorious but limited work to do. Its job is to lead the sinner along the road as far as conviction of sin and need. After that the Law can help *only* by pointing beyond itself to Christ through whom alone forgiveness and salvation could come. Verses 19b-20 are difficult. Stott, quoting Neill, says: "The promise came to Abraham firsthand from God; and the law comes to the people third-hand - God - the angels- Moses the Mediator - the people." In his reference to angels being involved in the giving of the Law Paul may be thinking of Deut. 33:2. This contrast between "first - hand" and "third - hand" must have been a blow to those who were idolising the Law. Having emphasised the unity, the total consistency and the absence of any confusion or uncertainty in God or in His plans (20) the question and answer in v.21 need no elaboration. God has never set forth any way of salvation other than by faith. Think of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. It does not say there, "If you have no other gods if you keep the Sabbath if you do not. steal, lie or covet, *then* I will save and redeem you and lead you to life." God said, "I am the Lord who brought you out of Egypt;" who worked for you a perfect salvation which was all of grace for a sinful and helpless and enslaved people. I have given you salvation. Now let these words of Law be seen as words of grace standing over against; your fallen humanity in all its degenerative potential to protect and to guide you in the right way. The Law cannot give us life (Rom. 8:3). But, when we stray from God's fold, the Law, like a good sheep-dog comes after us, barks to warn us, and chases us back to safety.

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3:21-22

We have here a tremendous and comprehensive statement about Scripture, the Old Testament which the Jews regarded so highly. Their claim to have and to know and to honour the Scriptures left them with no excuse or hope. Scripture consigned, concluded or declared the whole world to be a prisoner of sin. Wherever we turn in Scripture (and at the heart of it is God's Law) we find that every door is locked against us. We can neither get to God nor can we escape from sin or from self. "Sin is the jail-keeper who holds all men under the sentence of condemnation.... Such spiritual convicts are unable to break their fetters. On the contrary, every sin which they commit draws tighter their bonds, until at last they are completely crushed. (John 8: 34; Rom. 6:23a; 1 John 5:19)" (Hendriksen) Consider also such verses as Gen. 6:11; 8:21; Dan. 9:4-19 in order to see the hopeless situation that man is in and that man can never remedy. It is when sinner man begins to cry, "Who will deliver me?" and "What must I do to be saved?" that he begins to see the wonder of God's promise: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." Remember the dying thief. He had no time to be circumcised, or be baptised, or go to communion, or to remedy his life. He no longer wanted to excuse or defend his evil life. He was convicted. He looked to Jesus and called to Jesus, and he was given the assurance of acceptance, peace and heaven. What a Gospel! What a salvation! It was God-given, grace-given and received by faith alone. What a Saviour!

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3:23-26

We concluded yesterday by thinking of the Saviour, the Gospel and the great salvation. Now, before *this* faith came, the law had a particular job to do. But note, we must read "this faith" (NIV) because, as Hebrews 11:4 makes plain, "faith" as a way of life and acceptance had operated in the past. But it was faith in the promise. Now the promise had been fulfilled and made totally plain in the coming, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. What the generations of the Old Testament had looked for and waited for had come. There had been the promise of a Saviour. That Saviour had now appeared on the stage of history and the word of preparation must give way to the Person. Who would sit and look at photographs (however good and lifelike) or sit and read letters (however well written and loving) if the Person was there in the house, calling you by name? Until Christ came we all were kept in custody by the Law, never allowed to forget our sinner-status and by stern precepts and warnings held back from the worst of our potential excesses. But the Law had a temporary appointment and when its "Superior" and "Author" arrived He took over the "job" of salvation. It would be a foolish apprentice and a proud one who would try to hold on to his limited authority and capacity when the Master craftsman of salvation arrived. When Jesus came, the sinner, "by the broken law convicted" was handed over so that from Jesus he might hear the words of love, pardon, peace, reconciliation, life and hope. Only Jesus could speak the words, "Your sins are forgiven." Now that we have come to Jesus we are no longer in the charge of a custodian or guardian. We are family.

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3:27-29

We are sons of God only through faith in Christ. We are not "sons" naturally but only when we receive Christ (John 1:12-13). Believing on and receiving Christ we are born again, or born anew, or born from above. We are no longer dead in sin, or outsiders alienated from God, but are made alive and brought into the household of God. (Eph. 2:1, 2, 5, 12, 13, 19). In that household we are not servants, nor are we "minors" with limited rights. We are sons, "come of age" recognised and accepted. We are, as Paul says in Rom. 8:17, "fellow-heirs" with Christ. We need to note how much emphasis there is on Christ in these few verses (26-29). Paul describes the Christian believer as being "in Christ", "baptised into Christ", having "put on Christ", and he is "Christ's", belonging to Christ. Apart from Christ we are nothing and have nothing. This emphasis makes it plain that Paul's reference to baptism in v.27 cannot possibly mean that the rite of baptism has any part in "making" a person a Christian. Right through the epistle his emphasis has been on salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Baptism is the outward and visible confession of and expression of faith, a public commitment to Christ and to His church. When Paul wrote these words no-one would get baptised, or have their children baptised merely as a social convention. Nor would they "join the church" simply because it was thought a "respectable" thing to do. Indeed in these days to be called a Christian was a term of contempt and derision. How much we need to emphasise that apart from living faith in Christ all the sacraments, symbols and activities of the Christian church are empty and without significance.

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3:27-29

Paul describes the believer as having "put on Christ". Not only have we come to Christ, He has come to us and we are "clothed" with Christ. Think of the hymn-writer's words, "Clothed in righteousness divine," (Wesley) and "Dressed in beauty not my own," (McCheyne) and link that with what Scripture says about "Christ in us" (Col. 1:27). We

are in Christ and Christ is in us. We are clothed with salvation (Isa. 61:10) and in the practical outworking of this we are urged to put off the "garments" and practices of the old life and to put on the new "garments" and graces of the life that is ours in Christ (Eph. 4:20-32; Col. 3:5-14). However, Paul is primarily concerned here with our status and standing in Christ as part of the family of God. He is speaking of salvation *not* service and this must be kept clearly in mind in reading v.28. It is in the matter of salvation that there are no distinctions of race, rank or sex. Whatever our racial background, tradition and culture; whatever our social standing, be it employer or employed;

whether we are men or women; we must all come to salvation by the one and only way which is Christ. In the way of salvation there are no privileged entrances and no "apartheid" exclusions. All may come and God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). And, when we come into God's family through faith in Christ we are one family, one body. We belong to each other as brothers and sisters because we have the same Father. We are all one in Christ, because we are members of the one body (1 Cor. 12:12-14 ff). In salvation there are no distinctions, but in service there are distinctions.

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3:27-29

Because v.28 is so misunderstood and so wrongly applied in our day, being used as the catch phrase for many "causes" ranging from ecumenical enthusiasm to "women's-lib" we must state clearly what it does not say. In the way of salvation there are no distinctions, privileges or restrictions; but this verse does not obliterate distinctions that are facts of life. There are Jews and Gentiles, Scottish and English, servants and masters, male and female, brainy and not so brainy, musical and non-musical. There *are* differences and distinctions in functions, all stemming from God's order of creation. When it comes to service in Christ and in the Christian faith there are guidelines and restrictions *not* simply in terms of personality, gifts, and sex *but* in accord with what God has stated and made plain in His Word. If God has said that the man is the head of the woman (1 Cor.11:3 (NIV) then neither men nor women are allowed to change the principle. If we believe (but not all evangelicals are agreed), that all the Scriptural evidence is against the ordination of women to the eldership or the ministry, then the church must stand by the principle. To say that Paul was speaking only to his own generation and that his words are therefore "time-bounded" is to strike at the whole basis of the inspiration and authority of Scripture. This could lead to an open door for "re-interpreting" the standards of marriage, morals and all of church order. God has spoken and by His word we live. We do not adjust it to meet the strident demands of culture, sociology or subjective experience.

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3:27-29

We are one in Christ. We are one in fellowship. We need each other and we must never despise or patronise another who is a blood-bought, faith-justified, child of God in Christ Jesus. In the matter of salvation we are all desperately equal in terms of need, inability, guilt and debt. Within salvation fellowship we are still equal for all we are and have is from God (1 Cor. 4:7). Our sins and defects are the only things we can boast of as being our own. This equality lasts throughout the whole of life in the faith and fellowship of Christ and this needs to be emphasised. Advancement in professional life does not make us "special" cases in the church. Indeed some who "get on" in their chosen careers (sometimes by neglecting Christian commitment, and sometimes by compromising their Christian testimony) tend to begin to sit lightly to the *ordinary* duties and commitments in the congregations to which they belong. It is all too easy to think of ourselves as "big"; whether the big house, the big bankbook, the big brain, the big counsellor, the big minister or the big congregation. Perhaps some need to feel "big" to compensate for their sense of inferiority. There is no need for inferiority. We are accepted in Christ for ourselves and we are precious in His sight. What is more, the least obvious and the most, insignificant one is necessary (1 Cor. 12:22). In respect of v.29 Stott says, "In Christ we belong to God and to each other. In Christ we also belong to Abraham. We take our place in the noble historical succession of faith, whose outstanding representatives are listed in Hebrews 11. No longer do we feel ourselves to be waifs and strays, without any significance in history, or bits of flotsam drifting on the tide of time. Instead we find our place in the unfolding purpose of God. We are the spiritual seed of Abraham.... for in Christ we have become heirs of the promise which God made to him."

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4:1-3

The fact that Paul is dealing with everything in such great detail indicates the importance of the issue. We must not weary at detailed study but work at it for our understanding and blessing. Paul is concerned that we should

recognise and enjoy in full measure the life and liberty that are ours *by right* in Christ. He says in v.1 that being an heir is no real benefit if he is still a child. The law of inheritance means he cannot take possession of, and use for service or for pleasure, all the wealth of the estate until the date set by his father. The *law* restricts, limits and frustrates and the child feels he might as well be a slave. This, says Paul to those Jewish legalists who were insisting that believers must submit to the Law of Moses, is what you are reducing Christians to. These "legalists" were keeping Christians from enjoying all the inheritance which God had in fact given to them in Christ (Eph. 1:3). They were saying that life under the Law was the real life and the best life, but Paul denies this categorically. Taking up the theme of "before faith came" (3:23-25), he describes life under the law as being slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe (RSV). What can this mean? In Eph. 2:1-3 Paul describes the condition of the sinner outside of Christ as being under the power of the world, the flesh and the Devil, a very frightening picture indeed, and this could be his meaning here. But he is also speaking of being under the Law and under a trustee. Now, guardians have been known to ill-treat their charges terribly and the Devil likewise uses and distorts the good Law of God to frustrate the purpose of the Father and to lead believers into the "deadend" of sheer legalism which never satisfies or liberates but always steals peace, blessing and hope.

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4:4-5

In order to understand fully the glory of these two verses we need to grasp the twin ideas of limitation and slavery spoken of in v.1-3. The "child" is prevented by the law from entering into the enjoyment of his rightful inheritance and those who are "slaves" live under the constant fear of rebuke and rejection if they "put a foot wrong". Now, the Devil is always busy distorting the truth of the Gospel to prevent those who are children of God by faith in Jesus Christ from enjoying their position, possession and privilege. He is a thief. He is also a liar because he suggests we are not entitled to be glad in the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:21). The Devil is also a liar in that he tries to keep us under the dread of losing our salvation and our acceptance by God because we have failed to "do" something, "observe" something or have done something but not "properly". This is bondage indeed, because we end up living our Christian lives always looking for and finding something that *we* have to do or that *people* say we need to do. That makes our life in Christ a thing of constant hazard and worry to such an extent that our eyes and hearts are taken away from the Lord Jesus Christ in whom we have been given a perfect, present and irreversible salvation. We have emphasised again and again that there is *now* no condemnation to those who are in Christ (Rom. 8:1) and that is a tremendous relief and release. We have also emphasised that we have in our possession *all* that we can possibly need in Christ (1 Cor. 3:21-23). This we must believe and on this basis live our lives in the power and liberty of the Gospel.

