

## **GALATIANS**

Thus was one of Martin Luther's favorite epistles of Paul. In his striving to reform the church from its works-based soteriology ("doctrines of salvation"), no Bible book was more helpful in proclaiming faith-based salvation than Galatians. Galatia geographically included the area of Paul's nativity and early life in Tarsus. It was part of the territory that made up his travels in various missionary journeys, recorded in Acts. Julius Caesar had written that the people of this region were very fickle, and their jumping from Paul's simple gospel to the more complex teaching of the Judaizers illustrates that unstable nature. This book has been called the "Magna Charta of Christian Liberty." G. Campbell Morgan, a favorite writer of mine, spoke here of "Christ, the Emancipator." Galatians is a treatise for the purity of the gospel of grace with no admixture of Law. "Justification by faith alone" was the battle cry of the Reformation. G. Campbell Morgan's broad outline of Galatians is helpful:

|                                               |             |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Introduction                                  | 1:1 -10     |
| A. An Apology: the defense of the gospel      | 1:11 - 2:21 |
| B. An Argument: the declaration of the gospel | 3:1 - 4:31  |
| C. An Appeal: the demands of the gospel       | 5:1 - 6:10  |
| Conclusion                                    | 6:11 - 18   |

### **Chapter 1**

#### **THERE IS ONLY ONE GOSPEL**

##### **PAUL'S AUTHORITY IS IN CHRIST**

1),2) Of the Pauline letters, this alone has such a general address; all the others are penned to specifically named individuals or churches (unless he wrote the letter to the Hebrews, also a specific group). In this salutation Paul affirms his apostleship; he further asserts that the origin of his ministry was not human or earthly, but divine and heavenly. This seems to be a defense against a challenge to his credentials. It is my conviction that Paul was God's choice to replace Judas among the twelve, not the lot-chosen Matthias of Acts, chapter one. The term "apostle" means "one who is sent with a message." Paul became an apostle some time after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. As Israel came into existence later than other nations, so Paul was one "born out of due time." The term in its official use designates one of the 12 selected by Jesus to a specific apostolic ministry. The term is not always used, however, in that sense. He glories from the beginning of the letter in the death and resurrection of Jesus. With his present associates, he greets the churches in the region of Galatia.

3), 4), 5) Paul's formal greeting to the Galatian churches is packed with blessing, for them and for us! As in many other salutations, he blends the Greek (grace) and Hebrew (peace) forms of saying "hello." Deeper than a greeting, the word "grace" speaks of the fountain of all God's blessings to man. It is His undeserved favor to sinners. To some (myself included), grace is the sweetest word in the English language (of course other than the name "Jesus"). The second element of the greeting, "peace," represents the crown of all earthly blessings. It is a harmonized relationship, first with God (Romans 5:1), and then with the circumstances of life (Philippians 4:7). One who by God's grace has peace is wealthy, regardless of their earthly possessions. Grace and peace for sinners have a common source - God, and His Son, Jesus Christ. They can be found nowhere else. Having mentioned Jesus, Paul talks about one of His works on our behalf. He tells how Jesus gave Himself (sacrificially) for us (I Timothy 2:6, Titus 2:14) with the purpose of delivering us from the world of evil. We do not have to live in bondage to sin, for Jesus has died to set us free! This was God's desire and decree in the work of Jesus. Through Christ's work, we can be children of the heavenly Father, with the wonderful privilege of worshipping Him. To bring glory to God is our highest blessing. False teachers glorify themselves. We must glorify our Father.

##### **PAUL'S ASTONISHMENT AT CHRISTIANS**

6) Embracing any "different gospel" (old or new) is desertion of Christ. Astonishing! What caused apparent converts to desert the way of grace? Were some not truly saved? Do we today have a mixed multitude in our churches? This so-called gospel is different, not really a gospel at all. We get our prefix "hetero-" from the word used here. It is alien, foreign, different, contradictory. Paul is hotly exercised over this deception that has pulled men from Christ!

7) Three points he makes here: ① their teaching is not good news (the meaning of the word "gospel"); ② it is confusing; ③ it is a perversion of Christ's gospel. It speaks of Him, but goes beyond Him, and anything that claims to be gospel, but says more than the gospel says, is not really gospel. Acts 15 tells of the Judaizers adding law-elements to simple faith in Christ. Jesus said, "*It is finished.*" Christ's work is complete; nothing needs to be added. Truth is polluted by such addition.

8) Islam and Mormonism claim to have revelations from God given them through angels. These so-called revelations differ in vital points from the gospel of Christ. Paul here tells us not to follow such teachings. Those claiming to receive and transmit such teachings are hell-bound, according to the apostle. Christian believer, please do not swallow the politically correct but Biblically incorrect inclusion of other faiths into the true faith in Jesus Christ.

9) There is only one way to heaven - it is through simple faith in Jesus Christ. Any who preach a different message than this are lost, and they are teaching others to be lost, themselves. Scripture being at a premium, Paul would not repeat himself in so short a space if the thing stated were not so important. The compassionate Apostle does not lightly consign men to eternal condemnation. Know that truth is serious! Again, let us stick to the truth!

### PAUL'S AIM IS TO PLEASE CHRIST

10) There are some false doctrines that are designed to appeal to the sinner, like the belief that there is no hell. What sinner wouldn't want to think that? Works salvation schemes are also pleasing to men because they make human effort a basis of eternal life, giving man a false pride in a false salvation. God's grace insults the lost man. Paul was trying to please God, not men, so he preached the Word in truth rather than tickling men's ears.

11), 12) There are in our world many cults and false religions that men have made up. Paul even speaks to Timothy about "*doctrines of demons*" (1 Timothy 4:1). Any religious teaching that is contrary to the truth about Jesus as contained in Scripture has its origin either in the sinful heart of man or in hell itself. Such false religious teachings invariably make salvation dependent upon human merit or human effort. Man doesn't want to think he is so evil that he can do nothing to save himself. The cults and false religions appeal to that weakness in man's nature. Paul assures the Galatian believers that the gospel he preaches came to him by revelation from Christ Himself. Verses 16 - 18 give us reason to think that Paul's conversion was followed by a three-year time of study with the risen Lord Jesus Christ. What a seminary course that would have been! What preparation this great apostle received to go out and preach the gospel!

### PAUL'S "ABOUT-FACE" WAS CATAclysmic!

13) Few, if any have experienced such dramatic conversions as did Paul. The Damascus Road events were transformative to this religious man. His former life in Judaism was well-known, in which he sought to destroy the church of God, thinking they were heretics against the truth. His persecution was relentless and widespread, taking him even outside the boundaries of Israel in pursuit of these "Christians." One with such a track record could never be convinced by men that he was wrong and needing converting. Heaven had to intervene, and that is exactly what happened as recorded in Acts 9.

14) The things handed down by the fathers were a matter of great zeal for Saul of Tarsus. He said that he "kept on advancing" beyond many of his peers because of his passion. This Pharisee was driven like few before him, and he was climbing the religious ladder two rungs at a time! He knew the teachings of Judaism better than did the Judaizers - those men who would undermine the faith of the Galatian believers with the insertion of Jewish requirements as part of the salvation process. Paul taught grace and freedom, while the Judaizers proclaimed law and bondage. These doctrines were antithetical and mutually exclusive. When Paul shared his testimony, he often mentioned his radical opposition to the church in his pre-conversion years.

