

## James Philip Bible Readings

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THE BOOK of GALATIANS

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**THE BOOK of GALATIANS**

This epistle has been called 'the Magna Carta of Christian freedom'. It is an apt title, since it deals with 'the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free'. Many scholars now think that this was the earliest of Paul's epistles, and was written to those churches in Asia Minor which he visited on his first missionary journey, the account of which is given in Acts 13/14. The problem it deals with is one which faced Paul constantly in his work of building the Church, but it had become acute in Galatia. False teachers were perverting the Gospel; as one commentator says, 'they wanted to substitute external badges for inward faith; legal bondage for Christian freedom; observance of practices for holiness of heart. They were trying to put the new, rich, fermenting wine of Christianity into the old and bursten wine-skins of Levitism. In their hands Christianity would have decayed into exclusiveness, self-congratulation, contempt of others, insistence upon the outward, indifference to the essential - a Christianity of the outward platter, a Christianity of the whitened grave' (Farrar). In face of such a danger, it is little wonder that Paul penned such blunt, outspoken and uncompromising words.



**1) 1:1**

In studying a New Testament epistle, it is advisable, even necessary, to say something about the people to whom the epistle was first written, and the circumstances and time of its writing. There are two views as to the date and destination of the epistle. Some think that 'Galatia' refers to the northern part of what we know as Asia Minor, and others that it refers to the southern part of that land, the Roman province of Galatia. This distinction is important for a number of reasons, particularly with regard to the date of writing, for Paul visited the southern part - Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, on his first missionary journey, in AD 47/48. But he did not go near the northern part till his second missionary journey (Acts 16:6; 18:23). Dependent, therefore, on which part of the country he wrote to, the epistle must be dated either shortly after AD 47/48, and therefore his earliest epistle after he had visited the northern regions.

One or two considerations help us to solve this question. The first is this: we know that the great controversy raging in the epistle has to do with the Jewish legalisers - the Judaisers, as they were called, that is, those who maintained that to be a good Christian one had also to be a good Jew, observing the Jewish law - who were adding 'conditions' to God's free salvation, and saying 'Except ye be converted after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved'. We know that this very major issue came up for discussion in AD 49 in Jerusalem (cf Acts 15). Here, in the epistle to the Galatians, Paul is writing about this very subject. But he does not even mention the decree promulgated by the apostles in Acts 15; and this would surely seem to prove conclusively that Galatians was written before that decree was promulgated, that is, before AD 49. And therefore, also, the epistle must have been written to the south Galatian Church, to those in Derbe and Lystra, Iconium and Antioch.

**2) 1:1**

Another consideration in this debate is the fact that Barnabas is referred to in 2:1 as if he were known to the Galatians; and Barnabas was with Paul on his first missionary journey, when he visited the south of Galatia, but not on his second, when he visited the north. Then there is the question of Paul's visits to Jerusalem. The Acts of the Apostles record three visits, Acts 9:26; 11:30 and Acts 15, while Galatians mentions only two, Galatians 1:18ff and 2:1ff. It is generally agreed that Acts 9:26 and Galatians 1:18ff refer to the same event. Ramsay suggests that Acts 11:30 corresponds to Galatians 2:1ff, and that the third visit - Acts 15 - had not taken place when Galatians was written, and therefore Paul could not refer to it. It certainly seems inconceivable that the apostolic decree could have been in existence at the time Galatians was written, without Paul making any reference to it. This should surely incline us to believe that the recipients of the letter were the south Galatian people, in Lystra, Derbe, Iconium and Antioch. The appropriate section of Acts - chs 13 and 14 - should therefore be studied to provide the background to what Paul has to say to them in this epistle, for it is there that we are able to ascertain the nature and content of the message that Paul preached to them.