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4:4-5

The salvation that delivers us from being slaves and causes us to be received as sons is the work of God, accomplished at a specific and pre-determined time. As we consider the detail of these two verses let us remember that everything God does is planned and timed and carried through in absolute perfection. Down through the ages of history from creation onwards God had spoken and acted but in the "last days", the final movement of world history, God spoke in His Son Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1-3). It was the right time because God so ordained it. But it was right also in terms of prevailing conditions. Something like 1700 years had passed since Abraham, and 1300 years since Moses and the Ten Commandments. Hebrew religion had taught men about the one true and living God, holy and righteous, and had exposed man's sin, God's judgment, and God's mercy. The old mythological gods of Greece and Rome were losing their hold and people were groping for meaning and hope in life. There were few language, travel or communication barriers so the gospel message would have unfettered opportunity to spread. By the preparatory work of the Holy Spirit through the condemning work of God's law and through the pressure of human experience, men and women in many places were made ready to hear and to receive what God had done. There is a personal application of all this. God, who knows us through and through, deals with us in His providence

to make us ready and willing to hear what He is saying. When we feel there is much delay we must recognise that God is in control and He acts only when the time is ripe. This is why it is so important to wait upon God. When we rush ahead neither we nor the situations we enter are ready and the result is confusion.

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4:4-5

We must deal now with the theology of these verses in the context of Paul's exposition of the Gospel. God did something decisive in the interest of man's salvation. The action came from outside human experience. Man cannot save himself. It has to be done for him. The drama of salvation is a visitation from a realm beyond man's experience. God sent His Son. This is an affirmation of the eternal divinity of the Saviour. It is a declaration of the pre-existence of the Saviour. He did not "begin" when He was born in Bethlehem (John 1:1-2, 14; 17:5). The incarnate Son was born of a woman. He was truly human and took our nature but He never stopped being the eternal Son. He was truly man and yet He was different, born of a woman, yet without the agency of a man. He was "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary." "The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, for ever." (Shorter Catechism) He was sent and He came willingly for our salvation. To that end He was born under the Law. All His life He lived under the Law and its requirements experiencing every possible human pressure but He never once sinned (Heb. 4:15). As a man He stood free from the condemnation of the Law. But as Paul has stated earlier, He took the place of us who stood condemned and He paid the price to set us free (Gal. 1:4; 3:13; cf. 1 Pet. 2:24). In today's verses Paul's main objective is not to expound the nature of the atonement and the great substitution that took place ("In my place condemned He stood") but rather to declare the objective or consequence of the atonement. God's purpose was not just to redeem us from sin and its judgment but to place us in His family as adopted sons (John 1:12-13).

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4:6-7

Note the sequence of gospel truth in these verses. God sent forth His Son to redeem, to buy us back out of our slavery and bondage to sin and to the Law (4-5a). As a direct, consequence and never to be separated from it we are placed as sons, adopted, recognised, welcomed and honoured by God who will never go back on His Word (5b). Because we are sons God has sent forth His Spirit, the Spirit of His Son, into our hearts (6). The Spirit in our hearts "naturally" is turned to the Father and speaks to the Father causing us likewise to speak to the Father in prayer, speaking as children speak and as grown-up sons speak, sure of being heard and listened to simply because of sonship (Rom. 8:15-16). The relationship is no longer one of harsh master and slave with no rights. It is a father-son relationship. Now, if the Spirit of God's Son dwells in us then, by that Spirit, we will always look to the Father to see if He is pleased with us. As we grow up, growing in grace, we will know instinctively by that Spirit what the Father would have us do and it will be our pleasure to do it. This means Christian life is a life of father and son delighting in each other, and certainly not a life of constant demand, threatening, don't-you-dare kind of existence. We are sons and daughters of God through Christ. We belong to the family. We have rights, privileges, and liberty. We are allowed to be our own true selves and indeed we are helped to be our true selves and to develop our unique personalities by the Spirit who dwells in us. We must get our thinking straight. "Think what Spirit dwells within you, what a Father's smile is thine." (Lyte) Read 1 John 3:1-5 and be happy.

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4:8-11

There is no benefit in being told you are free if you continue to live as if you were in prison. It is possible to be a "free-man" and still to live with a slave mentality. This is why it is so important to grasp fully and clearly what God has done for us and given to us in Christ. Paul speaks of this in Rom. 5:1-2 in terms of peace, grace and glory; in

2 Cor. 5:17 in terms of being a totally new creation; in Eph. 1:3-4 as having been blessed with every spiritual blessing; and in Col. 3:1-4 as having been raised with Christ with our lives hid with Christ in God. It is quite breath-taking. Here in Galatians he speaks of a total change of status from being a slave with no rights to being a son with full rights. Then, in v.9 he asks how anyone can possibly want to go back to being a slave and to living a life of narrow bondage, controlled and dominated by rules, regulations and restrictions. If we go now to v. 10 we see what was happening to many of the Galatian believers. They were slipping back into an outward formalism, adopting certain attitudes, doing certain things and refraining from doing other things as *essential* parts of their salvation. Quite apart from submitting to circumcision (regarding it as necessary for "full" salvation) they were also submitting to the demands and requirements of all sorts of strong-minded "teachers", assuming that this was the way of spiritual progress. In actual fact it was the way of the Pharisees in Jesus' day. They had so many rules and requirements that no one was allowed to enjoy God. They made God appear to be like Orwell's "Big Brother", a tyrant watching to smite if you stepped out of line.

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4:8-11

Look closely at how Paul describes the sinner's condition apart from Christ. It is a life of bondage, but not just human, cultural or religious bondage. It is bondage to evil powers and persons. Consider Eph. 2:1-3; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; 10:19-20. There are things and activities which in themselves may appear innocent or even helpful, but which have in them and behind them spirits of evil. Never forget that the Devil can appear eminently cultured, religious and even spiritual, as well as cruel, crude and ugly (2 Cor. 11:14). Out of that kind of bondage and idolatry the Galatians had been delivered. In that deliverance in which they had come to know God through the Gospel, the initiative had been with God (9). They had been "known" by God before they had come to any awareness of God or of their need of Him. This is God's sovereign and gracious election which Paul does not elaborate on here. No doubt the Galatians could testify that, "While I passed, my Saviour by, His love laid hold on me." Paul cries out to them saying, "If that has happened to you, and you have been set free, how can you want to return to bondage again?" We must see clearly that Paul is speaking of their legalistic bondage which was parading itself as "extra" spirituality but was in fact a Devil inspired device to take them away from Christ. The moment we are turned in on ourselves, preoccupied with our own spirituality and our multitude of rules and requirements, then our eyes are away from Christ. That is exactly what the Devil wants. No one in that condition will ever be free to serve Christ, let alone enjoy Him.

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4:12-20

Note that in the last verse of yesterday's passage Paul seeks to shock the Galatians into reality by suggesting that their practical attitudes of legalistic observances suggested that they had never really been converted. They were living as if their salvation was constantly hanging in the balance and apt to be lost if *they* did not do certain things. They had to grasp that Christ *is* salvation, and all we need we *have* in Him. In today's verses Paul assures them that he is speaking in strong language not because they have done him any wrong but because he cares for them. He makes an astonishing appeal in v.12 urging the Christians to be like him. He does the same in 1 Cor. 4:14-16; 11:1; Phil. 3: 17. Is it wrong to follow a man? Should we not follow only Christ? We must never let our trust in any man, however full of grace, become a substitute for trust in Christ. But in time of crisis, fear, doubt or uncertainty, we should take our cue from those who have consistently followed Christ and who have stood for Christ, often at great personal cost. In the context of this letter Paul is emphasising to these Gentile converts that he, brought up as a dedicated Jew observing the Law, had broken free from the tyranny of the Law. They must do the same. He reminds them that when he came to Galatia, he, the one-time traditional Pharisee, had fitted in among them, making it plain that salvation was all in Christ, and not in the Law. Paul is urging them to remember the old days when together they fixed their eyes and hearts on Christ. Had they taken their eyes off Christ? Have we? Read Hebrews 12:1-2.

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4:12-20

Paul is shocked, afraid and perplexed about the Galatian Christians (1:6; 4:11, 20). As their minister and pastor he is worried and disappointed in them. They had shown such promise and evidences of growth in grace but now there was something cold, formal and unattractive about their spirituality. There was also a change in their attitude to him. He reminds them that it was a bout of terrible illness that led to his stay among them. It may have been something like virulent malaria, dysentery or hepatitis and it may have been this kind of thing that made John Mark lose his nerve and contract out of the missionary tour (Acts 13:13). It is clear from v.14 that Paul's condition and appearance were such that people found it hard to cope. It seems from v.15 that Paul's eyes were affected almost to the point of blindness. Acts 23:1-5 certainly suggest Paul's eyesight was severely impaired, since otherwise he would certainly have recognised the High Priest. Regardless of all these things, the Galatians did not feel that they had been "landed" with a "wreck" of a minister, liable to go blind on them and to be a permanent burden. They recognised that the man was unwell and in need of care as well as medical attention. But they also recognised that here was a man who was God's gift to them, a man on whom God's hand and blessing rested, a man sent to bless them in opening up to them the Word of the Gospel. Paul would have been the first to counteract and to quench any wrong "idolising" of a man, no matter how much he was used by God. Acts 14:11-18 makes this plain. But there is a right as well as a wrong way to regard God's anointed servants. Jesus words in Matt 10:40-41 and John 13: 20 are plain.

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4:12-20

When Paul preached to them they had been led from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God (1 Pet. 2:9; Acts 26:18). They found life in Christ. But now other "ministers" were influencing them and Paul says plainly that these "ministers" had wrong motives and bad influence. The false teachers were flattering the Christians in order to extend their own influence and to build up a little "kingdom" of their own, in which, of course, they would be the "big" people. This is always a temptation. An "uncrucified" man in whom "self" reigns will extend his own influence but not the influence of Christ. Beware popularity and do not seek "power". Beware of being a "sheep-stealer" because the sheep belong to Jesus, and if the Great Shepherd has entrusted them to His appointed under-shepherd no one has the right to take them away. Think of how some Christians in a congregation can turn other Christians against the minister who has been God's servant for their salvation and growth in grace. This was the situation Paul faced. New people had come into the church at Galatia and the critics' deliberate intention was to shut out Paul. But it was not personal rejection that burdened Paul's heart. He was too much a servant of the Jesus who was despised and rejected of men to be unduly bothered about that. It was the spiritual danger of and hindrance to the Christians he was concerned about. His heart was in an agony of travail as he prayed for them that they would come back to Christ and show evidence again of spiritual life and health. He did not want to have to speak sternly to them. He longed to visit them, to get near them, to help them and to take them away from wrong influences. He tells them plainly that he is perplexed. He does not know where they are spiritually. Surely some of them would be stirred to new reality by the knowledge that their minister was worried about them.

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4:12-20

One final lesson applies to all who are in any way involved in "the care of souls", whether in what is now called "pre-evangelism", evangelism, leading, teaching or church-building. Paul was evidently a man who, in the spiritual sense, was exercised about "post-natal" dangers. He highlights the need to pray for and to guide gullible, vulnerable new Christians who are in danger of being taken in by false teachers, false influences and false doctrine that seemed spiritual. This is a theme that runs right through the epistles (Eph. 4:14; Phil. 3: 17- 18; 2 Tim. 3:1-9; Heb 13:7-9; 2 John 7-11; Jude 3-4). Paul in v.17 warns of the danger of making too much fuss of new converts,

especially those who seem "gifted" lest they acquire too high an opinion of themselves. If they do, they will soon be unteachable. Too much "platform" prominence can lead to addiction and to a need for adulation. But that cannot continue and when some are no longer in the limelight they manifest withdrawal symptoms and their reaction, both psychologically and spiritually, is severe. It becomes evident that some are incapable of becoming grown-up persons and responsible adult members of a congregation. Some even disappear from the evangelical scene. Some remain spiritual adolescents right through their lives. Paul was grieved because he sensed this was happening in Galatia. He knew his own influence had been good (18) but there may be a suggestion that the Christians had been too dependent on him. What a sorrow for a minister to live with, to have produced converts that could not, stand without him.