15), 16), 17) The testimony to the Galatian saints goes on. Again Paul is emphasizing the fact that his gospel came from heaven and not from men. He acknowledges the sovereignty of God in setting him apart for ministry before he was born! God's call on Paul's life was in no way due to his brilliance or education or zeal or accomplishments - it was wholly by grace! This apostleship was not earned; it was endowed by a benevolent God! So Yahweh revealed His Son, Jesus, to Paul on the Damascus Road. This was to effect his salvation, but it did much more than that! It turned **Saul** into **Paul**, the **persecutor** into the **preacher**, the Jewish **defender** into one who would **declare** God's message to the Gentiles! The other eleven apostles had spent three years with Jesus, training for their mission. Now Saul of Tarsus does the same - he spends three years in the Arabian desert, ostensibly in Christ's seminary, training for his own mission. I wonder if one course was like that the risen Christ gave on the Emmaus Road in Luke 24; that is a course I'd love to sign up for! This man knew the Hebrew Scriptures well, but he needed to see Jesus running through their pages. Again, this gospel of grace came straight to Paul from heaven, not even by apostolic teaching.

18), 19), 20) After it seems Paul's gospel knowledge was settled, he did go to Jerusalem and spent a couple of weeks with Peter. If the encounter with the Roman Centurion, Cornelius, had happened, I wonder if Peter told Paul about it - this man who himself was to primarily evangelize Gentiles. The purpose of this trip was not for Paul to be taught, but rather to become acquainted with these two great men of the church, Peter and James. It is sad that Paul has to resort to an oath to defend himself against the accusations of the Judaizers. He was clearly no "second-hand apostle" who received his message from the others in Jerusalem. This gospel of pure grace came to him from none other than the risen Lord, Jesus Christ Himself!

21) Paul's next geographical move was from Jerusalem back to Syria and Cilicia. In Cilicia he had been born, and in Syria he had been born again. There he went to carry this message of life through faith in the risen Savior! What precipitated this journey was apparently an effort to kill him (Acts 9:29, 30). As Jesus sometimes left Judea for Galilee when things got too hot in the south, Paul used discretion to live and preach another day. He would not always do that.

22), 23) He returns to his point of showing his independence as a recipient and a preacher of gospel truth. The Judean churches didn't even know him; they only heard that the persecutor had been transformed into a gospel preacher! How often have we observed that the best testimony is a changed life! That was certainly true in Paul's case - no explanation for this radical change could be found other than an encounter with the risen Jesus!

24) Was it any wonder that word of what was happening to and through Paul brought the Judean Christians to sing doxologies to God? These Judaizers in Galatia were subverting faith and criticizing the apostle Paul; the saints back in the region of the mother church (Jerusalem) were rejoicing and praising God because of Paul!

*The importance of clarity and purity in doctrine cannot be overstated. What we believe determines how we behave, and we must then have a proper creed to have right conduct. Jesus had spoken of an enemy sowing tares among the wheat. Paul spoke several times about false teachers coming into the church to subvert it, as did the apostle Peter. The Judaizers were declaring that becoming a proselyte to Judaism was a necessary first step (summed up in the matter of circumcision) to coming to Christ and His church. This was absolutely false, even heretical, as it strikes at the root of the gospel of grace. Luke records for us in Acts 15 the matter of the very first "church council" called to deal with these great doctrinal matters. It is most likely this council which was the occasion for the trip to Jerusalem mentioned here in Galatians 2.*

## **CONFIRMATION OF THE GOSPEL OF GRACE**

### **THE TRIP TO JERUSALEM AND THE TEST CASE OF TITUS**

- 1) Paul and Barnabas, as well as Titus, made this important journey together from Antioch (the one in Syria). It occurred after the first Missionary journey and before the two first-mentioned men separated over the matter of John Mark. This was the third of five visits we find Paul making to Jerusalem after his conversion.
- 2) It was important for the church to see the absolute agreement between what Paul had been preaching among the Gentiles and what the apostles had gotten from Jesus and were executing in response to the great commission. Paul had not colluded with the Jerusalem leaders, and so it was clear that the matching up of their ministries meant they had all received them from the same Lord! As was the ministry of the Jerusalem leaders, so Paul and Barnabas' work had been confirmed from heaven with miracle, wonders, and signs. The Judaizers had no doubt claimed their authority from the Jerusalem church, but Paul sets forth that he met with those leaders in private and they successfully compared notes. The validity of Paul's gospel, the gospel of grace in Jesus, was clearly confirmed at this council.
- 3) The divine purpose of Titus being on the trip is now revealed. He was a Greek, now having become a believer in Jesus. If the leaders in Jerusalem taught the doctrine of the Judaizers, they would have compelled Titus to be circumcised. Yet he was not so compelled - a real blow to the Judaizing efforts for sure! This test case came down on the side of grace and freedom, giving a blow to the side of law and bondage! By grace alone, through faith alone, was confirmed as God's gospel!

### **THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL PRESERVED**

- 4), 5) It becomes clear now that even the Judaizing sect was represented at the council, or perhaps they were just there watching, listening. Paul calls them "pseudo-brethren," and says that they crept in secretly like enemy spies into a military encampment. He does not dignify their presence with compromising language; he dismisses them as the agents of Satan they were, trying to subvert faith by their false teaching! The gospel's truth was safe, confirmed by God through these godly men who dealt faithfully with the subject and rendered a verdict. Reading Acts 15 here would be a good and helpful exercise.

### **THE TOTAL AGREEMENT OF PAUL'S AND PETER'S GOSPELS**

- 6) Paul's gospel was complete, lacking no parts that needed to be added by the Jerusalem leaders. The "Big Shots" in the Mother Church did not need to fill in any gaps in Paul's teaching. It was the full gospel. Those today who speak of "the full gospel" are guilty of adding things to the simple truth given us by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1 - 5. There he defined the "gospel" as being the death of Jesus (according to the [Hebrew] Scriptures), the burial of Jesus, and the rising again of Jesus (again, according to the [Hebrew] Scriptures). There are many other wonderful truths in Scripture, but they are not part of the gospel. To add anything to the gospel is to make the true gospel void!
- 7), 8) It was wonderfully evident to the whole council there in Jerusalem that the gospel from Paul to the Gentiles was the same as the gospel from Peter to the Jews. They each had the same goods entrusted to them as stewards; they were just going to minister those goods to different groups of people, all of whom need the Lord. Both men, and those who follow in their train, are endued with power from the same Lord. For the gospel is "the power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16).

### **THE TOKEN OF THE RIGHT HAND OF FELLOWSHIP**

- 9) The inner circle of Christ's disciples, called by Paul "pillars," welcomed Barnabas and Paul with the "right hand of fellowship. This was a symbol of recognition, acceptance, approval, meaningful to this one who came to Christ later, but was also called to be Christ's apostle. Paul would head to the Gentiles, Peter & others, to the Jews.
- 10) As a minister to the needy myself, working in a Rescue Mission for 50 years, I appreciate that Peter and his associates commend to Paul to "remember the poor." Paul expressed that he was already eager to do that very thing. Both testaments commend it to us. The gospel is about souls being saved, yet where it goes in truth, people also work to meet the physical needs of the less fortunate around them. This gives a great testimony of love on behalf of the church.

### **TAKING PETER TO TASK FOR HIS HYPOCRISY**

- 11) Peter, the lead apostle, had to be challenged for his behavior that was inconsistent. This younger preacher's courage was founded on conviction of truth! We need, as Paul, never be ashamed of standing firmly on evident truth!
- 12) Peter altered his behavior when the "circumcision group" arrived. He vacillated, no longer eating with his Gentile brothers for fear of offending the Jewish saints. Double-minded, unstable Peter set a poor example for others.
- 13) Peter's hypocrisy was contagious, even swaying faithful Barnabas. The desire not to offend Jewish Christians was handled poorly by Peter, so much so that Paul had to take him to task. We must remember that others are watching us, and that they are often guided in their behavior by what they see in ours. Great influence is ours.
- 14) Paul's zeal for truth and truthful actions gave him courage to challenge Peter: "You act like a Gentile, yet you ask Gentiles to act like Jews." This public confrontation would bring the issue out for discussion. Peter, in the wrong here,

deserved to be called into question. The basis for the challenge was the truth, not personality.