**3) 1:1**

It will be noticed in 6ff that Paul, in addressing himself to the Galatians, expresses surprise and dismay that they had been drawn away so quickly from the message he had preached to them. What was that message? We learn its content in Acts 13/14. Paul preached to them the life, death and resurrection of Christ, and forgiveness through His Name. He proclaimed the cross of Christ as the hope of the believer and the pattern of his life, and the anointing of the Spirit making that cross a life-transforming reality in experience. This twofold emphasis on the cross and the Spirit is in one real sense also the theme of the Galatian epistle: the cross as the object of the believer's hope ('The Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me'), the principle of the believer's life ('I have been crucified with Christ'), and the Holy Spirit as the life and power of the believer ('Walk in the Spirit' and 'The fruit of the Spirit...'). Now, when the devil seeks to do a work in Christians' hearts to hinder or even destroy their faith, this is the twofold attack he makes: against the word of the cross on the one hand, and against the grace of the Holy Spirit on the other.

In their defection from the truth of the gospel the Galatians had been beguiled into doing two things: they were disputing the Apostle's message, and they were challenging his authority as an apostle. The false teachers had insinuated into their minds that there was a distinction between Paul's message and that of the other apostles, and suggesting by implication that his authority was therefore inferior to that of the other apostles. It is this that serves to explain the tremendous thrust of Paul's opening words in 1.



**4) 1:1-5**

We have often pointed out that there is significance in Paul's opening salutations in his epistles, and that he generally contrives to say something pertinent that has application to the particular situation in the church to which he is writing. This is certainly true here, for he emphatically asserts his apostolic authority in 1 and his apostolic message in 3 and 4. No one could miss the undoubted ring of authority in the opening words, 'not of men, neither by man', or mistake the tremendous force with which he establishes his right to speak to the Church in Galatia. Perhaps his detractors were suggesting that while he - and Barnabas - had been commissioned by the Church in Antioch, Peter and the other apostles had been commissioned by Christ Himself, hence his commission must surely be inferior. But Paul will have none of it. Lightfoot says of the two prepositions Paul uses here - 'of' men, and 'by' man that the first 'denotes the fountainhead from which the authority springs, and the second the channel through which that authority is conveyed'. The true source of Paul's authority and commission is Christ Himself, not the Church in Antioch. It was the risen Lord, who met him on the Damascus Road, who commissioned him and sent him forth to speak for Him.

**5) 1:1-5**

The attack on Paul's authority was undoubtedly a serious one, but nothing could have been more calculated to draw out his hidden reserves of strength in defence of the true gospel. The common phrase 'defender of the faith' surely comes into its own in this epistle! Not that Paul is on the defensive merely. On the contrary, he vindicates his apostleship, magnificently attacking dangerous evils in his concern to maintain the purity of his gospel. Whence, then, was his authority? The answer to this question lies in the fact that he was a chosen vessel unto Christ, and captive to the Word of God. We have only to read the story of his conversion on the Damascus Road to realise that here was a man apprehended by the gospel, and aware of the totality of its demands on him ('Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?'), and utterly yielded to the divine will. It is when a man is thus separated unto the gospel of God that authority is conferred on him. God sets His own seal upon all he says and does in an unmistakable fashion. This is one of the inestimable rewards of obedience, and nowhere is it seen more strikingly than in Paul. In spite of themselves, men were obliged to pay heed to him.

**6) 1:1-5**

It might be said that the teaching in Galatians centres on two considerations: the work of Christ for us, and the work of the Spirit in us. These Paul deals with in order, and first of all brings his readers face to face with the central truth of the gospel, and that which makes it a gospel - the death of Christ (4). This is significant, in view of the situation he was writing to deal with in Galatia. The enemies of the gospel were insisting that the works of the law were necessary to salvation, and this to Paul was 'another gospel' (6) which was not a gospel, and was to be condemned. Thus speedily does he turn their thoughts from their own works to the 'finished work' of Christ.