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4:21-27

As we come to this difficult passage note how Paul has led into it and see how the incisive and decisive theologian is also a tender and caring person. In v.19 he has referred to the Galatians as his little children and to himself in terms of a mother's travail. In v.20 he speaks with the concern and discipline of a father. Back in 4:6-7 he has spoken of Christ dwelling in them by the Holy Spirit, They have life in Christ but he longs to see Christ being formed in them (19). He looks for them to "take the shape of Christ" (NEB) and manifest the family likeness, and this will be his theme when he deals with the fruit of the Spirit in the next chapter. But before he goes on to that great theme Paul gives a detailed illustration from the story of Abraham. The facts of history are given in v.22-23 (cf. Gen. 16:1-6, 15:16; 17:15-21; 21:1-3). Then Paul says this is an allegory, that is, there is a spiritual significance beyond the mere historical facts. All this may seem strange and difficult to us but there is something we must learn. Paul, being a Jew, had a detailed knowledge of the Old Testament but he is writing to a largely Gentile church. Yet he assumes they will have knowledge of the Old Testament, acquired either before or since their conversion. This is not the situation we live in now and we must recognise that the disappearance of Bible knowledge with its historical and ethical teaching is a significant factor in the secularising and paganising of society. In the church the neglect of the Old Testament has meant we have not learned the lessons of history nor have we learned to think in biblical categories. Paul is really saying here that the basic spiritual principles of the Gospel are seen and demonstrated in the life of Abraham. That being so we must take time to study carefully.

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4:21-27

Keep in mind that the burden of this epistle is the fact of Christians departing from the truth of the gospel into what they considered to be a. superior spirituality. This is still a problem in our generation. People who are "into" various enthusiasms, be it, praise, or tongues, or healing, or ecumenism, or baptism, or re-baptism, nearly always tend to think they have gone a step further than other ordinary or less spiritual Christians. In the Galatian situation it was the Jewish rite of circumcision as *the* sign of being God's chosen and favoured people. Paul addressed his words to those who had made it plain that they wanted to be under the Law (21). They were making their Christian lives and their relationship with God dependent on rules, regulations and ceremonies. There was fear rather than joy, and bondage rather than liberty. These people said "we are Law men", and Paul tackled them on their own ground and compelled them to listen to the Law. He had already spoken of the stringent and impossible demands of the Law in 3:10. Now he addressed those who were saying proudly, "We have Abraham as our father. We are a special case. You cannot be better than a son of Abraham, and the best thing others can do is to become like us and be circumcised." (cf. Lk. 3:8; John 8:33, 37, 39). But Paul reminded them that Abraham had two sons, very different from each other. One was cast out because he was the natural-born child of a bondwoman, a child who should never have been born, and would never have been born but for Abraham's lack of faith and impatience with God. That child was born into slavery. He was by nature a slave. He was not the child of promise and freedom.

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4:21-27

When Isaac, Abraham's other son was born, it was a miracle birth to fulfil God's promise. Abraham and Sarah were old and humanly speaking unable to have a child. But God had promised, Abraham believed that promise and so Isaac was born. Abraham's faith, and his faith alone, was reckoned to him as righteousness, salvation and acceptance with God (Rom. 4:13-25). Paul was showing the Jewish traditionalists that you can be a "son" or "descendant" of Abraham after the "flesh" and still have no part with God. It is only those who look to God in faith alone and who manifest the obedience of faith who belong to God and are accepted by God. Turning from the sons to their mothers, Paul says that they represent two ways, or two religions. The first is a religion of Law (Sinai) and leads to bondage under all the rules and requirements of Judaism (Jerusalem). The other is the religion of grace and faith which leads to liberty (heavenly Jerusalem). The first system or religion has to do with those who strive to please God and to be accepted by God by good works. Their religion is trying, trying, trying. The second way is the way of trusting, receiving salvation as a gift from God, just as Sarah received Isaac by the miracle of grace. Think of those who say, "We have tried our best; we have always gone to church; we have had our children baptised; we have always gone to Communion; we hope all will be well with us in the end." That is the religion of Law. It has no assurance. It makes people live in bondage lest they "fail". How different it is for those who receive and rest in Christ alone! We are accepted in Christ (Eph. 1:6 AV). There is no condemnation (Rom. 8:1). We are complete in Christ (Col. 2:10 AV). If we have Christ, we have "everything" of salvation, and nothing can take it away from us because it is God's doing.

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4:28-31

Here is Paul's personal application of the difficult (to us) allegory. The two sons represent two ways of salvation which are totally different and in opposition. To go the way of "salvation by the works of the Law" means you do not "inherit" the blessing. You do not get to heaven. To go the way of faith in a God-given salvation for which you cannot work, to which you cannot contribute and which you cannot ever deserve, means acceptance and a place in God's heavenly home. But Paul also emphasises that just as Ishmael despised and persecuted Isaac, so we who live by faith alone must expect to be criticised, rejected, opposed and persecuted by those who refuse to take the place of being undeserving sinners. The bitterest critics of evangelical faith will always be those who count themselves religious. Just as the Pharisees crucified Christ, and the legalistic Judaisers opposed Paul, so religious moralists will be bitterly against those who insist that men and women need to be "saved". The great issue is between being religious and being Christian. Religion has been defined as "trying to reach God, find God and please God through your own efforts." Religions reach up to God, Christianity is about God reaching down to seek and to save what is lost. Religion, which is really dealing with God on our own terms, gets no-one to Heaven. Salvation is accepting God's free gift, on God's terms, namely empty-handed faith.

"Nothing in my hand I bring;
Simply to Thy Cross I cling." (Toplady)

That is the beginning of Christian life which is fellowship with God, not striving on a religious treadmill.

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5:1

For four chapters Paul has argued and expounded theology in a rigorous and uncompromising way because the faith of the Gospel and the way of salvation were in danger of being obscured. This is an example to us in our own generation in which there is so much unbelief being preached from churches and so much foolish talk about "all religions saying the same thing and leading to God by different ways." There is only one way (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). For ourselves and for our witnessing we must be clear: Christ is salvation. Every aspect and every potential of salvation is in Christ. He has set us free from sin's power and dominion as well as from sin's guilt. He has set us free from the condemnation and demands of the law *as a way of salvation*. Neither sin nor law has any right to

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interfere with our standing with God or our fellowship with God. We are no longer slaves. We are free men and women *in Christ* and we must refuse to be moved from that glorious position. We must stand our ground. This one verse is an important lesson. Paul states the doctrine first (Christ has set us free) then, and only then, does he exhort us to the practical outworking. Christ has made us new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17), therefore *be* new. In Christ we are raised from the dead: live resurrection lives (Rom. 6:4). Christ has brought us from darkness to light: live in the light with God (Eph. 4:8). Christ has set us free: refuse to be loaded down or narrowed down with bondage.

We do not need to prove we are free by breaking every custom and shocking people at every turn. The person who knows he is free can be at peace in himself, and can begin to enjoy God. That is life.

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5:2-6

Keep in mind that the context of Paul's strong words here is found expressed in Acts 15:1. Legalistic Jewish teachers (who no doubt claimed to have believed in Christ for salvation) were insisting that a further "thing" was necessary for salvation. They were insisting that Gentile believers had to be circumcised, that is, to receive the physical sign of God's Old Testament Covenant. Paul says here that if you take your stand on salvation by the works of the Law you cannot stand in Christ. It is as radical as that. Whether it is legalism or ritualism, you take your eyes off what Christ has done and you focus on what you are doing. That, says Paul, cuts you off from Christ. We may feel that we have gone over all this before and may wonder if Paul is repeating himself needlessly. That is not so. It needs to be emphasised again and again that if we say that this or that or the other thing is *necessary* for salvation as well as trusting Christ, then we are saying quite plainly that Christ is not enough. "You cannot have it both ways. It is impossible to receive Christ, thereby acknowledging that you *cannot* save yourself, and then receive circumcision, thereby claiming that you *can*. You have to choose....you cannot add anything because Christ is sufficient for salvation in Himself. If you add anything to Christ, you lose Christ." (Stott) We must see that Paul is saying, "Christ is everything," and if we have Christ then we have "everything" of salvation. There is nothing more to get. There is nothing more needed. To add any requirement is not spiritual progress, it is to deny the Lord who bought us. Read Eph. 1:3; 3:14-21; Col. 1:19; 2:9-10; 1 Cor. 3:21-23.

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5:2-6

We have in Christ, by faith and faith alone, full salvation and glorious freedom. We live by faith. But we also live by the Spirit who has been given to us and who lives in us in the fullness of His power (Rom. 5:5; 8:9-11; Eph. 3:14-21). By the Holy Spirit we wait in faith for the future perfect hope of righteousness. We believe that the God who saved us will bring us finally to our perfect destination in perfect condition to be with God and to serve Him perfectly (Rom. 8:28-30). Because our final glorification is sure (it is in God's gracious hand and not ours) we can wait for it without fear. We do not need to be for ever anxiously striving to prove to ourselves (and perhaps to others) that we are truly in Christ. We are His, for ever, and we shall in eternity be like Him (1 John 3:2). This does not mean that we shall live carelessly as we please. Nor does it mean we shall be for ever striving, by things we do and things we do not do in the religious and spiritual realm, to pile up merit for ourselves to "make sure" all is well. We rest in Christ alone for perfect salvation and, by the active power of the Spirit of God in our hearts, there is worked out in us all the graces of love. What we are and what we have in Christ will show in our lives if faith is real. But for salvation, we rest in Christ alone.

"A debtor to mercy alone,
Of covenant mercy I sing;
Nor fear, with Thy righteousness on,
My person and offering to bring.

"My name from the palms of His hands
Eternity will not erase;

Impressed on His heart it remains,
In marks of indelible grace.

"Yes, I to the end shall endure,
As sure as the earnest is given;
More happy, but not more secure,
The glorified spirits in heaven." (Toplady)

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5:7-12

Paul turns now to speak plainly about the false teachers who were claiming to lead the Galatians into a better and higher spirituality. He is blunt and to the point. He tells the Christians that they had slipped back spiritually and were not the fresh, eager, growing believers they had been earlier. Their backsliding was showing! It always does! The root of their decline was simply that they had not yielded to the truth to obey it. It is not enough to give assent to doctrine. We must commit ourselves to follow the truth and to live by it. But the Galatians were living to follow and to please certain teachers who *seemed* to be very positive spiritually but who were not of God (8). Paul affirms (perhaps referring to his own ministry among them) that the "gospel" these men were preaching was not the gospel that had worked with saving power to bring them out of pagan darkness into God's light, life and power. He goes on in v.9 to say that this evil influence (it may have been one specific teacher), however small or innocent it seemed on the surface had to be resisted because, like yeast, it would spread its influence right through the body of the church. It is never easy to deal with the influence of persons who are harming the life of the fellowship, but it must be done. No doubt at first the whole matter must be taken to the Lord in prayer, and perhaps then taken to the elders. But what if it was one of the elders of the church who was exercising this evil influence or being the spokesman of the false teacher who was keeping a low profile? There comes a time when things have to be said and said clearly and without compromise if the life and work of the congregation are to be kept safe and honouring to God.