## HOW GOD JUSTIFIES MEN

*One of the great issues that has been debated throughout the age of the church is the matter of "justification by faith." The two names that rise to the top like cream on milk whenever this discussion appears are Paul, the apostle, and Martin Luther, the reformer. God's way of salvation has ever been "by grace through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). Satan's lie has been that a person can earn his or her way to whatever they may call heaven. There are really only two religious systems in the world. There is the Bible one that looks to God in faith for His provision of salvation, and then there is the one that says "I can make it on my own." It is simply "I cannot save myself; God must save me" versus "I did it my way." It is Abel's sacrifice of the animal God provided over against the works of Cain's hands. No person has ever attained heaven on their own merit; we come to God in the merit of Jesus, Who loved us and gave Himself for us. A good historical background for this Galatian passage is Luke's record in Acts 15 of the Jerusalem council. That should have settled the issue once and for all, but there are always folks like the Judaizers who tried to teach the Galatian people to add works to grace and faith. Now grace and faith do **produce** works, but the works play no part in the saving of the trusting soul. Martin Luther cried with the Scripture writers, "The just shall live by faith." We say, "Amen!"*

### DECLARED RIGHTEOUS BY FAITH IN CHRIST

15), 16) I repeat that in all the world of religious thought, there are only two basic pathways. One seeks to please God and obtain His favor by doing good works. This religion has many names and faces, but they all amount to the same thing, and it is always an affront to a holy God. Sometimes it pretends not even to be a religion, like *humanism* - but it really is! That "man is the measure of all things," and that he has pulled himself up by his moral bootstraps is certainly a religion! The other religion receives by faith the gift of a God Who favors us in grace. His favor is unmerited, gracious. One religious system says, "Something in my hand I bring." The other says, "Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling. Foul, I to the fountain fly; wash me, Savior, or I die." The works religion here takes the form of a distortion of Judaism; it seeks to merit God's favor by law-keeping. Here Paul gives the lie to that approach; he makes it clear that justification (being declared righteous by God) is by faith in Jesus, not by law observance. Paul reminds the Galatian believers not to bind their Gentile friends with the law, again, a thing settled at the first church council, recorded in Acts 15. Jewish believers must not look down their religious noses at "Gentile sinners" and require more of them than they were able to do themselves.

### DEMONSTRATED TO BE SINNERS BY THE LAW

17) It appears that a charge had been leveled at Paul's teaching, that this grace approach led people to sin, concluding that Christ, then, promotes sin. It is an accusation that some make even today, suggesting that our approach of faith in Christ apart from works leaves people with the idea that they can trust Jesus and then do whatever they want and still be saved! Nothing could be further from the truth! We are frail, yes, and we do sin even though we have been redeemed. That, however, is not a result of trusting in Jesus, but it is a product of our sinful, Adamic natures. Please don't blame Jesus for shortcomings you see in my life. They are all my fault.

18), 19) Believers do not deny the rightful place of good works in the grand scheme of things. Paul, the "grace apostle," mentions the importance good works play, for instance, in Ephesians 2:10. The idea is that, while we are not saved **by works**, we are saved **unto good works**. No man having come to Christ by faith can or should go back to some legal system, some religious persuasion that makes works a requisite for salvation. Going back to Moses and a law-system would be building again that which he destroyed. Living in the shadow of the law only proves that we are law-breakers. The law is a ministration of death, not life. The law condemns us because of the sin which it points out. It cannot give life because it would depend on the flesh, which is weak. The purpose of the law was never to save; it was to show us our sin, our need for grace, and point us to Christ where that grace could be found. Free from the bondage to law-keeping, I can now freely live for God. Satan loves to lead people to think that their "salvation" (whatever they may mean by that) is something to be earned by human effort. For a man to try to earn what God wishes to freely bestow is an insult to the God of Grace.

### DEAD WITH CHRIST AND ALIVE IN HIM!

20) What a marvelous passage, this! When Christ was crucified, I was positionally crucified with Him. That brought my death to pass. God declared me guilty of sin, and He judged my sin in Jesus. So **His** death is **my** death, and as a result, God sees me through the filter of the finished work of Jesus on my behalf - what joy! *"I am crucified with Christ!"* Enter Jesus, and He lives His life now through me. Once dead in sin, then dead with Christ, I now am alive in Him also! Alive from the death brought about by sin, I live a life pleasing to God in my mortal body. This is possible only by **faith in** and the **faithfulness of** the Lord Jesus Christ, Who in love purchased us.

21) Some who had been teaching the Galatians had clearly "set aside" God's grace in favor of a system that required proselyting to the Jewish faith as a part of entering the Christian faith. Paul declares his loyalty to grace with a hypothetical argument. If justification could be had by law-keeping, then Christ's was a pointless death. His point is well-taken, that a law-keeping salvation would render the cross of Jesus a useless trifle, unnecessary. This is a thing absolutely unthinkable to anyone who has knelt at the foot of the cross and trusted the Savior!

*In closing, let us think for a further moment about justification. This great word means that the absolutely holy and just God of the universe has "declared righteous" the one trusting His Son, Jesus. This is a legal term, describing our **position** before the Judge of all the earth. If the Judge declares us righteous, none else can convince us otherwise.*

### Chapters 3

#### WE ARE BLESSED WITH FATHER ABRAHAM

#### THE FOLLY OF DEPARTURE FROM THE GOSPEL

1) Paul charged the Galatians with acting irrationally - they were not thinking (the meaning of this word for “foolish”). Their actions were so strange that Paul said they had been “cast under a spell.” There was no excuse for their side-stepping, for the apostle had graphically and emphatically preached the cross of Christ to them. We must understand that to supplement (add to) Christ is to supplant (replace) Him. This is not just error, it is heresy! You can almost hear the disappointment in Paul’s words; the Galatians had several things going for them. Faithful preaching of the Word had included a setting forth of Jesus in His cross work for them. In their foolishness, they had allowed themselves to be deceived into believing that one must add something to the work of Christ in order to really be saved. It is Jesus plus nothing that saves the soul. Adding anything takes away everything!

2), 3) With great logic, Paul now sets two things against each other for purposes of being saved (here spoken of as “receiving the Spirit”). Those two things are the **works of the law** and the **hearing of faith**. He again chides, scolds them for being irrational - not thinking (same word as before). He knew the answer was the hearing of faith, not the works of the law. So he asks essentially why did they leave the simple truth that won them to Christ and follow the complex, convoluted thinking of the Judaizers. You began this walk by faith, and now you have come under bondage to a system that was never designed to save or sanctify - the law of Moses. **What are you thinking? Are you thinking at all?** If your spiritual conception was by faith, and it was, how do you plan to reach the culmination, to be made complete, by changing to law-works in the middle of the process?

4) Paul’s next challenge (these coming in the form of questions) has to do with their suffering for the faith. Even he had so suffered in that region, being himself stoned (I believe to death) at Lystra. Those who stoned him rejected his teaching of God’s grace in Jesus Christ, believing the law was the thing, and that faith in Jesus was a grave disservice to Moses. If they now thought that the law was essential to salvation, they suffered in vain!

5) While looking somewhat like the question in verse 2, this one is really quite different. That question had to do with receiving the Spirit to dwell within them upon their trusting Christ. This one is more about the constant supply of the Spirit (present tense) and the spiritual gifts He is ever bestowing upon the church for its service and worship. Again comes the query as to whether this is a reality because men obey the law, or because they believe the gospel of Christ.

#### THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM

6) The issue Paul discusses here is whether God’s people operate on the principle of faith or on the basis of fleshly obedience to the law. He calls Abraham as a witness - using Genesis 15:6; Paul demonstrates that the patriarch was justified by faith. When we trust God, He places righteousness on our spiritual accounts in heaven because we believe in Jesus, not because through some human effort we obey the law given through Moses.