There are two things to note in 4: the meaning of Christ's death, and the effects of it. There can be little doubt that the aspect of His death that Paul has in mind here is that which brings about our justification. He is concerned, against the enemies of the faith, to establish that justification is by faith in Jesus' blood, and not by the works of the law. This he expounds more fully in the latter part of chapter 2; here, however, he simply states what we are used to call the substitutionary work of Christ on the cross - 'He gave Himself for our sins'. The New Testament writers are never tired of turning to this glorious theme; again and again it appears, and one can sense something of the awe that steals over them as they write. Nor should this surprise us, for truly to understand the implications of that 'aweful' transaction, in which He stood in for us, taking upon Him what was ours - all the infinite liabilities due to us because of our sin - in order to bestow upon us what was His - and at what sacrifice and cost - is not this something to fill our hearts with wonder and reverent fear? Let us steal away into a secret place, and ponder these tremendous words: He gave Himself - for us!

**7) 1:1-5**

The second point about the death of Christ in 4 is the effect it produces in those that put their trust in Him. They are 'delivered from this present evil world'. The word of the cross is the power that leads men into the liberty of the gospel, and that in two ways, negatively and positively. In the negative sense, it effects a separation from the world. It is necessary for us to see that being a Christian involves a definite stand on this matter. For us the alternatives are: Christ or the world, and the issue is clear-cut. As disciples of Christ we are in the world, but not of it. Indeed, the Christian calling is to 'other-worldliness'. We are pilgrims and strangers on the earth. To use J.B. Phillips' words in his preface to 'Letters to Young Churches', we must train ourselves 'not to be 'taken in' by this world, not to give our hearts to it, not to conform to its values, but to remember constantly that we are only temporary residents and that our rights of citizenship are in the unseen world of Reality.'

But this is never to be understood as a kind of escapism. The fact is, as one notable scholar once pointed out, the Church has never so dominated the world as when it has taken nothing to do with the world. Not only so: 'out of this world' means for the Christian out of its limitations and restrictions. To be delivered from this present evil world is to be set free, to be rescued from the 'parochialism' of this world, and brought into truly heroic, adventurous living. This is the paradox of the Christian gospel: the cross - symbol of suffering, death and negation - sets men free into glorious liberty, into largeness and breadth of vision. In the Christian life, we die to Live!

**8) 1:1-5**

Let us consider this whole question of 'the world' once again. The word is perhaps more accurately rendered 'age', and it has the force and connotation of 'world-order'. Scripture teaches that this age, or 'world-order' is under the domination of Satan, the prince of this world. The 'world' is therefore a highly infected entity, and a calculated 'risk' for all whom it touches. When the Scriptures speak of salvation, they speak in terms of those that are saved as being translated out of this evil world-system into another world, viz. the kingdom of God, or the 'age to come' - translated not in a physical or geographical sense, for the Christian has to live the life of the age to come in this old order which we call 'the world', but in a spiritual sense (cf Colossians 1:13). As believers, therefore, we are called to live the life of the age to come in this present age. All this has considerable implications. We do not 'belong' to this world. We are no longer part of it. Our citizenship is in heaven.

One of the references this has - and, so far as Galatians is concerned, it may be meant to be the primary reference - is that, being delivered from this present age with all its evil, we are delivered out of the sphere in which law operates. For law belongs to the old order; it 'came in' because of sin. In the new order, there is only one consideration: the life of the Spirit. This has important implications as we shall see in later Notes, in understanding the nature of 'law', and its place in the Christian scheme of things....

But - living the new life in the context of the old order - this means that it is not automatic, but involves taking a stand on the subject of the 'world', and a definite attitude to it.