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5:7-12

Note the words Paul uses to describe the influence of those men whose spirituality was false. They hindered (7), troubled (10) and unsettled (12) the believers. Such influences appear from time to time in every congregation and no matter how plausible their persons and words may be, no matter how spiritually they appear and talk, their influence marks them out as being inspired of a spirit other than the good Spirit of God. They must be exposed and resisted. This is what Paul does, and he affirms his confidence in the Galatians that, having heard what he has to say, they will recognise that his ministry carries with it the authentic truth and unction of God. Paul refuses to believe that evil will triumph. God watches over His own Word to perform it (Jer. 1: 12 AV), and the Parable of the Tares and the Wheat (Matt. 13:24-50) makes it plain that not even the full operation of evil can prevent the final harvest of good grain. But the parable also makes plain what Paul states here: that evil will meet its judgment (10b). Paul is speaking with solemnity as well as conviction and concern, for it is plain from v.11 that these wicked men were spreading the rumour that Paul took the same view of circumcision as they did. There is no end to the deceitful wickedness of men and women whose spiritual pride has made them lust for power over other Christians. Paul pours scorn on their accusations. If he was a "circumcision man", why were the Judaists persecuting him wherever he went? If Paul was preaching "circumcision", suggesting that sinners could save themselves, then the offence of the Cross would be nonexistent. It is the Cross that demolishes the sinner's pride and tells him he needs someone to save him. Whatever the last verse (12) means in exact terms, the significance is clear. It is Paul's final denunciation of men who are false.

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5:13-15

The theme is still our glorious freedom in Christ. Whatever our bondage or inhibition, be it sin, self, Satan, people, the world or the shackles of legalistic religion with all its burdens, rules and regulations, Christ by His death and resurrection sets us free. We are set free to become our true selves, our new selves, to discover the full range of our capacities and potential. We are set free also to discover the service that we are able to render to God and to man. We are not to use our freedom in Christ to live as we please, because that would be simply self-indulgence and it would lead us back into bondage. We are given our freedom to live as we *should* live, to yield ourselves to God as servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:13, 19). Paul is very aware of this and in v.13 he speaks of limits to freedom. This is not a denial of freedom but rather direction of it. It is neither freedom nor life to be at the mercy of every whim and inclination. Every thought and desire must be brought into captivity to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). It is when we are captive to Christ that we are truly free. Life is found in fellowship, and fellowship is possible only when freedom and liberty are used in the right way, which is in the service of others. Jesus spoke of those who tried to keep their lives to themselves losing life, and those who lost their lives for His sake finding life (Matt. 10:39). Self is greedy and it produces the situation spoken of in v.15. On the other hand we have the example of our Lord Jesus Christ who was glad to serve rather than be served. We do well to ask ourselves what we do that is not for our own gratification. Do we know anything at all about sacrificial service?

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5:13-15

A great part of sin is self, and Paul sets the duties and privileges of love as the guides to liberty. What kind of people would we become if the "flesh" was allowed unrestricted sway? We would neither be attractive nor useful. But if, through love, we become servants of one another, we will become like Jesus who said, "Take my yokelearn of Meand you shall find rest to your souls" (Matt. 11:28-30). The love Paul speaks of is not theory or feeling but attitude and actions. Read 1 Cor. 13 and John 13:1-7. Paul was glad to be the bondservant of the Jesus who washed the disciples' feet and who freely gave Himself up to die so that others might live. Read Peter's balanced exhortation in

1 Pet. 2:16. Read Paul's caring words about looking after and encouraging Christians who are not sure of their standing in Christ (1 Cor. 8:9, 13). Go on and read Paul's glorious testimony about his attitude to Christian service and see just how much that which was his by right he was willing to give up in order to win others for Christ (1 Cor. 9:19-27). Note in that last passage how Paul exercised discipline over his own personality and life lest anything caused his usefulness to God to be limited. No one was ever so gloriously free as our Lord Jesus Christ, but think of how freely He yielded His liberty (Phil. 2:5-8). Perhaps Paul sums it all up best in Eph. 5:1-2. This is what pleases God, and if we please Him, then wherever we go we will be a blessing to others. The Spirit of God within us prompts, encourages and enables us to love, and to love generously. After all, the love of God has been poured out into our hearts (Rom. 5:5). It should be "natural" for a Christian to love his neighbour.

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5:16-18

Keep clearly in mind the main thrust of Paul's teaching. He has expounded salvation, full, free and glorious in Christ alone. That salvation brings freedom, total liberation from every power and influence that seeks to mar and limit our lives (5:1). In Christ we are set free, not to live as we please but to live as we ought (5:13). We must not use our liberty as a base of operation for our fallen human natures which, given opportunity and stirred into activity by Satan, will bring us back into bondage to sin. Our lives, liberated in Christ, must be lives of self control and loving service to others. But "self" will take every opportunity to assert itself. How then can we be what we should be so that our lives will please God? It is by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit who asserts God's "rights" within us and leads us and enables us to live the life of Christ. This, says Paul, will inevitably involve conflict between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit, because both "powers" are determined to have their way. Paul has taught the believers that they have been crucified with Christ (2:20). This is the truth about them. He

says, "All I once was by nature has been put to death in the death of Christ and I, as I now am, am a new creature in Christ Jesus." We need to tell ourselves this again and again. The old nature has not been eradicated and we still live down here in a fallen world, therefore the old and the new will always be in conflict and contradiction. But the battle is not between equals. Christ, who lives in us by the Holy Spirit, is the clear victor, and His victory is ours by faith. Read and study Rom.6:17-19; 7:15-25a; 13:14.

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5:16-18

The last reference yesterday urged us to make no provision for the flesh and made clear that the way to do this was to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. This we do when we walk by the Spirit, living our lives in and by the power of the Holy Spirit. "Think what Spirit dwells within you," says the hymn writer, and Paul agrees. Read Rom. 8:1-13. Believe what you are and what God has given you in Christ and live out the proof of that day by day in the power of the Holy Spirit and so begin to become like the Jesus who lives His life in you. That this will mean battle and conflict Paul states very clearly. The whole passage from v.16 to the end of the chapter speaks of the fact of Christian conflict (16-23) and the way of Christian victory (24-26). In today's verses Paul says that the conflict will be intense and continuing. The Holy Spirit in our hearts asserts the claims of Christ, insisting that the claims are total, and He will not "do a deal" with the stirrings and claims of the flesh. The unconverted man knows nothing of this struggle, because he just goes with the flesh. The backslider sides with the flesh and quenches the Spirit. (1 Thess. 5:19). But the person who walks by the Spirit will not consent to the desires of the flesh and will battle to victory, no matter how costly the battle is. No matter how often in a given battle they lose and fail, they will get up again and by faith take their stand in Christ. This can be done again and again so long as we recognise that we do not battle towards victory: we start with victory because we stand in the victory Christ won for us in His death and resurrection. This is good news indeed!

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5:19-21

In the previous verse (18) Paul seems to be contrasting the healthy freedom of life in the Spirit with the harsh demanding life under the Law. In the former there is enjoyment but in the latter there can be only condemnation and exclusion from the Kingdom of God (21b). Now Paul speaks of being led by the Spirit and this has nothing to do with impulse, guidance or "holy" experiences. It has to do with living a life that is pleasing to God in moral categories and character formation. It is all very practical. Look back over this chapter and see how Paul speaks of a stand to be taken (1); a walk to be maintained (16); an ability given by the presence, desires and power of the indwelling Spirit; an obedience to be manifested (18); and the outcome of it all is the fruit of the Spirit in character like Jesus (22). The emphasis is again and again on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. We walk by the Spirit (16), are led by the Spirit (18), and we live by the Spirit (25). It is by the presence of the Spirit that the very life of God is within us. It is by the Spirit that we are regenerated, born again, born of God so that Christian life is now possible.

It is no use trying to live a Christian life until you are a Christian. It would be like trying to be a good wife before you were married. It is impossible. We have life by the Spirit and by that same Spirit we are taught and led into all God's truth. The Spirit of God and the Word of God must never be separated. John says we are born of the Spirit and Peter says we are born of the Word (John 3:5-7; 1 Pet. 1:22-23). If people give "the Spirit" precedence over the Word it means the guidelines and signposts are always changing and there is no certainty. This is why there is so much confusion in our day as people talk glibly about "what the Spirit is saying to the church." The Spirit speaks through the God-breathed Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

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5:19-21

If we are led by the Spirit we will learn to pray (Rom. 8:14-16, 26, 27), calling God our Father and in that God-ward disposition of life we will be shown the way to live and the way not to live. The Spirit will convict of sin

(John 16:8) and that same Spirit will be an inbuilt safety-factor cautioning us when we are drawing near a danger area and putting a brake on our natural tendencies. What are these natural tendencies? What are the works of the flesh, the natural expressions of fallen human nature? What will man be and do if left to himself? Paul says the answer is very plain for all to see (19a) and we certainly see it all in our own generation. The list given is not exhaustive for Paul adds the words "and the like" (21). There are, as John Stott points out, four categories specified. The first words in v.19 refer to the realm of sexual indulgence, wilful and without shame. It has to do with bodily gratification, not love. The next words refer to the realm of "religion" in which people make "gods" of their own ideas in total contradiction of the Ten Commandments. They also traffic in "powers", and the current obsession with the "occult" is one of the frightening aspects of society, not least because people do not realise the danger of what they are doing. There are many "Frankenstein" monsters preying on human lives and once evil spirits have gained entrance it is hard indeed to get free (Luke 11:24-26). The words beginning with "envy" speak of the breakdown of human relationships throughout the whole realm of society. At the heart is the power of selfishness and the poison of envy. The last words referring to drink and to "letting your hair down" complete the picture.

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5:19-21

Paul's words make it plain that in dealing with the desires of the flesh we are not in the realm of innocent fun and natural high spirits. We are in a minefield of disaster. We need the sober realism of the warning that James gives to the effect that sin "when it is full grown" brings death (Jas. 1:15). We do well to ponder the ravages of sin's course through human life; the human dereliction it brings; and the final spiritual consequences (21b). How we need Jesus' great word: of forgiveness, the assurance that great sinners can enter the kingdom, the comforting word that tells us that He receives sinners (Lk. 15:2 AV). Paul was well aware of this. Read 1 Cor. 6:9-11, and give thanks for the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness (Zech. 13:1 AV). Read Eph. 2:1-4a and thrill to the words "But God". Let every heart say, "But for the grace of God, there go I." Paul is a good psychologist as well as a great theologian and he is in measure using "aversion therapy" in showing the Galatians just where the works of the flesh would lead. We challenge ourselves: "Is that what you want your self and your life to be?" Sin is not to be trifled with. Its price is too high. It costs everything and gives nothing. Read, if you would be realistic, Rom. 1:18-32. The way of the transgressor is hard indeed (Prov. 13:15 AV). Sin finds us out (Num. 32:23). The God of love says, "You have destroyed yourself" (Hos. 13:9 AV). The man who lives for the flesh will say in the end, "I have played the fool, I have erred exceedingly" (1 Sam. 26:21). The Gospel still says, "Though your sins be scarlet they shall be as white as snow." (Isa. 1:18).

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5:22-23

It is a relief to turn from the grimness of the flesh to the beauty of the Spirit. These two verses deserve a series of sermons. The work of the Spirit is not just to subdue evil but to produce righteousness in us and to make us good and gracious. Paul speaks of the *fruit* of the Spirit, not the *fruits*. There is completeness and balance. Of course, fruit takes time to appear, grow and ripen, and since we are obviously speaking of character we are dealing with things that are permanent, whereas the "gifts" of the Spirit are more immediate and temporary (1 Cor.13:8-10). We must also remember that in the last judgment the claim to gifts and activities by the Spirit was spoken of by Jesus as largely irrelevant, because the fruit of the Spirit in righteousness of life was missing (Matt. 7:21-23). There is good biblical ground for stating that it is easy for an alien spirit to counterfeit the more obvious and miraculous gifts (2 Cor. 11:14; 1 Tim. 4:1; 1 John 4:1). But it is not easy to counterfeit the graces that characterised the person and life of our Lord Jesus Christ. The real thing has the ring of truth about it. The fruit of the Spirit is not the same as the natural "graces" that some have as part of their personalities. Some people who are "nice", "cultured", "well-mannered and integrated" become very different when challenged by the claims of Christ and are seen then to be contrary to God. The fruit of the Spirit has an element of tenderness running through it,

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counteracting the harshness that comes from "self" and at the same time it is never weak or compromising. The love that is spoken of first in the list is not sentimental nor is it indulgent. It always desires the best for the one it loves.