7) He commands the Galatians (and us) to keep on knowing that those operating on the basis of faith are placed as sons of Abraham. This is “placed sons,” not to be confused with “born ones.” We are not Israel, as physical descendants of Abraham; nor have we, the Church, taken their place. This is a “faith lineage.” We do not embrace the replacement theology that says the church replaced Israel, and that Israel’s day is over.

8) While the Abrahamic covenant secured certain blessed promises for Israel, it also spoke beforehand about God’s plan to justify the Gentiles, as well. Paul asserts that this statement in Genesis 12:3 was the gospel being announced 2,000 years before Christ came. Genesis 3:15 had been an announcement 2,000 years before the call of Abraham!

9) God’s provision for man’s need is made by grace. Man’s appropriation of that provision is through faith. It was true of believing Abraham. The big question today is, “Is it true about you? Are you trusting Christ alone to save you?” What worked for Adam at the gates of Eden worked for Abraham and David and Paul, and it works for us, too!

#### THE FOUNDATION OF JUSTIFICATION

10) The wise apostle next goes to the law to explain the law. Making reference to Deuteronomy 27:26, he shows that the Hebrew Scriptures place under a curse anyone who tries to do the law but fails even in one point (James 2:10). The law was designed to expose our sin, not to remove it. Only the blood of Jesus can wash away our sin, cleanse us.

11) Not just the Lawgiver Moses understood this, but also the prophets, like Habakkuk, who declared (2:4) that *“The just shall live by faith,”* a statement so important that it is quoted three times in the New Testament (here, Romans 1:17, Hebrews 10:38). All that God says is important, but when He says something four times, we must really pay attention!

12) One might suggest combining law-obedience with gospel faith, but even the law precludes that. As a means of being saved, law-obedience and gospel faith are mutually exclusive. All the law could do was help a man live a little longer on earth, show him he was really a sinner, and point him to the real answer for sin, faith in a Sin-bearer.

13) An old hymn said, “Cursed by the law, and bruised by the Fall, Christ hath redeemed us Once for all!” We were all, Jew and Gentile, under the law’s curse - it proved us to be sinners. But we need not despair; One came Who kept the law in every point, and then He satisfied its demands on us by dying in our place - blessed redemption!

14) *“In you shall all the families of the earth be blessed,”* said the Lord to Abraham. That blessing of Abraham comes to us through Abraham’s greatest Son, Jesus Christ. And with the blessing comes the Spirit (fourth mention in our text) of God.

Jew and Gentile are now in one body, the body of Christ, and all through faith in His finished cross-work.

## **THE PROMISE AND THE LAW (PART 1) [SEE 4:1 - 7]**

### **THE PROMISE TO ABRAHAM WAS ABOUT JESUS!**

15) Paul is addressing the Galatians about several things, including “what makes a family a family?” And so he calls them by a family name - “brothers,” those born of the same womb, in this case meaning members of the family of God called the “church.” His main point in this section is the endurance of the Abrahamic Covenant. He illustrates its duration from “everyday life.” Once a will is established, it cannot be set aside. We cannot decide to do differently than what the testator willed. The covenant with Abraham was permanently sealed with blood.

16) God’s covenant promises to Abraham had no shelf life, no expiration date. They transcend time, and they every one will be fulfilled completely. The “Seed” (singular, as Paul stresses here) refers to Christ, the timeless One. While many people and many peoples have been and will be affected by this covenant and God’s actions to fulfill it, the specific reference here is not to people or peoples, but to a Person, and that Person is Jesus Christ.

### **THE PROMISE WAS NOT ANNULLED BY THE LAW**

17) Someone might suggest that the entrance of the Law of Moses changed the landscape, and surely it did! But it did not in any way abrogate, alter, or disannul God’s promises to Abraham. God had repeated those promises to Isaac, and later to Jacob. From the time the third patriarch entered Egypt until the Exodus and the giving of Moses’ Law, there were 430 years. Neither the Law nor the elapsed time had any effect whatsoever on the validity or enduring nature of the promises to Abraham. It was an intermediate covenant with a special purpose.

18) While the Law of God given to Israel through Moses was a special thing, law can never trump promise, especially a promise by the eternal God. The inheritance that flows from the promise is on the basis of God’s grace, received by those who exercise faith. The blessings that flow from the law come to those who obey, who keep the precepts of the law. Those blessings would include such things as an ordered society, better health, and longer life. Those are conditional upon obedience; Abraham’s covenant was unconditional.

*The final verses of chapter 3 may be summarized thus: (A) two of the purposes of the law were 1) to prove to men they were sinners (by showing them they could not perfectly keep the law) and 2) to point those sinners to the Savior Who could remedy their sin problem. (B) The Law does not in any way oppose God’s promises (Abraham’s covenant), nor can it give life (which comes as a result of the fulfillment of Abraham’s covenant). (C) Until Jesus came, men were held prisoner by sin and the law. (D) Faith in Christ 1) makes us Sons of God, 2) eradicates the Jew-Gentile distinction (and all other such distinctions), and 3) makes us Abraham’s spiritual seed and therefore heirs to the promises given him. Now let’s look at them more closely.*

## **GOD PROVIDES, FAITH SECURES**

### **THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE LAW AND THE PROMISE**

19), 20) Paul had spent considerable time explaining that righteousness doesn’t come by obedience to the law. It was and is powerless to save. He now asks the obvious question - “Okay, then what was the design of the Mosaic law?” The first part of the answer is that it was given to reveal sin. He wrote to the Romans (7:7) that without the law he would not have known that his behavior was sin. However, now that the promised Seed (Genesis 3:15) has come, I can also know I am a sinner by comparing my life to that of Jesus. Boy, do I ever come up short - on both standards of measure! Thank God for a Savior Who takes away our sin! He goes on to point out a contrast between the law (a covenant) and the promise. The law came **from** God **through** angels, **to and through** Moses **to** men. Lots of mediation there, and as a covenant it depended on two parties. The promise came directly from God to man, and only depended on Him for fruition. No human failure could thwart God’s promise.

21), 22) There is no conflict between the law and the promise. Each was designed to do something very different from what the other could do. Law was the diagnostician. It told us what was wrong with us - that we are sinners. That knowledge is a good thing, for with it we now can move forward to find God’s cure for the malady that law pointed out. In fact, the law even went so far as to help lead us to Christ! Thank God for the law! Not for its bondage and curse, but for its revelatory power! One said, “The sharp needle of the law must make way for the golden thread of the gospel.” No man can be saved who does not understand that he is a sinner, having offended a holy and righteous God. Armed with that knowledge, a man can flee to the cross. There he will find God’s solution to the sin issue. There he will find a perfect Sacrifice dying in his stead. There he will discover a fountain of cleansing that reaches deeper than the stain the soul-slaying sin had ever gone. He finds life!

### **THE COMPLETION OF THE PROMISE IN JESUS**

23) In two verses Paul uses two illustrations to set forth God’s purposes for the law. Figure 1 - before faith came to Paul, the law was a prison-house in which he was bound. The law was his jailer; but in Christ he is free.

24), 25) As the law had a personal application, so Israel was held in protective custody by the law until the Messiah came. In addition, it acted as a child-leader, a pedagogue, to point the nation and the individuals to Christ. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> illustration. The law was a tutor, schoolmaster, teaching us about Christ, Who could justify us by faith. The law disciplined us like our parents or a governess would. Submission to it prepared the Jews to submit to the claims of Christ. Now we who

believe no longer need the law to tutor us; now we have learned about Christ!

26), 27) Paul had been speaking in the first person as a Jew; he now changes to the second person to address the Galatians about themselves. Membership in God's family is upon the premise of faith in Christ - for the Galatians, and for all men! There is no other way to become God's child. The result of our living union with Christ following Spirit-baptism is that the new clothing for our souls is that of Christ's imputed righteousness. An old chorus says, "The best thing in my life I ever did do was to take off the old robe, and put on the new." The old robe of self-righteousness by law works is like a filthy rag in the eyes of God - so says Isaiah in 64:6. It just will not do!