**9) 1:6-9**

These words breathe a spirit of fierce intolerance that seems very strange to a generation brought up to believe that to be tolerant is an indispensable mark of true enlightenment in things spiritual. But intolerance is an essential ingredient of the gospel, as the following stirring words by Dr James Denney show - and we can think of no apter comment on the passage than this - 'Neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament has any conception of a religion without this intolerance.... If God has really done something in Christ on which the salvation of the world depends, and if He has made it known, then it is a Christian duty to be intolerant of everything which ignores, denies or explains it away. The man who perverts it is the worst enemy of God and man; and it is not bad temper or narrow-mindedness in St Paul which explains this vehement language; it is the jealousy of God which has kindled in a soul redeemed by the death of Christ a corresponding jealousy for the Saviour.... Intolerance like this is an essential element in the true religion; it is the instinct of self-preservation in it, the unforced and uncompromising defence of that on which the glory of God and the salvation of the world depends. If the evangelist has not something to preach of which he can say, 'If any man makes it his business to subvert this, let him be anathema, he has no gospel at all.'

**10) 1:6-9**

Paul comes to the point here without delay. It is striking to realise that this is the only epistle in which he does not give thanks to God for his readers, and go on to pray for them (cf the other epistles' introductions, e.g. Philippians, Colossians, even 1 Corinthians, where there was much to concern the Apostle). It is a measure of how urgently he felt he should write to the Galatians, and how seriously he regarded the issues facing them. Paul is 'astonished': 'dumbfounded' would be a better word to express the strength of his feeling, combining astonishment with dismay at what had happened among them. 'So soon' may mean either 'so soon after your conversion, when you are yet young in the faith', or, 'so soon, in the sense that you so readily and so quickly fall from the faith after the temptation came from these false teachers, i.e. at the first breath of the enemy's opposition'. 'Removed' is in the present, active tense 'you are so quickly deserting Him who called you'. The word means 'to turn renegade against', and is used of desertion or revolt, in the military sense, or of a change in politics, religion or philosophy. 'Trouble' has the force of 'raising sedition', or 'shaking one's allegiance'. 'Pervert' means to reverse, to change to the opposite. The very words Paul uses show how seriously he regarded what was happening in Galatia. It is indeed a wonderful thing to become a true Christian - Paul's phrase 'called into the grace of Christ' indicates as much. What a beautiful phrase! It is like standing outside a vast treasure house, and the door opens and the keeper of the treasure says, 'Come on in'. But what a tragedy to be moving out of that into something that in its very nature is the denial of the true riches, something that, although initially it may seem to offer something better, is inevitably subject to the law of diminishing returns, and will in the end lead to poverty, barrenness and loss.

**11) 1:6-9**

It is possible for young believers to be drawn away in this way; Satan will see to that. Whenever a true work of grace is wrought, the evil one counter-attacks, and this is one of the ways in which he does so, introducing confusion into the young believer's life (it is not only young believers, of course, that can be so beguiled; older, experienced believers can also be drawn away from the truth). But we should note Paul's words: it was certainly a distortion of the gospel that had come in; but the resultant effect of this was not merely a doctrinal matter: they were drawn away not only from true doctrine, but from Christ Himself. And this is the seriousness of the situation. This lays a tremendous, awesome responsibility on those who are guilty of drawing people away from the truth of the gospel. It is well for us to remember Jesus' solemn words about it being better for a millstone to be hung around our necks and our being cast into the midst of the sea than that any of Christ's 'little ones' (young believers) be hurt or harmed. Viewed in this light, the strength of Paul's language in these verses does not seem misplaced or too extreme; indeed, he is simply echoing our Lord's own solemn words.