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5:22-23

Before considering the nine-fold fruit of the Spirit ponder the words from hymns we love to sing.

"Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Until my heart is pure,
Until with Thee I will one will,
To do and to endure." (Hatch)

"When once Thou visitest the heart,
Then truth begins to shine,
Then earthly vanities depart,
Then kindles love divine.

"Thee may our tongues for ever bless;
Thee may we love alone,
And ever in our lives express
The image of thine own." (Bernard of Clairvaux)

"One with Thyself, may every eye
In us, Thy brethren see,
That gentleness and grace that spring
From union, Lord, with Thee." (Denny)

"Holy Spirit, Love Divine,
Glow within this heart of mine;
Kindle every high desire;
Perish self in Thy pure fire." (Longfellow)

"Holy Spirit', give us
Each a lowly mind;
Make us more like Jesus,
Gentle, pure and kind." (Parker)

This is the fruit of the Spirit. It is the supreme desire of the Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts to fashion our personalities and characters to make us like Jesus. Our prayer is in fact already answered when we sing:

"A heart in every thought, renewed,
And full of love divine,
Perfect and right and pure and good,
A copy, Lord, of Thine."
(Wesley)

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5:22-23

These nine "graces" are simply the expression in our lives and personalities of the life of Christ within us by the Holy Spirit. The various "fruits" of the Spirit have the effect of unity, harmony and coherence in both the individual and society, whereas the works of the flesh tend towards disintegration. The first three aspects of the fruit of the Spirit all seem to be related to God. God is love. Everything about Him is love, rich, full and free; love that never wavers or fails; love that always acts for the good of the loved one (1 John 4:7-12). But love must be expressed and shared and this leads us into fellowship with God and with one another (1 John 1:3-4). This brings us joy, not only in enjoyment of one another but in enjoyment of God who has done so much for us (Rom. 5:6-11). Our Lord promised this joy in full measure to His disciples (John 15:9-12), and it is inseparable from love. There is a wonderful element of certainty in both love and joy and it is little wonder that peace is the result, peace with God, peace from God, peace in God, and the peace of God which passes understanding and enables us to cope with the most amazing variety of life's experiences, both good and bad, to the astonishment of unbelievers who watch us and wonder just how we can possibly cope. We who believe know why we are able to cope. It is through the Saviour who said, "My peace I give unto you." In some ways we can think of love, joy and peace as doors that have been opened to us by Christ, doors through which we can go, enabled by the Spirit, so that increasingly we discover newer and richer realms of life that is life indeed.

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5:22-23

The next three "graces" worked in us by the Holy Spirit have relevance to our relationship with others. Like the previous three, these are also very undemonstrative, not likely to draw attention to themselves and yet bound to be attractive. We could well compare this with the commotion that often attends the exercise of the "gifts" of the Spirit. You cannot think of the first six aspects of the fruit of the Spirit without thinking of the Person and character of our Lord Jesus Christ. Everything about Him was balanced and harmonious. His manner and His words alike spoke of life, joy and peace, and in His dealings with all sorts of people there was evidenced patience, kindness and goodness. He could be straight and strong, and He never suffered fools or hypocrites gladly, but there was never anything harsh or devaluing about His dealings with people, no matter their background or their immediate condition. The three graces for today must have caused Paul to think of the Servant of the Lord, as spoken of in Isa. 42:1-3; cf. 2 Tim. 2:24-25. The patience spoken of here is sometimes referred to as longsuffering. In the Greek it is a different word from that translated in the AV of Rom. 5:3 "tribulation works patience" where the reference is to endurance. The patience which is the fruit of the Spirit is the very characteristic shown by God in His dealings with people. He puts up for a long time with those who are stupid, perverse, rebellious and forever going wrong and getting lost. Patience speaks of care that does not get weary even though it gets exasperated.

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5:22-23

Some of the significant references to patience are Rom. 2:4; 9:22; 1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 3:9, 15; Jas. 5:7-11. A Christian minister must have patience if he is to shepherd the flock of God (2 Cor. 6:6; 1 Tim. 1:16; 2 Tim. 3:10).

Every Christian is called to show the example of patience (Eph. 4:1-3; Col. 3:12-13). This is how we must; deal with each other. If the first mentioned fruit of the Spirit is love, then patience flows from it (1 Cor. 13:4). "The great obligation which rests on the Christian is just this - he must be as patient with his fellow-men as God has been with him." (Barclay) This leads on inevitably to the grace of kindness which may have to do basically with our attitude to people. Kindness is full of gentleness, which is not the same as weakness and is certainly not sentimentality. Think of the wonderful sureness of touch in all our Lord's dealings with the needy and broken people who came to Him. It was so manifest that He cared for people and, even though He sometimes had to speak sore and searching words, He never caused a needless tear. Think of His great invitation and testimony in Matt. 11:28-30. Kindness and tenderness are very closely allied and both have to be expressed in the right way and at the right time. Sometimes we need to respect people and leave them with some degree of privacy in their hurts and

disappointments. Certainly we must not be "Job's comforters" with spiritual clichés giving easy answers to a person's agony. Sometimes we should pray rather than speak. But sometimes the Christ-like thing to do is to speak. A few words of interest and care can be like the balm of Gilead to a sore and lonely heart. Be kind.

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5:22-23

The third grace of the Holy Spirit in our social relationships is goodness or sheer moral worth. Some commentators suggest that there is an element of generosity in the word. This does not refer to monetary generosity, although the Lord does love a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7), but rather to an openness of attitude. Think of how Paul had to appeal to the Corinthians, who owed so much to him in terms of ministry and pastoral care, to open their hearts to him (2 Cor. 6: 11-13). There are some who seldom, if ever, do a truly generous act or speak a really generous word of thanks. Goodness goes the second mile, and often a further mile after that. Of course goodness seldom meets the public eye because the good-hearted person regards what he is doing as natural and necessary. This is simply the fruit of what that person is at heart. His life is full of genuine goodness. We do not exclude the emphasis with which we began this note. Be good, pure, true and let these graces so grow in you that you will begin to shrink instinctively from what is bad, soiled and sordid (Eph. 5:3-5). Be good and let no shadow fall on your fellowship with the Lord. Remember that the great, gracious and good Holy Spirit of God lives within you to work this grace in full measure. The fruit will be, as it was in Jesus:

"A heart at leisure from itself,
To soothe and sympathise." (A L Waring)

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5:22-23

The last three graces seem to refer to integrity and consistency of character, attitude and action in the context of difficulty, trial, criticism, and even persecution. It is when we are up against it that we have the opportunity to show how a Christian copes with life. Worldly people and people who are merely religious tend to react bitterly and with indignation when things go wrong, saying, "Why should God let this happen to me when I have done my bit and tried my best?" But faith has a different attitude. Faith trusts the trustworthy God and even in perplexity, pain and frustration says, "He knows the way I take." (Job 23:10). Although the Greek word used is often translated "faith" its meaning here seems to be, as the RSV suggests, faithfulness, loyalty or fidelity. It seems to refer to reliability or dependability. But in the context of this letter it must also have reference to faithfulness towards God, the Gospel, the work of God, and indeed faithfulness to men like Paul who were unmistakeably God's anointed servants. God's faithfulness to His people is written large right through the Bible (Lam. 3:22-23) and it speaks of a commitment by God given and never withdrawn no matter the provocation. This aspect of God's character must be worked in us by the Holy Spirit. It is a great commendation when a Christian can be described as faithful. That person will always be there "where duty calls or danger" and will be as faithful and conscientious in small duties as in great ones, in private duties as well as public ones. And did not Jesus say that it is those who are faithful in small things who prove they are to be trusted in greater things (Lk. 16:10)? We may not be selective.

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5:22-23

We must still speak of gentleness and self-control. The first of these is often regarded as weakness because we tend to think of strength as being necessarily brash and self-assertive. Our words "gentleness" and "meekness" come from the same Greek word, and far from being a grace that causes you to lose out, it is the very thing that causes you to inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5). Other references to this grace are found in Jas. 1:21; 3:13; 1 Pet. 3:15. Barclay says gentleness is a word with a "caress" in it. One of the hymns of the Holy Spirit says,

"And His that gentle voice we hear,

Soft as the breath of even,
That checks each fault, that calms each fear,
And speaks of heaven." (Auber)

Barclay goes on to say that the meaning of the word is applied to a horse that is broken in so that it is obedient to the bit and the bridle. Behind the gentleness there is controlled strength. Gentleness is not sentimental, spineless quietism. Moses was meek (Num. 12:3) but at the right time he could act with decision and react with righteous and justified anger. Only a spirit of meekness and gentleness is able to be so controlled that it is angry only at the right time. The man who is gentle is God-controlled not simply self controlled. As Barclay says, "It should be our prayer that God should make us '*praus*' (meek or gentle), master of ourselves, for only then can we be the servants of others." There is more than enough here for study in one day.

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5:22-23

We are not surprised that the last aspect of the nine-fold grace of the Holy Spirit is self-control. If we look back to the list of the works of the flesh (19-21) we shall see that in essence they are all forms of unrestrained self expression. Of course, if the "natural" man has a heart that is hopelessly sick and diseased (Jer. 17:9; Gen. 6:5-6), then the expression of it can lead only to a sick society. Read Rom. 1:18ff. to see what self expression apart from the saving and restraining grace of God leads to. It is only by the power of the in-dwelling Spirit that "self" can be kept in check. Martin Luther, the great Reformer, used to say that he was more afraid of the Great Pope Self than all the other Popes in Christendom. We must be aware of the treacherous enemy within, always seeking to cancel out, or at least to hinder our loyalty to and our service for our great King Jesus. Paul speaks of disciplining himself and of bringing every thought into captivity to Christ (1 Cor. 9:27; 2 Cor. 10:5). But he also speaks of the love of Christ controlling, constraining and holding him back so that he should live not for self but for Christ who died for him (2 Cor. 5:14-15). Self-control means that there is no excess or extravagance, not even in expressing love. There is a seemliness about self-control and an instinctive awareness of how to behave in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. There is poise, calm, peace and a lack of tension and strain in those whose "self" is under the control of Christ. Self will never obtrude. Instead there will be an attractiveness of personality that will bring sweetness to others. That is how it was with Jesus, and it is the Spirit of Jesus who lives in our hearts. Little wonder Paul says that against such Christ-like graces there is no law.

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5:24-26

Keep in mind that Paul is dealing with a situation in which legalistic men were imposing all manner of "requirements" upon the believers, holding out the "way of the Law" as the way of spiritual maturity. But the Law could not produce these graces, for the simple reason that the flesh is weak (Rom. 8:1-4). It is God alone who in Christ has broken the tyranny of sin and set us free to live. We are Christ's, and we are set free from the law or principle of sin and death. Salvation is a fact. Deliverance is real. Victory is ours. But if we look back to v.17 we see that there is still the presence of "the flesh" to be reckoned with. But we who are in Christ stand with Christ in His total victory and we refuse, again and again and again, however costly and no matter how many staggers and failures, all the passions and clamant desires of the flesh. We affirm by faith that we have indeed died with Christ and have risen to newness of life (Rom. 6:4) even when it seems every temptation we have ever known is stirring into life with greater potency than ever. We are determined, because it is our right in Christ, that sin and self will not have dominion over us (Rom. 6:14). God has given us the victory and we refuse to yield our rights to sin, self or Satan. It is a theological issue in which we must lay hold on the facts of our salvation. But it is also a very practical issue in which we must see to it that we make no provision for the flesh (Rom. 13:14). We must watch our step, our company, our reading material, our music, our television viewing. Yes, we must guard our thoughts. There is an enemy. It all hinges on how seriously we want to be truly Christ's.