#### **THE COMBINING OF JEW AND GENTILE IN JESUS**

28) The unity of believers in the body of Christ removes the significance of any human distinctions. In Christ there is no race, gender, breeding - these are no longer man's primary considerations. Grace has set us free from the things that divide us, and it has gloriously made us one in Him Who is the great Unifier - even Jesus Christ!

29) Believers of any race are Abraham's spiritual seed, heirs of his spiritual promise. This is not to discount that there will be a future believing remnant within his natural seed (Israel) who will inherit the national promises. We and they will enjoy the blessings promised to Abraham through faith in Christ. Jew and Gentile are now one in Christ's body.

### **Chapter 4**

#### **THE PROMISE AND THE LAW (PART 2) [SEE 3:15 - 18]**

##### **THE POSITION OF MEN BEFORE CHRIST CAME**

1), 2) People trying to live under the Mosaic law relegate themselves to the immaturity of an heir who is not yet of age: he has no freedom, no volition, and he does not even possess what is his! Such a one is led around by others, even as was the under-age child in the Roman and Hellenic (Greek) cultures. There are those who watch over the immature heir's person (we call them tutors, governors), and those who manage his estate (stewards). They are his overseers until a time established by his father when he will be placed as an adult son, and then he will possess his possessions. (*This by the way, is the meaning of the New Testament doctrine of "adoption." It is placing as an adult son, not placing in a family*). Israel before Christ was in this immature condition - do not try to return to it!

3) Before Christ came, Jew and Gentile were in a sort of slavery: the Jew to law, the Gentile to pagan religion with its worldly principles. When believers revert to an inappropriate relationship to the law, they place themselves in a type of bondage. Even today all men are enslaved to sin until Christ sets us free. Have you been set free?

##### **THE PERFORMANCE OF THE PROMISE, THE CHANGE OF THE POSITION**

4), 5) When the time was right, God sent His pre-existent Son on a mission to earth. Here are some things that made the time right. There was a Jewish expectancy, the words of the prophets about a coming Messiah not yet having been fulfilled; Rome's oppression added to that great need and desire for a Deliverer. The empire had a system of roads like none before, as well as the *pax Romana*, the "peace of Rome," wherein men could travel without papers to any part of the empire (to make easier the task of spreading the gospel). Alexander the Great had given the Mediterranean world a common language, *Koine Greek*, into which the New Testament would be written - so that all who would could understand. At such a time as this, with great anticipation of the Man and with great facilitation for the propagation of the Message, the Virgin-born Son of God left the threshold of glory and entered the human experience to redeem men from their bondage to sin and to place them as adult sons.

6), 7) To us who are sons, God also sent His Spirit as an Indweller! The Spirit leads us to an intimate relationship with God, more than just a legal one. Mark the marvelous progression: slave - son - heir! Our position in Christ, secured by grace through faith, does not depend upon law obedience. It is received by trusting Him Who died for us. The Trinity is seen here - The Father Who designs the plan, the Son Who executes it on the cross, and the Spirit Who applies it to our hearts and draws us to the Father. And for the believer, unlike the child in a Roman family, there is no waiting period, no maturity gap before the full benefits of sonship pertain. The moment we are born into the family of God, all that is ours belongs to us! Truly God provides, faith secures.

#### **A PUZZLING "ABOUT-FACE"**

*Where the book of Hebrews details the superiority of Jesus to any pretender, and it challenges the Hebrew Christians to press on and not to turn back to their old beliefs, this passage is doing something similar for Gentile believers. It is a challenge to them to press on also, and not return to things wrongly believed before they met the Savior. The Hebrews were tempted to turn back to a belief system that led up to the coming of Messiah, but it was now set aside in favor of the further development and culmination of God's unfolding drama of redemption. The Gentiles were in danger of turning back to religious principles of their past that were opposed to faith in the living and true God. While neither of these groups would "lose their salvation," for such a thing is not possible, they would by regressing spiritually doom themselves to lives of misery and unproductivity for the cause of Christ! To move forward in and with Christ is the thing.*

##### **AN EXCHANGE OF SLAVRIES**

8), 9), 10) Before these Galatian Gentiles received the gospel of Christ and the Christ of the gospel, they had not known God and were slaves to so-called deities that were no gods at all! The first chapter of the epistle to the Romans (specifically verse 23) parallels this with a description of man's "creature worship." The digression was from worship of things like man to

birds to mammals to bugs. Idolatrous worship is always enslaving - and a poor slavery it is to a master who cannot carry you, but must be carried by you! A great change has come - you didn't know God; now you do! And you are known by God, Who is unlike the false gods you used to worship, but they could not know anything. How in the world can you turn back to those old things- back to things that are 1) weak: they can't justify, or empower godly living, things that are 2) worthless: they have no value and are unable to give you an inheritance? Will you go back and become a slave for such as this?! I see here a parallel with the wilderness Jews who wanted to return to Egypt, with its false gods. The Judaizers had persuaded these Gentile believers to follow legal observance of Sabbaths, new moons, annual feasts - in hopes of gaining favor with God. Salvation is by grace through faith. The sinking sand of legalism is no substitute for the solid rock foundation in Christ. 11) Paul continues, "I fear concerning you - if you who were once captive to pagan vanities only become captive again, this time to religious vanities, then all my exhausting labor has been spent in vain! I wasted my time!" His identification with them is so strong that he feels their failure becomes his failure. Had he labored to the point of exhaustion only to see the churches disband, the believers scatter, people follow false gods once again?

#### **AN ENTREATY FOR STEADFASTNESS**

12) Here is an affectionate appeal - "I plead...brothers! Become as I am - I became like you. I left the law's bondage and my hopeless self-righteousness and stood before God as bankrupt as any Gentile. Don't put yourselves under a system which I had to leave to find God. Until now you've not wronged me. Don't follow that from which I fled!"

13), 14) "How gracious you have always been. When I came to you in Galatia, I was suffering physically in some way that might have made me an offense. But you were so gracious, and you did not cast me aside in my infirmity, rather you accorded me a welcome worthy of a visitor from heaven - an angel, or even Christ Himself. Such was your joy that you took me into your hearts. Your welcome was not worship, but it touched my heart, and it made our hearts one in the glorious gospel. Would you now be persuaded to set aside that which meant so much to you then, and because precious to you, it was also precious to me? Please, Galatians, press on!"

15), 16) "So, what happened? Where is your blessed joy? O fickle Galatians, you cared for me so well, you trusted me so much. My physical infirmities included a weakness in my eyes, and you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me if it were possible! All I've done is tell you the truth. Does that merit you making me your enemy? Don't turn from the Lord, His message, and His messenger. Can't you see what these people are, and what they are doing? You came to God through faith in Christ; these Judaizers tell you that you missed a step - circumcision. Do you think you must come to Jesus through the law, instead of to God through Jesus?"

#### **AN EXPERIENCING OF SUFFERING**

17), 18) Paul had been zealous for the Galatians to bring them to God. The Judaizers were also zealous, but with base motives - to then have the Galatians zealous for themselves! Paul characterizes their motive as being up to no good - not being honorable. He does not mind at all to chide men who do spiritual damage to the souls of others. You were zealous to listen to Gospel when I came, and such zeal is indeed good. But the purpose then was good. The zeal offered and sought by these Judaizers is for personal gain: that the Judaizers themselves may be held in esteem by the Galatians - not draw them to Christ. "Choose, foolish Galatians, and choose well, please."

19), 20) Once before Paul had travailed in pain to "birth" the Galatians. Once again he feels he is in labor as he wishes them to be transformed into Christlikeness. It seems to be unfair to experience labor pains twice for the same child, but Paul was willing because these "dear children" (the expression is used in Paul's writings only here) meant so much to him. The absent correspondent wishes he could be present with them in face-to-face conversation. Inflections of voice can change to properly show compassion and to elicit response. Though powerful, written words lack that flexibility of character. "I am so puzzled," concludes Paul, "about what you do."