**12) 1:6-9**

Paul's fierce and uncompromising attitude in face of the threat to the Galatians' well-being is noteworthy. Twice, in successive verses (8, 9), he very bluntly puts the issues: preaching 'another gospel' - and this may be regarded as any wrong emphasis, or over-emphasis which leads to a perversion or reversal of the true gospel - deserves and will bring the curse of God upon men. In the first statement Paul puts it in a hypothetical way - 'If we, or an angel...' but in the second it is spoken of as having actually happened. It is no theoretical matter; nor is the anathema theoretical either, but solemnly real and factual. The implications here are important. Clearly it is the truth of the gospel that is the all-important thing. And no one, angel or apostle, is exempt from the anathema if he departs from that truth. Apostolic office will not safeguard a man here, if he is unfaithful; not even angelic status will avail. As Cole puts it (in the Tyndale Commentary): 'The outward person of the messenger does not validate his message; rather, the nature of the message validates the messenger.' But why an 'angel from heaven'? Perhaps what is in Paul's mind is the Jewish belief that the law was given through angelic mediators at Sinai, and the legalists had stressed the validity of keeping the law because of this. On the other hand, there may be something in his mind like the reference he makes in 2 Corinthians 11:14 to the devil appearing as an angel of light. This last may be very significant; for, of course, it is possible to be led astray by a strong personality, who 'impresses' and 'deceives' the elect into 'believing a lie'. The touchstone must always be the biblical 'kerygma', the apostolic gospel; and it is significant that in this epistle Paul underlines its main thrust quite unmistakably: justification by grace, through faith (1:4); identification with Christ in His death and resurrection (2:20); the glorious liberty of the children of God (5:1); the fruit of the Spirit (5:22, 23). This is the criterion by which to judge whether teaching is wrong, unbalanced or heretical.

**13) 1:6-9**

Intolerance, then, is an essential ingredient of the apostolic gospel. But, that being insisted upon, two other things must be said: the first is that intolerance of anything that denies the gospel is not to be confused with intransigence and bigotry with regard to, for example, methods. It is one thing to insist on the necessity of conversion, but another to insist in a bigoted manner that conversion must be of a certain kind! We must learn to distinguish things that differ. Secondly, we must learn the distinction between faithfulness to the gospel on the one hand and offensiveness on the other. Intolerance of error can be expressed - and needs to be! - in the most courteous of ways, and with grace. Firmness of conviction is not the same as boorishness and fanaticism. We read recently a notable expression of this in an American Presbyterian Journal. The quotation is well worth pondering! 'One of these days, Presbyterians are going to realise that the Reformed Faith stands before the Church and the world with its arms open, not with its arms folded across its chest. When that day comes, there'll be a great renewal within the kingdom'. That has surely something very pertinent to say to us!

**14) 1:10-12**

The meaning of 10 is not immediately apparent, and Paul's words here need some thought. Commentators think that what lies behind them is that the Jewish legalists, his enemies, had been accusing him of being a temporiser, a man-pleaser, misunderstanding some acts or attitudes of his on previous occasions, and had charged him with changing his message to suit the company he was in (perhaps his attitude to circumcision was a case in point - cf Galatians 2:3, as contrasted with Acts 16:3, and the seeming discrepancy and inconsistency involved). Well, says Paul, in writing as I now do, with such forthright condemnation and anathemas, do I sound as if I were a man pleaser? Does the tone of what I am saying suggest that I am sitting on the fence, or that I am the kind of person that would compromise? In fact, there was nothing inconsistent in his behaviour and attitudes; it is simply that when principle was at stake, Paul was utterly implacable against anything that deviated from the faith once delivered to the saints, but when principle was not at stake, he showed a forbearance and grace that made him prepared to go to almost any lengths to accommodate the viewpoint of others. The two attitudes are neither incompatible nor inconsistent, but part and parcel of the true Christian attitude. It is only the legalistic mind that cannot appreciate the difference between them.