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5:24-26

Read Gal. 2:20 and Phil. 2:12-13. Recognise that what we are called to do is to live out what God has planted in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. It is nothing less than the perfect life of Jesus Christ in all its grace and power. If we are Christ's, then walk with Christ. If the Spirit lives within us, then live life in the power of the Spirit. It means simply this, that we must be true to what we are. We are not weak and helpless, victims to heredity, personality and circumstances. We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Rom. 8:37). Now, walking in or by the Spirit is not the same as having and using the "gifts" of the Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit have to do with activity but the fruit has to do with character, and the possession of the gifts of the Spirit does not necessarily lead to the fruit of the Spirit. One commentator says, "Gifts are optional and secondary because they vary according to the wisdom of God for the age and the situation. But the fruit of the Spirit is not only obligatory, it is *the* seal of the presence of the Spirit in our hearts." No one can really challenge us if we claim to have had particular spiritual experiences. These are private. But our lives are public and can be examined objectively and criticised. What then is the Spirit-filled life? In v.26 Paul gives a list of negatives. If a person is filled with the Spirit and walking in the Spirit there are things which will never be seen in that life. There will be no self-conceit, no spirit of provoking or confrontation and no spirit of envy. These are so important that we consider them in detail tomorrow.

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5:24-26

Self-conceit is simply pride and its worst form is spiritual pride. When we begin to think that spiritually we are better than others, more important or more significant than others and more mature than others, then something has gone very far wrong. When we are preoccupied with our own spiritual attainments we inevitably devalue others and we feel our "place" is in "spiritual" activity and others are left to do the more mundane but necessary tasks which are vital to the on-going life of a congregation. Of course, we are quite sure that we are humble. Indeed, we feel others could well follow our example. We are, in fact, proud of our humility! Whatever else we are, we are certainly not walking in and by the Spirit, because the Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus who did the job of the humblest servant when no-one else was prepared to do it (John 13:3ff). Paul gives a searching warning in Rom. 12:3 and urges on us the humility of Jesus in Phil. 2:3ff. When speaking to the proud believers in Corinth who tended to compete with each other in "spiritual" ambition, Paul reminded them that apart from Christ they had nothing, were nothing and could never become anything (1 Cor. 4:6-7). Self-conscious spirituality by definition is false because its focus is self and not Christ. What a guard we need to place on our thinking lest we assume that we are spiritual giants when in fact the truth is that the Spirit's grace and power do not rest on us. Think of the self-conceit of Samson who went out to do great things for the Lord as he had done before, not being aware that the Lord had departed from Him (Judges 16:20).

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5:24-26

When self is dominant the spirit and attitude of that life will be one of provoking. This seems to refer to the person who is always challenging and confronting others. It is a spirit that always wants to be in the right, to be on top, in the lead or in charge. It is a spirit that tends to impose its will on others. This kind of spirit usually indicates that the person feels a deep (though not necessarily conscious) sense of insecurity, uncertainty or inferiority. It always has to prove itself, if not to others, certainly to itself. But the Spirit of God in our hearts is there to assure us that in Christ we are accepted as we are. We do not have to prove ourselves but rather to rest ourselves in Christ and to be inwardly persuaded that we are in fact valid members of God's fireside family (Eph. 2:19). It is when we are not at peace within ourselves that we tend to provoke one another and to make every situation, especially in Christian service, one of confrontation. Time and again we must learn to leave situations and people to God, who is perfectly able to handle things with total knowledge which we never have. Walking in the Spirit will bring us the blessedness that comes to those who are peace-makers. Any proud fool can create a commotion and send everyone home licking their wounds, but that is not the healing Spirit of Jesus. This spirit of provoking stems from

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spiritual pride and is a manifestation of self not of the Spirit. Listen again to Paul's challenge to the Romans. You have faith? Keep it between you and God (Rom. 14:22 AV) and, among other things, it will make you a man or woman of prayer. Praying for people is better than provoking them.

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5:24-26

The third great negative Paul uses as evidence of a life lived in the power of the Spirit is absence of envy. Envy, jealousy or coveting, can come when we see someone who has (or we think they have) something denied to us, or something better than we have, or getting more recognition and praise than we get. We react with a spirit of bitterness, criticism and resentment. That soon becomes self-pitying and we begin to feel that God has been hard and unreasonable with us. But we do not need to envy, because each is accepted, valued and necessary in the fellowship and service of the church which is the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:14-27). God has His particular plan for us, His place for us, and His pleasure is in our being what He has made us and fitted us to be. He does not want us to be someone or something else. Think of how Paul testified that he had learned to be content (Phil. 4:11) and indeed had learned to accept God's ordering of his life even if that were to mean an early death. We must learn not to envy when God withholds some things from us. It may be that we could not cope with having them. If we had some things that others have we might bring our usefulness to God to an end. We must learn the attitude of the wise man in Proverbs 30:7-9 and leave it to God to give and to withhold in His perfect will for us. Of course, sometimes when we envy others it can be a sign that our commitment to Christ and His church is not what it should be. Some get much less out of the ministry of the Word than others simply because they choose to sit on the edge of the fellowship and give very little of themselves to it, even though they owe it a great deal. Some have few friends because they never give friendship.

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5:24-26

Read Jesus' words in Matt. 6:33 about seeking first His kingdom and thereby finding our heart's desire. Read also Ps. 37:3-7a and then consider these verses from a lovely hymn.

"Father, I know that all my life
Is portioned out for me;
And the changes that are sure to come
I do not fear to see;
But I ask Thee for a present mind,
Intent on pleasing Thee.

"I ask Thee for a thoughtful love,
Through constant watching wise,
To meet the glad with joyful smiles,
And to wipe the weeping eyes;
And a heart at leisure from itself,
To soothe and sympathise.

"So I ask Thee for the daily strength,
To none that ask denied,
And a mind to blend with outward life
While keeping at Thy side,
Content to fill a little space,
If Thou be glorified." (Waring)

This is the attitude to life that the Holy Spirit is eager and able to work in us, and it brings both peace and poise. It is also a life of true liberty as opposed to bondage (5:1), because our thoughts and hearts will be centred on God and not on people. Our business will be to please Him and to be assured of His favour. On the one hand this will set us free from the tyranny of trying to please people, and at the same time it will enable us to regard people as valuable, sensitive and perhaps having far more spiritual significance than ourselves. God values them and us and He is no respecter of persons. If we could remember this we would be set free from the miserable negatives of v.26.

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6:1

Paul continues his searching test of true spirituality and says we can judge a person's spiritual calibre and reality by their attitude to and handling of someone who falls into sin. We are speaking here of a believer who is suddenly overtaken and overcome by the power of temptation, whether in the realm of former weakness or in some new realm of sin which he never thought he would be involved in. Try to imagine the sense of shock and shame and the waves of desolation, and remorse. But without doubt Paul is assuming here that there is in fact repentance, brought about by the Spirit of God (John 16:8), and already kindling the desire to be done with the sin and to get back to God. Remorse in itself can be a "dead-end" of self-pity (2 Cor. 7:8-11). And it may sometimes take a long time to bring such a sinner to repentance. In the case of David's great sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah it took a whole year during which David hid, excused and justified his sin. His impenitence took a great toll of his life as Ps. 52:1-5 makes plain, but eventually the ministry of the prophet brought conviction (2 Sam: 12:1-7) and led to the magnificent prayer of penitence in Ps. 51:1-17. But even when conviction leads to confession and there comes the assurance of pardon (1 John 1:5-2:1; Isa. 1:18-19), the fallen sinner may still need something more. He needs help to be lifted up and to be set right and to be enabled to take his place again in the fellowship and its work. The word "restore" is used in. Matt. 4:21, with reference to mending nets to make them fully useful again. It can also be used of re-setting a dislocated joint. It is work that needs tender strength.

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6:1

When a believer crashes morally and there is, as here, no doubt as to the facts, false spirituality can react in two ways. It can condemn and criticise and say it is no surprise and add, without compassion, that it was his own fault. On the other hand it can take an easy attitude and say the sinful failure does not matter. The first wrong attitude is making no allowance at all for the times the person may have battled successfully against the temptation; a battle of great cost but private and known to no-one but God. The one public collapse is condemned out of hand. The second false attitude tends to say that since the Christian has been much used by God in the past no notice whatever should be taken of the fact that he has sinned grievously and publicly. This is to ignore the testimony of the church in the eyes of the world. Both attitudes are wrong. Of course we are not dealing here with deliberate sin being persisted in, as was the case in 1 Cor. 5:1-2. We are speaking of a Christian who weeps because what he has done is a contradiction of his faith in Christ. He has denied his Lord, and he fears he will be for ever rejected. The spiritual man will not simply pray, nor will he leave it to someone else to get involved. He will go at once to the side of the broken-hearted one, feeling and sharing his hurt, and showing to him the sweet tenderness of the Saviour's forgiving restoring love. In this kind of ministry there will be gentleness and sureness of word and action, not least because the "good Samaritan" will be aware that but for God's keeping grace he might well have been the one who had fallen. How can we pass by on the other side? (Luke 10:29-37)

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6:1-2

Ministering to others is Christ-like work and it is done in the name of Him who receives sinners (Lk. 15:2), the one who saw the needy as sheep without a shepherd, and who wept over them (Matt. 9:36; Lk. 19:41). Have we not often proved that

"Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore;
Touched by a loving hand, wakened by kindness,
Chords that were broken will vibrate once more." (van Alstyne)

Our great heritage of hymns says it so well,

"To those who fall how kind Thou art." (Bernard of Clairvaux)
"There is no place where earth's sorrows
Are more felt than up in heaven;
There is no place where earth's failings
Have such kindly judgment given." (Faber)

There is no greater privilege than to be allowed, under God, to help in the restoration of someone who has fallen. But we must look to ourselves, because the area of sin may be more dangerous for us than we realise. Read Jude 20-23 but remember also James 5:19 20. To be part of a Christian rescue service is glorious work and it is a thrill to see the broken ones once again on their feet and going on after Christ. They have been given new hope. But do not expect that they will necessarily be grateful. Jesus found that in the story of the lepers who were healed (Lk. 17:11-19). When we are in need it may be that those we have helped will be the last ones to think of coming to our side.

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6:1-2

We cannot begin to bear one another's burden unless we notice when our brother or sister is in need of help. They may in fact be so much in need they cannot bring themselves to ask help and they may even feel that if they did they would be repulsed, or worse, patronised. Some hold back from asking or accepting help because they "do not want to be a bother". We must not be too proud to admit that we need help. None of us is totally independent, but no-one needs to be carried all the time. There is something wrong in a fellowship when some do all the carrying and some all the receiving. Everyone has the opportunity to show gratitude or to speak a word of friendship and encouragement, especially to those who have been kind to them. But such is the selfishness and lovelessness of the human heart that all too often we just forget. Think of how our Lord's dearest friends left Him to bear the burden of Gethsemane alone (Matt. 26:36-46). Think of how Jonathan helped David to carry his great burden (1 Sam. 23:16). Think of how the loving and loved Doctor Luke ministered to Paul. Think of how Onesiphorus lifted Paul's spirits just when he needed help most (2 Tim. 1: 16-18; 4:11). Note carefully in these two verses that it is Paul who has argued so earnestly and accurately about the theology of the Gospel who now shows the need for mutual care and responsibility within the fellowship of believers. If ever we feel crushed we should go to the men and women who are most in earnest with God. They are the ones who have tasted the tender kindness of God and will be glad to share it with you.

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6:3-5

The word "for" (AV and RSV) links v.3 with the exhortation and caution given in v.1-2. If anyone thinks he is spiritually superior or too good to be a burden bearer for those who are weak and sinful; if he thinks he is so spiritually secure that he does not need to be on guard lest he fall into the obvious sin his fellow has succumbed to; if he is more prone to criticise and write off the failures in the fellowship rather than spend time and care nursing them back to health and happiness; then his spirituality is a fraud. He thinks he is "something" but in fact he is nothing but a shallow, non-productive Christian. He deceives himself but deceives no-one else. He has no awareness at all of his manifest spiritual limitations and defects. It would shock him beyond measure if he had any

idea of how others regard him as a poor, self-centred spiritual infant. He, of course, regards others as spiritually inferior. He never does anything for anyone and his contacts with others are for the sole purpose of getting the attention he desires. Such a person becomes increasingly friendless and isolated. He also becomes more and more coldly critical, always able to point out when something or someone is wrong, but never speaking a word of commendation or appreciation. This is the kind of person who lives in a dream world and loses touch with reality. His life revolves round himself and he cannot understand why people do not appreciate him more. He is quite sure the work would collapse without him, but in fact he would scarcely be missed if he disappeared, except by those who would pray for him. What opinion do we have of ourselves and our service?