#### **BONDAGE AND FREEDOM ILLUSTRATED IN TWO MOTHERS AND THEIR SONS**

*Paul is going to continue to show his Galatian readers the fallacy of accepting as true what the Judaizers were teaching - that some measure of law-keeping (including circumcision) was necessary as part (prerequisite) of the salvation process. Though he is writing to Gentiles, he will appeal to the law, for it was that very law that they wished to submit themselves to. He will prove from the law (in its larger context, the Pentateuch - first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures) that placing themselves under the law is a mistake. And he will go all the way back to "Father Abraham" for this exercise.*

#### **THE FACTUAL RECORD**

21) Scripture always agrees with Scripture; truth ever matches up with truth. To what better place can Paul appeal than to the writings of the Lawgiver, Moses, to make his point about law versus grace, bondage versus freedom? He says, "Talk to me, you who keep on wishing to keep on being under the Law, you do keep on listening to the Law, don't you?"

22), 23) Paul writes of the first two of Abraham's sons, Ishmael and Isaac (he had six other sons by a second wife, Keturah, after Sarah died). The firstborn, Ishmael, was the son of Hagar, a slave woman in Abraham's household. Isaac came along 13 years later, born to Sarah, the free woman. Ishmael was the child of the flesh, and Isaac was the child of promise. This, Paul says, was written in the Hebrew Scriptures. At the request of Sarah, Abraham fathered Isaac through Hagar in the ordinary way - no miracle was needed. Isaac, on the other hand, was miraculously conceived by a woman well past child-bearing years and to a father who himself was ten years older than Sarah! Clearly a miracle was necessary here, and so God provided one. See Romans 4:19 - 21 here. Ishmael was conceived by the laws of nature, while Isaac was conceived by

faith in the promise of God.

### **THE FIGURATIVE INTERPRETATION**

24) Hagar represents the law, given on Mount Sinai. She is all about carnal obedience to the flesh, and she is not about depending upon God in faith to keep His promises. She is a symbol of what the Judaizers were peddling: the works of the flesh must enter into your salvation as you Gentiles attempt to become as much like us as possible, by circumcision and law-keeping.

25) That Arabian mountain has a modern corresponding place - Jerusalem, from which these teachers claim to bring this "additional truth." They would make you as much a child of the flesh and a slave as were Hagar and her son, Ishmael. The holy city was in bondage to Rome politically, and those who live under the law there are in bondage to that old system (as it had been perverted by the Jewish religious leaders).

26) There is a better Jerusalem to come - the heavenly one (Hebrews 12:22, Revelation 21:2, 10). What a day it will be when we abide there! Until that day arrives, may we be found faithful praying and working that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. One day, we will by faith be there; until that time, we can bring some of there, here! And let us not live in Sinai's bondage, but rather enjoy the freedom brought and bought for us by Christ at Calvary.

27) Paul was so familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures! I think he may have had them memorized. He refers to the prophet Isaiah here, quoting 54:1. Sarah had been barren, but was made to rejoice with the birth of Isaac. We were lifeless (dead in sin), but we were brought to life in Christ - by faith, not by the works of the law! Israel had been in captivity and exile, but she was restored her fortunes in returning home! We were held captive by sin, but we found freedom and a new home in the Lord when we trusted Jesus - not embracing the law-works!

### **THE FAITHFUL APPLICATION**

28) "YOU" is the emphasized word in this statement, meaning "You, as opposed to those who would trap you in bondage." Paul acknowledges that these are his brothers in Christ. When he calls them children, he uses the word for "born ones." They have experienced the new birth by faith to enter the family of God. The new birth is a miraculous spiritual birth, as Isaac's birth was a miraculous physical birth. God kept His promise to Abraham, and He keeps His promise to us that if we "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," we will be saved!

29), 30) Ishmael mocked Isaac, persecuting him even when he was a small child. Paul had been a "child of the flesh" in his law-defending days. Now he is a child of the spirit, as were the Galatians, and they all knew what it was to be persecuted by the spiritual descendants of Ishmael. Modern days see the perpetuation of this in the Arab-Israeli conflict, as well as in the ongoing battle this world brings to the doorstep of Bible-believing saints. As Sarah pressed Abraham to expel Hagar and Ishmael, so we must expel those who teach a false gospel, adding law-works to faith-reception of the truth. As Ishmael would not partake in the inheritance with Isaac, neither will those whose confidence is in an alien gospel receive a goodly inheritance from the Lord. In many ways, false religion is worse than heathen paganism, and God deals harshly with it.

31) Again is pointed out the great difference between bondage and freedom. Bondage comes from sin and faulty efforts to deal with sin. Freedom comes from Christ and faith in Him. John 8:36, "*So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*" To the Romans (8:17) Paul would write, "*...and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...*" Born free and made heirs - what a blessing is ours through faith in Jesus!

## **Chapter 5 and 6**

### **LOVE IS BETTER THAN LAW!**

#### **STAND FIRM**

1) The theme of chapter 4 is bondage and freedom. Verse 1 here sums up that chapter - "Christ freed us to be free (he piles up terms to make his point.) So, having been made free, let's stay free, not allowing anyone to put us into some other form of slavery!" He warns against replacing slavery to sin with bondage to the law of Moses. Having been saved by grace, we don't need to live by the principle of law. It is a yoke too heavy for anyone to bear.

2) Paul is not here saying that a circumcised male cannot be saved, or that if a saved male becomes circumcised, he is suddenly lost. He is speaking of circumcision as a symbol of one saying that he is going to add obedience to the law to faith in Christ for salvation. If I add anything to Christ, then I am not fully trusting Him. Dr. McGee calls circumcision "the badge of the law." The only badge we wear is the "badge of faith."

3) The law is a unit, bound together as a whole. James reminds us that breaking it in just one point is breaking the whole law. If a man chooses to wear the "badge of the law" by being circumcised, he is taking upon himself a weighty obligation - that of obeying the entire law! This legal code carries with it a curse for disobedience!

4) When any person attempts to be justified by law-works, he is coming to the Lord in his own merit, and not in the merit of Christ. This is an abomination to God, a great offense to His gracious plan and offer of life through the finished work of Christ. Such a one makes Christ void, and he falls from the *grace way* of salvation back to Satan's old *human-effort-and-merit way* of salvation - which is no way at all. "*No man cometh to the Father but by me.*"

5) The *summum bonum*, Latin for "the highest good," is to be clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Man, whose nature it is to try for heaven by effort, gets a new hope of that heaven when he trusts the Lord Jesus Christ. He comes to understand that the Spirit applies the righteousness of Christ to those who believe in Him as Savior. This new hope is so exciting, such a release from the burden of self-effort, that he eagerly awaits its full revelation.

6) He begins here with the true sphere of salvation - "in Christ Jesus." In Him it is not a matter of whether you were born a Jew, or you became a Jewish proselyte through circumcision. At the day's end the thing that matters is whether you have trusted Christ. And if you have, your life will show it by becoming a life of Christian love.

#### **SEE CLEARLY**

7) Paul often used metaphors from the games - wrestling, running, boxing. The Galatians were running well, the race seemed to be theirs, but someone (singular) had cut in on them, tripped them up, broken their stride. They were now in danger of losing by pursuing law-works rather than God's "by-grace-through-faith" method.

8) Paul knew, and he wanted his readers to know, that the God Who called them by grace wouldn't then give them a message of carrying on by law. The character of the (false) message showed that it didn't have its source in God. He is Truth. He would not throw His own into confusion by sending them mixed messages like this.

9) Someone might argue that this is a small thing, not worth getting so bothered about. Paul uses an old proverb to illustrate the danger of letting even a little untruth in. Why, just a few false teachers and false teachings could create major problems in the churches. Truth sets us free; error will lead men into bondage. Choose the truth.