**15) 1:10-12**

It will be remembered that in 1, Paul asserted the divine origin of his apostolic commission, now in 11 and 12 he proceeds to assert the origin of the message he preached. Neither commission nor message came from man, but from God. Here he explains how that message could have come from no one but God, and he does so by giving, from this point onwards to the end of chapter 2, a historical retrospect of his career, proving - as one of the commentators points out - by an exhaustive process the thesis with which he starts, that the doctrine he taught comes from a divine source and possessed the divine sanction. My doctrine is not human, he exclaims, but divine. It could not be otherwise, for (a) I did not learn it in my youth - very much the contrary, 13, 14; (b) I did not learn it at my conversion, for I went straight into the desert to wrestle with God, 15-17; (c) I did not learn it on my first visit to Jerusalem, for then I saw only Peter and James, and that only for a short time, 18-24; (d) I did not learn it on my later visit, for then I dealt with the apostles on equal terms and was fully and freely acknowledged by them as the apostle to the Gentiles, 2:1-10); (e) I openly rebuked Peter for seeming to withdraw the support he had accorded me, 2:11-14. Thus does Paul establish the fact that this commission was given directly by God, and it is useful for us to realise, as we study his words, that this is the context in which he gives us the account of his conversion which occupies this portion of the epistle.

**16) 1:13-16**

This tremendous statement about Paul's conversion will repay careful study. In its simple dignity and profound theology it could scarcely be matched. The contrast is made between what he once was, and what by grace of God he became. In the first place he acknowledges the sovereignty of God in his salvation. 'It pleased God', he says, 'to reveal His Son in me'. We must recognise that salvation is never a 'foregone conclusion' for any man. 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy', says the Lord, and Paul humbly acknowledges the sovereignty of the hand that touched him. Secondly, he realises, looking back on his experience, that the Lord had separated him unto Himself (for so it ought to be understood) from his mother's womb. Not merely God's sovereignty, but His sovereign electing grace is in his thoughts. It is all the more wonderful and awesome to think that all during his earlier days of bitter persecution of the Church (13, 14) he was nevertheless a chosen and separated vessel unto God. How patient and forbearing is our God! Next, we must note that Paul speaks of God revealing His Son in him - not merely to him, but in him. True revelation never stops outside a man, it enters into him. And with none was this more true than with Paul, for he became a repository of grace and salvation for the Gentile world. In 2 Corinthians 4 he speaks of having the treasure of the gospel revelation in an earthen vessel, and this is surely what he means in 16 by the phrase, 'that I might preach Him among the heathen'. Such was the Apostle's experience of conversion, and it is still the truest and deepest way of describing and understanding our own.

**17) 1:17-24**

We have already noted Paul's reason for stressing that he had but little intercourse of any kind with the other apostles. He wishes to make it clear that he had received his gospel by direct revelation from Christ Himself, not from any man. In doing so, however, he reveals something that is of the first importance in spiritual life. Following his conversion he withdrew - or, rather, was withdrawn - from the public gaze. A careful examination of the references in Acts and in this epistle to his visits to Jerusalem makes it seem likely that the reference in 2:1 to 'fourteen years' is to a time following his conversion and before he was commissioned as a missionary of the gospel in Acts 13:1ff. What is the explanation of this lapse of years, exciting and critical years in the young Church's life which one would have thought needed a man of Paul's calibre? The simple answer is: God is not in a hurry; He takes time to prepare His vessels. The pattern in Paul's life is plain: he had to think out the implications of the gospel that had apprehended him, and this takes time, and intellectual energy of a sustained order. He also needed to unlearn so much wrong thinking in his past, and so many wrong presuppositions. There was so much to undo in his mind, before he could be the man God had called him to be. Above all, he had to get to know Christ, in the power of His resurrection, and establish His sovereignty in his heart and life. When he came forth from that God-appointed seclusion, he could say, 'To me to live is Christ'. But it takes time to come to that place; and, all too often this is what we have never given ourselves in our spiritual lives, and we need look no further than this for an explanation of our fruitlessness and barrenness in Christ's service. We have not given ourselves a chance.