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6:3-5

This chapter began with thoughts of forgiveness and restoration, and one of the safeguards against pride and self-deception is to remember just how much and how often we have been forgiven and how forbearing God has been with us (Matt. 18:21-35). Peter thought he was very spiritual, ready to forgive seven times, and who could do better than that? Jesus spoke of seventy times seven, and if we are counting how often we do nice things for others our spiritual lives are out of focus. Paul now goes on to say that those who have an undue sense of their own spirituality are seldom in evidence when there is work to be done and loads to be carried. It is always best to begin by examining ourselves (1 Cor. 11:28) and to remember that it is to the Master that each of us gives account of himself (Rom. 14:4,10-13; 1 Cor. 4:1-5). If we compare ourselves with ourselves we will get a very defective assessment (2 Cor. 10:12). It is possible to boast about being part of a church or a Gospel venture and yet contribute nothing to it. There have always been "passengers" in the work of Christ. The word "load" is a different word from "burden" in v.2. Every Christian soldier should bear his own pack and needs to be present at "pack drill", the routine duties that are part of training for what is yet to come. In the ongoing work of a congregation if anyone is not carrying their allotted share of the load then others are over-loaded and that is not pleasing to God. The work will not suffer. Those loyal and loving to Christ will see to that. But, as the work goes on, the lazy and unwilling will be left behind and will suffer loss. They will lose out now and in the world to come (1 Cor. 3:10-15). We must try to restore them while there is the chance.

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6:6

Before considering this very practical verse think back to the earlier verses. If we take the theme of "burden" to refer throughout to the battles, struggles and failures of life which we all have (1 John 1:8) we need to remember that every believer has this to cope with. It is a comfort to be told that we are all in the same boat (1 Cor. 10:12-13). We share the trials and the blessings and when we make it our business to do so openly, then we share also the fellowship and the encouragement. If v.1-5 speak of responsibility for each other, then v.6 speaks of our responsibility for maintaining the ministry of the Word and those who are called by God to undertake it. The principle is stated more fully in 1 Cor. 9:3-14 where Paul, having affirmed his rights, also makes plain that for a variety of reasons he did not claim these rights. This is very different from situations where the maintenance is denied. It is not a good testimony to the world nor is it morally justified when we read of missionary societies giving thanks to God that they were able to send their missionaries 60% of their monthly allowance. What can the world think of those who boast in their biblical theology and their spiritual principles and yet make sure that their ministers are kept on a sufficiently low salary that they will qualify for Social Security Benefit? When one Christian was challenged about the poor provision for his minister he replied, "It is good for his sanctification." Paul's words in 1 Tim. 5:17 are the answer.

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6:6

In a generation in which there is a manifest devaluation of preaching and of the office of the ministry, it is good to recognise that as early as the apostolic age there was a class of teachers of the Word who, because of the nature and demand of that work, were precluded from earning their own living in secular employment. But not all congregations were faithful in this matter, as Paul makes plain in Phil. 4:10, 14-19. Here in Galatians, Paul speaks of sharing and of common experience and provision, and this seems to suggest that full-time teachers of the Word and the people to whom they minister should have something of the same standard of living. Our own Church of Scotland compares well with other denominations in the matter of providing for its ministers and very favourably indeed in the matter of its overseas workers. But we would point two important lessons. A minister should not want to be different from his people nor should he ask any member of the congregation to do or to sacrifice what he is not prepared to do himself first by way of example. Along with that, no members of the church should set standards and expectations of service or sacrifice for ministers and missionaries which they are not prepared to accept for themselves. If the minister is expected to be constant spiritually, always ready to help and to encourage then, as a member of the fellowship, he has the right to expect to be ministered to and encouraged the same as everyone else. This is fellowship. But it is not always found even in evangelical congregations. Sometimes there is more human care in a congregation that makes no claim to spirituality.

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6:7-8

The second of these two verses contrasts a carnal and a spiritual way of handling life. The principle being expounded in v.7 operates in our dealing with others (1-2), with the work of the church (3-5), with the maintenance of the ministry, and with our handling of our own lives both personally and in community. Recall Jesus' words in Lk. 6:37-38. The principle Paul states is that of the inevitability and the increase of the harvest. We reap what we sow plus the increase. The prophet Hosea states it in stark terms about sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind (Hos. 8:7). What we sow, the quality of the seed, the generosity of the sowing and the thoroughness of the preparation of the ground determine the nature and the extent of the crop. The harvest principle operates in the life of society as well as in personal life (Eph. 5:3-6) but, just as it takes time for the crop to emerge, grow and ripen, so it takes time for the chosen life-styles of individuals and society to come to the forefront of attention. This is why we must not make snap judgments and assessments, interpreting events only in their immediate context. For example, the present moral chaos, confusion and degeneration in society has not come about suddenly but is the fruit, in measure at least, of the adulation of the so-called "new morality" of some decades ago. The lawlessness and the contempt for law evident on all levels of society stem in measure from the woolly, sentimental humanism that insisted decades ago that the idea of retribution in punishment was sub-human, sub-Christian and even barbaric. We need to recognise that fallen human nature can only express and reproduce its own sickness.

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6-7-8

Following on the closing theme of yesterday's note, we need to affirm the glorious truth and hope of the Gospel that human nature can be changed. We can be born again (John 3:5-7) and made new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). In that new life we are endowed with every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3), and God is pleased to give us all things in rich measure to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17). He will give us in fullest measure all we can be trusted with. But the issue is what we do with what we have been given. We can use it or misuse it, as Jesus made plain in the story in Matt. 25:14-30. And Paul makes plain in his letters to the church at Corinth (where the Christians were proud of their spirituality and felt superior to others) that it was possible so to misuse the capacities and opportunities that God had given them that they would lose out not only in this life but in the life to come. Read carefully 1 Cor. 3:10-15 and 2 Cor. 5:9-10. What are we doing with our lives? What are we doing with our time? We can waste it or redeem it (Eph. 5:16 AV). One of Bonar's great hymns has the words,

"Fill up each hour with what will last;

Buy up the moments as they go;
The life above, when this is past,
Is the ripe fruit of life below."

The old saying is true, "Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny." It is indeed very important how we live our lives. But lest we be too desolated, remember that you can sow new seed; sickly seedlings can be transplanted; and the soil of life can be treated so that weeds have little chance to grow (Ps. 119:11).

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6:7-8

Seed-time and harvest are well illustrated in the Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:3-9, 18-23). It reminds us of the variety of things, attitudes and activities that militate against the good and healthy growth of the seed. While circumstances and outward pressures can exercise unhealthy influence, it is perhaps even more important to guard our thoughts and attitudes (Col. 3:1-3; Phil. 4:8-9). In practical terms it means we must see to it that we put ourselves in the way of blessing not of hindrance; be in the right places with the right people and involved in the right activities. We must not pray, "Lead us not into temptation" and then go barging on foolishly, hoping that God will keep us from going wrong. Attitude, desire and motivation are crucial. Compare the stories of Lot and Abraham. Lot is seen looking to the fertile plain, calculating in material terms only, and putting himself and his family out of reach of spiritual nourishment, and causing them to live in a polluted atmosphere. Lot. "got on in the world" and sat in the gate of Sodom as one of its leading men. But when the crisis came he had to be dragged out by angels (in answer to Abraham's prayers) and he was saved, so as by fire (1 Cor. 3:15). His family never recovered! Abraham, in spite of all his failures, fears, confusions and hesitations, was a man whose deepest desire was to go with God. As his life went on it grew richer, deeper and fuller, and he became the friend of God. He was blessed himself, and made a blessing to others. When you have time read the story in Genesis, chapters 13, 18-19, 22:1-19.

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6:9-10

In this last chapter Paul has dealt with the theme of practical Christian living in terms of fellowship (1-5), responsibility (6), and reward and loss (7-8). All of this is the outworking of Christian character which is the fruit of the Spirit by the power of the Spirit (5:22-24). The theme is solemn and makes plain that true Christian living is demanding. It is not surprising therefore that Paul now adds a great word of encouragement to counter any danger of being dispirited. Those involved in Christian work tend to become very aware of the problems, oppositions and the apparent lack of "results". This can be used by the Devil to distract, demoralise and to pressurise us into efforts to produce "quick" results, not least to reassure ourselves that we are not failures. But, following the illustration of sowing and reaping, we need to remember that "hot-house" plants do not survive well in the outside air. What we must look for and work for are long-term results. Our concern is not just to "get conversions" but to build churches. This takes time and effort but we must not grow weary in well-doing. We must learn to have the confidence of the farmer who trusts that God will give the increase (1 Cor. 3:7). Our labour is not, in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58). We have the assurance of the Psalmist that those involved in costly sowing, which can at times reduce us to tears, will in due time rejoice, "bringing in the sheaves" (Ps. 126:6). We must believe that every battle, hurt, reverse, criticism, service, kindness, every prayer and all the times of waiting will bring their fruit in due time. We must also learn to leave the timing with God. He is in charge. (Acts 1:7)

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6:9-10

In a generation that is conditioned to instant food and instant everything else it takes real faith to wait on the Lord. But it is those who have learned to wait who also learn to work long-term (Isa. 40:27-31). Of course, working for

the Lord is not necessarily in obvious or public Christian things like preaching or verbal witnessing. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ manifested in our ordinary dealings with people is of the essence of service. Our own personal reactions to the pressures of life are a witness to those around us and can point them to God. But we must not limit "well doing" to our relations with people. We must please the Lord by trusting Him. Think of Mary and Martha. The worst happened, and when their brother died (John 11:6, 21) they were tempted to doubt. In John 13:7 Jesus called His men to trust when they were perplexed. In John 16:12 Jesus makes plain that we are kept in a measure of ignorance lest at one particular juncture we might become overloaded. This is why we must keep on going on without becoming weary. We have a Master who is also a Shepherd and He leads at the pace and to the place He has prepared for us. All the issues of every situation are in His hands (Ps. 68:20 AV). Both in this life and even more in the world to come we shall look back over the story and "bless the hand that guided and bless the heart that planned." Read James 5:7-8. But waiting is not easy. That is why we meet so many complicated situations. It is tribulation that works patience!

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6:9-10

It is an evidence of spiritual immaturity when we always want things to happen at once. It is also an evidence of immaturity when we are for ever trying to manipulate and organise situations and people. It is true that "fools rush in where angels fear to tread" and we must not assume that an opportunity presenting itself necessarily means that we personally are the one to handle it. Think of how Barnabas went for Paul (Acts 11:22-26), recognising that he was God's man for the need. Think or how Paul always submitted his plans to the over-ruling will of God. An open door does not always mean we should go through it and a closed door does not always mean we should stop. Sometimes apparent denial is designed to call forth faith. We must learn to look to God and to wait for God, believing that He most certainly has His plan for us and will lead us to it by His own perfect methods. Think of how Paul and Silas were frustrated and so directed to Troas and to missionary service far wider than they ever expected (Acts 16:6-10). Peter counsels us to be ready for opportunity when it comes (1 Pet. 3:15). Besides that, we have opportunity all the time simply by being salt and light and signposts in society (Matt. 5:13, 14; Phil. 2:15; Zech. 8:23). But Paul seems also to be referring to daily activity, not preaching, but ministering to the needs of others, following the example of the Saviour who went about doing good (Acts 10:38). Note however, that Paul insists that there are priorities to be observed (10b). This does not mean simply that Christians come first, and such is the importance of the lesson here that we must return to it tomorrow.