10) Two strong statements: 1) Paul was confident that the Galatians would return to the truth (real believers always do). 2) He was equally sure that the leader of the false teachers would get his come-uppance. This was not a personal thing; Paul didn't even know who he was. Recall, he used strong language in 1:8, 9 about false teachers.

11) As is often the case with wrong thinkers, they had leveled false charges against Paul - that he was still preaching circumcision. He did circumcise Timothy (Acts 16:3), but only to open ministry doors for him with Jews. He refused to circumcise Titus when it was an issue of law versus grace for salvation. Further, if he **was** adding circumcision to grace, why were the Jews persecuting him? They would have loved it for Paul to so preach.

12) What a strong sentiment! Paul is angry with these false teachers, to say the least. He wished that those who were troubling his young converts would not just receive the minor surgery of circumcision, but that they would get the major surgery that would leave them impotent eunuchs - impotent to further mislead young believers!

#### **SHOW LOVE**

13) Some charge that Paul's "grace gospel" leads people away from right living and into sin. They suggest that **liberty** produces **libertines**. Paul preempts such a charge by reminding his readers not to think that liberty allows them to live lawlessly. Rather it calls upon them to put others ahead of themselves in service prompted by love.

14) In Romans 13:8 Paul wrote, "*he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law.*" Jesus agreed that the law as a whole was summarized in love. The first table of the law is about loving God; the second, about loving man. Grace produces a desire to serve God and man in love, thus enabling us not to do anything that would violate law principles.

15) Ephesians 4:16, 1 Corinthians 8:1 connect "love" and "building others up." The divisions that had apparently crept in because of false teaching were not serving to promote love and edification. Our passage closes with Paul warning of the destruction that would come if the Galatians didn't "get their act together." LOVE IS BETTER THAN LAW!

*In this passage the terms "flesh" and "spirit" are set in opposition to each other. When we humans are born, we have a body and a soul - better said, we ARE a soul that LIVES in a body. Our only nature is a sinful nature. It has no capacity for anything good - only for sinning. When we are "born again," we receive a new nature. The spirit of man which died in Adam is now made alive in Christ. Our new nature knows only how to do good; it is not capable of sinning. And the two natures are immediately at war with one another! Only when we go to be with Jesus (or when He comes to take us home) will that struggle be over! Our now-alive spirit is enabled by the Holy Spirit to take us on the path of becoming like Jesus - we call that process "sanctification." He produces in us fruit that makes us more like Jesus even here in this life. That process will only be complete when we get to heaven by death or through the rapture of the church.*

16) The great command for the believer is found in this present imperative verb, "walk." We are to "keep on letting the Holy Spirit guide our walk;" that path will enable us to utterly avoid gratifying the sinful nature. It takes life from the Spirit for us to overcome death by the flesh. On a great oak tree you will notice that many dead leaves hang onto lower branches all through the winter. It takes the life force that begins to flow through the tree in the Spring to make them fall off. Some sins are like that - they only give way to the life of the Spirit in us.

17) Again, every believer possesses two contrary natures: one is sinful, received at birth; one is holy, received at the new birth. Each works to subdue, to block the other. This conflict between the natures is why we struggle in our souls with sin. Do not despair at the struggle - it is evidence that you belong to God through faith in Christ.

#### **PRESS ON IN THE SPIRIT**

##### **PRODUCT OF THE SPIRIT**

18) Being "under the law" spells defeat, bondage, and spiritual impotence. It is the Spirit Who sets us free. What a joy it is when the Spirit blesses us with His good influence that at once begins to crush our sins and empower us to lives of holiness. The initial "if" here should be read "since." It is a fact that believers are led by the Spirit.

19), 20), 21) Man, dead in sin, is still able to work. Paul describes the flesh's works, that is what is produced by our sinful natures. These "works of the flesh" are evident, manifest - they cannot be easily hidden! They include: **sexual immorality** (the original word here gives us our "porn" words) - any form of illicit sexual activity (and the only proper, Biblical place for sex is between a man and a woman in the bonds of marriage); **impurity** - moral uncleanness in mind, speech, and action;

**sensuality** - open, brazen, shameless indecency; **idolatry** - this is the worshiping of tangible representations of pagan gods (covetousness is also idolatry, Colossians 3:5); **sorcery** - the word gives us our word "pharmacy," perhaps including the drug culture; **enmity** - malignity in the heart; **strife** - factions resulting from hatred; **jealousy** - the resentment caused by wishing that what belongs to another was ours; **fits of anger** - outburst from smoldering envy; **rivalries** - desire and work to promote oneself; **dissensions** and **divisions** - men disagree, so we divide into groups; **envy** - desire to possess what belongs to another; **drunkenness** - intoxication from drinking much alcohol; **orgies** - carousings associated with drink. "**And the like**" - this is only a representative list; there are more. These things are characteristic of people who are headed for hell. So we must walk in the Spirit!

22), 23) "But" suggests a stark contrast to come between the acts of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. This nine-fold cluster of the Spirit's fruit should characterize the life of every believer in Jesus Christ. **Love** - not a feeling, but a decision, followed by action, to pursue the welfare of another, regardless of what it may cost, and without regard for any possible return on the investment; **joy** - not fleeting, circumstance-based happiness, but an abiding gladness because I belong to Jesus; **peace** - not just the absence of conflict or hostility, but a quietness of soul and a harmony with God ("**peace with God**" Romans 5:1) and being at harmony with the circumstances of life ("**the peace of God**" Philippians 4:7); **patience** - when provoked, I don't strike back, but I rather "suffer long" with adversity; **kindness** - I am benevolent, even to enemies; **goodness** - an upright soul, opposite of malevolent; **faithfulness** - reliability, doing as I should; **gentleness** - makes me considerate in discipline; **self-control** - mastery of self in the appetites of the flesh. No law can be made against any of these things.

### **PUTTING TO DEATH THE FLESH**

24) We are not compelled to follow the sin nature, for we have crucified it; crucified with Christ, my old man has been rendered inoperative; only in unbelief and disobedience do I give him leave to act. A man in a coffin has no passions or desires. We must reckon, consider, our old nature to be in such a coffin. The new man rules! This is very much like his personal testimony of death and new life in Christ, found in chapter 2 verse 20.

25) Once again the "if" should rather be translated "since," or "in view of the fact that." This is not a hypothetical statement, but rather a statement of fact. As children, we obey the parents that brought us into the world, or at least we should. Just as God's Spirit gave us life through regeneration, even so we should follow - "Keep in step with" - Him now. Again we are reminded of the similar means of salvation and sanctification. He gives us life, He gives us leading. It is ours to follow Him. "*Since we live by the Spirit, then let us also walk in the Spirit.*"

26) The fleshly walk, described in verses 19 through 21, will tend to conceit, which produces envy, strife, and division. Conversely, the Holy Spirit being present in our lives will produce humility in us, a trait which tends toward unity. The wise man, Solomon, wrote (Proverbs 13:10) that, "*By pride cometh contention.*" Paul taught us that humility brings unity (Philippians 2:1-8). The choice for the believer is clear - we must eschew pride and pursue humility.

### **PARTNERSHIP - HELPING THE WEAK**

6:1) In the life of the body, sometimes a brother falls into sin. The job of those who are more mature in Christ is to help that wayward brother to be mended. This must be done with great care, knowing that none of us are exempt from sin ourselves. We must lean on the Holy Spirit to enable us to not be drawn into sin ourselves. If the matter comes to discipline, we must remember that the goal of church discipline is restoration, not ostentation.

2) When we believers assist our weaker brother with his load, we are fulfilling Christ's law, the law of love. Love does not kick the wounded; it rather reaches down to them, offering a helping hand. This was how Jesus lived. This responsibility includes an ongoing assistance in walking aright. A restored brother may be a target for Satan, and we must endeavor to help him not return to the sin that made him fall. This is all part of the discipleship process.