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6:9-10

Is Paul's insistence that the needs of the household of faith come first a denial of Christian love and also of the spirit of evangelism? A superficial answer would say it is but we must think more clearly. We are always surrounded by needs of many different kinds. People are lost, hungry and frightened in many senses and their cry for help has limitless variations. In answering the need we must see to it that in feeding the body we do not forget the soul, for what profit is it if human needs are alleviated and souls are lost (Mk. 8:36-37)? In like manner in all our evangelism we must not lose sight of the need to build the church. We do not mean the church as an ecclesiastical organisation but as the household of faith. Paul compels us to recognise that there is a clear distinction between those who believe and those who do not believe, and this is a distinction both in this world and in the world to come. By all means let us work to help the community with all its varied citizens, but we must never identify the community with the church, as is the prevailing pattern today. We must be very clear about this. Involvement in good work, social care, famine relief etc is the fruit and expression of the Gospel but it is not the gospel message. Improving human conditions, however earnestly, is not the same as bringing sinners to saving faith in the one and only Saviour. Social involvement is not an equal partner with nor even the handmaid of the Gospel. But if the grace and goodness of Christ have touched and blessed our hearts and lives then there should be an overflow of that grace and goodness to everyone we come in contact with, regardless of their deserving. And

there is something wrong if that love is not first shown to those who are our brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers in the household of faith (1 John 3:11-18).

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6:11-13

It seems that, following his usual custom, Paul at this point took the pen from his scribe or secretary and added the final paragraph in his own handwriting. There is reference to the secretary in Rom. 16: 22, and to Paul's own writing in 1 Cor. 16:21-24; Col. 4: 18; 2 Thess. 3:17-18. In the case of the Thessalonians the personal, recognisable handwriting was doubly necessary because of forged letters that were being circulated (2 Thess. 2:1-2). Take comfort from the fact that the early ministers of the Gospel had their problems just as we have, and many of them stemmed from words spoken or written, words set on fire of hell (Jas. 3:1-10). In v.11 Paul refers to the fact that his writing is far bigger than that of his scribe and this may be explained in several ways. It may be that his hands were gnarled and arthritic as a result of his work as a tentmaker by which he supported himself. It may be an indication that his eyesight was in fact very poor, either as a result of infection (4:13-14) or, as some suggest, because his sight was permanently damaged by the brightness of the glory that shone on him on the Damascus road. We are sometimes so thrilled at and blessed by the ministry of a man like Paul that we simply do not think at all of the disabilities he may have suffered from. We must not think of God's men as superhuman. Paul himself said that God had chosen the weak things of the world to be His servants, and we must remember the earnest pleas of Paul to have some particular "thorn in the flesh" taken away (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Paul, like Elijah, was a man of feelings, hurts, fears and disappointments, just as we are (Jas. 5: 17). That is a comfort and an encouragement. All of us who serve have a Master who knew all about these things too (Heb. 2:14-18; 4:14-16).

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6:11-13

Perhaps the truest explanation of the large letters is that Paul was printing in capital letters for emphasis. He makes a devastating comment on the false teachers who were troubling the Galatians with their legalistic teaching. Paul says they were taking this attitude in order that the Jews, in particular would regard them as "sound". What a temptation it is to sell out a radical spiritual stand and to compromise one's preaching in order to be accepted! What a temptation it is to preach enough of the Bible, in biblical language and forms to be accepted and even praised as an evangelical and yet never go far enough in preaching to disturb worldly people or to rebuke and challenge converted people. Spurgeon used to speak of people who liked to go to church and hear sermons that would iron out their creases and send them home feeling smooth and comfortable. Paul charges these men with tailoring their preaching so that they would not be persecuted. If our aim is to be "acceptable" to all then we will never be faithful to God and His truth. Our calling is to be faithful to all the truth of Scripture and in our dealings with others to keep back nothing that is profitable (Acts 20:20,27). There is a terrible danger in aiming simply for outward conformity. Paul says in v.13 that the believers in Galatia who had yielded to pressure and had "got circumcised" were not actually giving themselves to keeping the law. And, what is more, those who had pressurised them were not very concerned. The aim had been a statistical one. The "legalists" could boast about how many "converts" they gathered. But they were really Paul's converts, and these men of spurious spirituality were simply "sheep stealers". There are plenty of them around still!

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6:14

Paul has charged the false teachers with glorying in their own success and popularity. He accepted that in the eyes of the world and even of part of the church he himself was counted as nothing. He had suffered the loss of all things, including his reputation (Phil. 3:4-9). He was "outside the camp" (Heb. 13:13) of Jewish acceptability; outside the camp of Gentile culture and expectation (1 Cor. 1:20-25); and even outside a great part of the church at Galatia and elsewhere, a despised doormat (1 Cor. 4:13). The false teachers were not persecuted for the sake of the

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Cross, because their preaching left "self" unchallenged and uncrucified. But Paul was proud of the Gospel (Rom. 1:16). He was determined to be true to Christ and to preach Him in His fullness regardless of the cost (1 Cor. 1:17; 2:1-5). As far as the world was concerned Paul was "branded" with the Cross. He was unacceptable. He did not get invited. His preaching was not "appreciated". They said of him what they said of Jesus, "Away with him." So far as Paul was concerned there stood between him and the world with all its ways, the Cross of the Son of God. He could not go back to the world without brushing aside the One who died for him. This he would not do.

There is an old hymn that says, "Take the world, but give me Jesus." Paul stood exactly where he was later to call the Christians at Rome to stand, when he said to them, "I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice which is your reasonable service (Rom. 12:1-2). Read and ponder the hymn, "When I survey the wondrous Cross." Love like that demands our soul, our life, our all.

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6:15

It is not the externals of religion that are of the essence of the Christian faith and gospel. It is not one or other form of baptism, or the Lord's Supper, or church government that is the heart. It is not even meticulous formulae of doctrine that are the ultimate test, although in this epistle Paul has argued for the truth of the Gospel over against all systems of belief that would deny or even qualify it. It is not the earnestness or impressiveness of a person's testimony, nor great involvement in evangelical activity that sets the seal on a person's conversion. It is the evidence of a new life, a new personality marked above all else by the grace as well as the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ. If any man is in Christ he is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17) and if new life is in fact there, and if a new regime of life has been instituted in the power of the world to come, then it should show. Paul spoke to the Corinthians about manifesting the truth (2 Cor. 4:1-2) by being the kind of person who had nothing to hide because he walked in the light with God (1 John 1:7). And Paul would know full well the challenge of Ezekiel's word to the effect that there would be mighty testimony among the heathen when God was sanctified in His people before their eyes (Ezek. 36:23 AV). On the other hand when the world sees that those who claim to be God's people speak "holy" words on appropriate religious occasions but then live their lives as if God and His laws simply did not exist then the Gospel is discredited. God complained in the time of Isaiah against this kind of hypocrisy (Isa. 29:13) and Jesus spoke sharply against it in Matt. 23:25-28 and Mark 7:1-8. The epistle of James is, as always, very practical and makes plain that believing calls for behaving (Jas. 2:14-26).

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6:16

Paul prays for, or pronounces, a blessing on all those whose attitude to and principle of life centre on the Cross of Christ as the heart of the Gospel, and a life in the likeness of Christ, as the expression of the Gospel. When these emphases are central a congregation will know peace and sinners will indeed find mercy. It is when the church lives by God's "rule" that it enjoys God's blessing. If we walk in obedience then we will know fellowship, and that is certainly peace and mercy (1 John 1:3-7). Commentators argue about the last part of the verse which, on the face of it, seems to say that those who walk by this rule, that is the true church, are in fact the Israel of God. Without entering into the controversy it seems clear that Paul is emphasising the continuity between the Old and the New Testaments. Without diminishing the significance of the ancient people of God, the name or the nation Israel, we emphasise that the work of God's grace is one work from beginning to end. Paul seems to emphasise this in Phil. 3:3; Gal. 3:7-9, 14, 29. All the glorious promises of God can therefore rightly be claimed by those who have trusted in Christ. The God of Abraham is our God. The God who worked His mighty deeds and perfected His glorious plans throughout the ages of the Old Testament is our God. Other men have laboured and we have entered into their labours (John 4:31-38) and those who come after us will inherit from us. Hopefully we will leave them an inheritance in our congregations for which they will thank God. The past, the present and the future belong together in glorious unity, and one day the finished work will be seen in all its glory (Heb. 11:39-40).

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6:17

There are both challenge and rebuke in these words, and indeed a little sorrow, for Paul does not like having to defend himself and his ministry. He never does so except under constraint and for the good of the Gospel (2 Cor. 11:12-30; 12:11). He speaks here of having been troubled, and that is more than just being criticised, for he had been distracted and hindered from his God-given task by those who had hounded him from place to place. When he speaks of bearing in his body the marks of Jesus he may well be referring to what he describes in 1 Cor. 4:9-13 and 2 Cor. 11:23-33. The scars of these experiences were there for all to see. But there are other and perhaps deeper hurts that pierce the heart and cause secret tears which no one but God knows about. When we see evidences of a man's ministry being blessed by God, we may sometimes envy him, but we seldom consider what it may have cost him in secret travail. Paul is saying here that when others have worked as long for Christ as he has, and have suffered as much as he has, and accomplished as much in terms of building and shepherding the church of God, then and only then are they free to criticise him. Paul does not often refer to his personal hurts and griefs but he does so in places such as Acts 20:19; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 2:12-13; 7:5-6. Like his Master, he was by and large despised and rejected by the world, and often by the church. But, in the mercy of God there were those who loved him and showed it by ministering to him, even to the point of risking their lives (Rom. 16:1-4; 2 Tim. 1:16-18).

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6:17

The marks Paul speaks of are the "stigmata" not the "charismata" and there is a very great difference. It is difficult to say exactly what Paul meant by the "marks". He often referred to himself as a "bondslave" of Jesus and he may have in mind the mark or brand a slave owner put on his slave so that there would never be any doubt as to ownership. The marks then may be the battle scars, or the manifest dedication of his life through thick or thin, or even the fact that his person and ministry were persecuted rather than popularised. After all Jesus did say that His men would suffer persecution and that they would be treated as He was (John 15:18-20). Paul goes as far as to declare that all who desire to live their lives in true godliness will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:10-12). Paul may also here have been counselling his critics to be careful what they said about him and how they dealt with him, because, after all, since he belonged to a Mighty Master they would have that Master to deal with if they hindered His servant from faithfulness. As the Shorter Catechism says: Christ the King rules and defends His people and subdues all His and their foes. Being a man well versed in the Old Testament Paul may also have had in mind the warning to all not to touch the Lord's anointed nor to harm the prophets (Ps. 105:15). God is not slow to vindicate His faithful ones. But all may claim to be the Lord's anointed. Paul's critics in Galatia certainly did. Let God be judge, and let the marks of costly dedication make plain whose are the Lord's.

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6:18

Paul's final prayer for the Galatians is that the grace of God might be in their deepest hearts. It is not a veneer of grace that is needed, for that just makes us polite and pleasantly correct. It is when grace touches the deep fountains of life and personality that the sweetness and the strength of Christ begin to show in all our dealings with God and with people. Think of how someone with a bitter spirit manifests a sharpness, a criticism, an ingratitude and a discontent wherever he goes. Such people introduce a sour note into everything. They are never pleased. They are for ever seeing what is wrong in everyone else but are seemingly unaware of their own sad unattractiveness. Such people have forgotten just how bountifully they have received grace from God, usually through the ministry and kindness of other people. Paul's critics had forgotten just how much they owed to him and yet here he calls them "brethren". He would much rather be friends with them than be in this situation of confrontation. What he longs for is that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ might bring them together at the Master's feet. Could there possibly be a better place to end our study of this epistle?

"Lord, it is my chief complaint
That my love is weak and faint;

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Yet I love Thee, and adore;
O for grace to love Thee more.” (Cowper)

Amen, so let it be.

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