3) Paul returns to the matter of pride, a man thinking he is more than he is. Such thinking is self-deceptive, and it is not born of the Spirit. A spiritual man knows his lowliness, his weakness, his nothingness apart from Christ. Pride is embedded in the hearts of Adam's race. We all capable of loving the sound of our name called in public; we can thrill at recognition for some deed done. We must fight the temptation to acts of pride and thoughts of pride throughout our Christian life and walk.

4) Pride looks at others and says, "I am better." The spiritual believer examines his own deeds, and he has some sense of satisfaction in what God has done in and through him. He does not boast about how he is better than others. Better to compare our actions to those of Jesus and know how weak we are than to compare ourselves with others trying to look good. If we are going to boast at all, let it be in what Jesus has done for us, not what we have done ourselves (verse 14).

5) In verse 2 a heavy, crushing load is to be shared. Here, a lighter burden is to be borne alone. Verse 2 describes teamwork. Verse 5 speaks of each man on the team fulfilling his own assignment. There is no contradiction between our bearing the burdens of others and bearing our own burdens. The word "burden" or "load" here comes from the verb which means to carry, to bear something.

6) Students are responsible to share with their teachers materially as the teachers share with them spiritually. This is in harmony with Paul's teaching elsewhere (1 Corinthians 9:14) that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

### **PRINCIPLE OF SOWING AND REAPING**

7), 8) The command is "*Stop being deceived (led astray)!*" They were being led by the Judaizers to add something to the gospel of grace; they must cease and desist from that! O, how certain elements in our culture mock God! They turn up their noses at God, defying Him and His eternal principles. Here is an eternal principle for us and for all of Adam's race, that of sowing and reaping. We reap in kind as we sow. If we sow to the sinful desires of the flesh, our harvest will be rotten flesh. If

we sow to the Spirit of God, we shall from the Spirit reap things pertaining to life eternal. Now is the time to sow, later is the time to reap. If we seek reward here and now, we shall have nothing in which to rejoice later. May we live life each day with this principle in mind. How blessed we would be!

### **PERSEVERANCE IN DOING GOOD**

9) Sometimes people say, "I'm tired of doing right. It hasn't paid off." Or, "I tried following the Bible, and it didn't work for me; I got nothing out of it!" Such is a sinful attitude. Now is not the time for reaping, and doing right should be its own present reward. Though it is certainly true that God showers us with blessings even in this life, we are not hirelings, and today is not payday. Yes, life can be really good now for the believer walking with God, but the best is always yet to come!

10) Acts chapter 5 showed the folly of "Christian communism." Those believers who sold everything and had all things in a common purse found themselves later needing support from the young, newly planted missionary churches. While communism always fails, a proper, love-induced sharing is commanded. Many opportunities will present themselves to us to minister to others in material ways. Those are important demonstrations of our love for Christ and for His body. Let us be faithful to share with the needy. Note that this is not a command to the state to take goods from some and give it to others. It is an appeal to the compassion of believers to open their hearts and hands to the needy, helping when we can.

*The closing here differs from some of Paul's letters, where he often sent personal greetings to believers by name. There appeared to be no time for or interest in doing that here. The gospel was the thing - it's simplicity and its purity. The Judaizers had challenged it and challenged him who taught it (Paul himself). The response to this affront must be strong and sure. So Paul stays with the tenor of rebuke and defense, which have characterized the entire epistle.*

### **IT IS HARD TO SAY FAREWELL**

### **CONCLUSION IN PAUL'S OWN HAND**

11) It was sadly clear that Paul had some vision problems. He often employed a scribe, and *amanuensis*, to take dictation, writing these letters to the churches and to individuals. Once in the letter to Philemon (verse 19), Paul took the pen and signed a promissory note to cover the debt of Onesimus. Some portion of this letter was hand-written by the apostle himself, saying, "You see that I write with such large letters." I am so glad that Paul wrote this letter! This teaching reinforces the truth of salvation by grace and through faith, as does the letter to the Romans (these were two of Martin Luther's favorite letters).

### **CONTRAST BETWEEN HIM AND THE FALSE TEACHERS**

12) Paul had known and would know more persecution for preaching this gospel of grace. It was repugnant to the misguided Jewish mind, and the persecution thus came mostly from his own ethnic people - the Jews. The Judaizers, attempting to avoid this persecution, were adding into Paul's gospel elements that might appease their Jewish brethren (according to the flesh, not brothers in Christ). Again, circumcision is mentioned alone as representative of the things they required of those entering the family of God. Let us never choose a path just because it is smooth going; let the truth guide us always!

13) The Judaizers were pretending to be something they were not - law-keepers. Their insistence on circumcision was to please those Jews from which they came, and to thus avoid persecution from them. They were neither honest in their Judaism nor authentic in their professed Christian faith. If they had been successful in persuading these Galatian Gentile believers to adopt circumcision as a matter of religion, it would be a feather in their cap. Then they could say to their Jerusalem law-abiding Jewish brothers, "Look, we made some proselytes from among the Gentiles!" That would be their boast to ingratiate themselves with the crowd back home.

14) But Paul would say, "May I boast only in Christ's cross - where I and the world die to each other." There I see depth of my sin and the height of God's love; there I find the only means of redemption, the finest model of selflessness to follow always. To those trying to have one foot in the new and keep one in the old ways, the cross alone was a thing of shame - circumcision had to be added. To Paul, who broke with his past rather than clinging to it, the cross was a thing of glory! The world and the believer part company at the cross, where each is crucified to the other. These crucifixions are complete and final (perfect tense verb). The cross is the watershed of Christianity, the line of demarcation on the new journey of faith.

15) It matters not of outward signs, of privileges of birth. What really counts is that in Christ I am a new creation. Circumcision is done by hands of men - only God makes a new soul - creation. The one thing is physical, the other is spiritual. Having been crucified with Christ, we have arisen to a new life. No longer does the past define us; our future is bright and it is with Christ. The world of men, Jew and Gentile, said "NO" to Jesus and placed Him on a cross. Should we then seek the approval of those who disapproved of Him? No, we should not; we must not.

16) What rule? That Christ crucified is the supreme thing; that a changed life through faith in Christ is the most important. That salvation is by grace, through faith, plus nothing! This was true for the Galatian Gentile believers; it is also true for those who descended from Abraham, Israel. It is just true! God's salvation is not exclusive, it is rather inclusive in Christ's death for all and the universal call to come to Christ.

### **CREDENTIALS BORNE IN HIS OWN BODY**

17) Troublesome individuals rob others of time and attention in ministry. They also burden ministers, exhausting them with extra efforts required. The weary apostle had a body scarred on account of Jesus. Those marks (stigmata) were like a badge of Christ's ownership of Paul, much as one would brand cattle. His multiple beatings, his being stoned, and other

persecutions he bore no doubt left many a mark on the beloved apostle. It is almost as if he is saying, "The work of the gospel is so important; let's stop these trifles and get on with reaching the lost and making disciples!"

#### **CLOSING BENEDICTION**

18) The epistle closes as it opened - wishing God's abundant grace upon his readers (and upon all who might read it after them, like us!). He does not lighten the mood of the heavy thoughts shared herein with a bevy of personal greetings - he just says "good-bye." To the peace and mercy wished for in verse 16, Paul adds a desire for Christ's grace to be with the Spirits of his brothers. Such grace is the first and greatest blessing, and the fountain of all others. The closing may be brief, but it is in no way lacking in depth of meaning. The word "grace" conjures up in the mind all the things that flow from this marvelous fountain! Some of these are: gladness (Acts 11:23), enablement to serve (Acts 14:26), salvation (Ephesians 2:8), ability to believe (Acts 18:27), justification (Romans 3:24), freedom from the law (Romans 6:14), the ability and desire to give (2 Corinthians 8:1), sufficiency in everything (2 Corinthians 9:8), and a great many more things besides these!