**18) 1:17-24**

'We have not given ourselves a chance'. This is how we ended the previous Note. It is only too true that the Church's leaders have all too often tended to press and push young believers into service for Christ for which they have been in no real way prepared. It is little to be wondered at that they frequently come to grief, and fall away when the first emotional impetus has waned. It is very plausible to say that every convert must forthwith become a soul-winner - and doubtless there is a certain appeal and attractiveness in such an attitude - but we can only reply that this is not how the Bible says it ought to be. The fact is, if young people are driven prematurely into service before they have had time to think things through and become established in the faith, they may well become spent forces after a year or two, drained dry of spiritual reserve before their life's work is ever begun. This, surely, is a major tragedy. The Church of God is strewn with middle-aged and older Christians today who are spiritually nowhere, who 'used to be' keen and ardent in earlier years, but are now lapsed into a chilling mediocrity of spiritual experience, or even into shipwreck of faith. Why? Because 'service' - activity in gospel work - became a substitute for hard, solid thinking about the Faith, so that the past was never really unlearned, and the new life never really allowed to develop in its fullness. The foundation for a lifetime of faithfulness in service had never been laid. It was very different with the Apostle Paul!

**19) 1:17-24**

It is likely that Paul's sojourn in Arabia took place between 21 and 22. Some think that 'Arabia' refers to the desert land east of Damascus, but there is nothing to suggest that it was not much further south that he went. Indeed, it is highly likely that it was further south, for this reason: one has only to think of the strong element of symbolism in the Scriptures, and of the significance of places in the Scriptures to realise that Arabia in the south would have an especial significance for Saul of Tarsus. For Arabia was steeped in historic association for the people of God. It was there that Moses the man of God had himself been prepared and trained for forty years for his life's work, before being sent to Pharaoh with the command, 'Let My people go'. It was there that the Moses of the Old Testament saw the burning bush, there that the constraint of divine love came upon him. And it was there also that the Moses of the New Testament, Paul the Apostle, was prepared, seeing the glory, meeting with the God of the Bush, and being gripped by divine love. It was there that Moses received the Law; and there that Paul received the gospel.

But there was another significance in Arabia; for another Old Testament figure had frequented that place: Elijah the Tishbite. After the spectacular battle with the prophets of Baal on Carmel, Elijah had fled to Horeb (Sinai), and there the still small voice had spoken to him. God had spoken in the earthquake to Saul of Tarsus, on the Damascus Road, and now he needed the still small voice to minister to him, and to instruct him in the way that he should go. Alexander Whyte says, 'Paul went down to Arabia with Moses and the prophets in his knapsack, and came back with Romans and Ephesians and Colossians in his mouth and in his heart'.



**20) 2:1-5**

Paul's second visit to Jerusalem was marked by conflict and tension. This arose because of the insistence made by certain disciples (J.B. Phillips calls them 'pseudo-Christians') who insisted that Titus should be circumcised. Paul, however, refused to yield to their pressure, and insisted on the liberty of the gospel. Paul has often been charged with being a bigoted dogmatist (and this is understandable in an age when an uncompromising stand on anything is the surest way to become unpopular, and the only way to be acceptable is to subscribe to the doctrine that nobody's feelings are to be hurt, and harmony must be maintained!). Yet, as has already been pointed out, in Acts 16:3 the Apostle had Timothy circumcised. This is not inconsistency on his part, but rather discernment to see when principle is at stake and when it is not. On that occasion, principle was not at stake, and Paul was therefore prepared to go to any lengths to accommodate the Jews. But here, it was crucial, and Paul took his stand, as he says, 'that the truth of the gospel might continue with you'. When the sacred deposit of divine truth was at stake, then Paul was implacable in his hostility against anything that deviated from it, and no strictures were too strong for him to use in his determination to withstand error.

**21) 2:1-5**

The point about the reference to Titus is this: If the apostles, Peter, James and the others, had been in agreement with these Jewish detractors who were subverting the truth in Galatia, claiming that what they were teaching about circumcision was in harmony with what Peter and the others preached, then Titus must surely have been compelled to be circumcised. But, says Paul, Peter did not in fact demand his circumcision, for the simple reason that Peter did not consider circumcision to be necessary for salvation. But if Peter had insisted, Paul would have resisted to his last breath, as we may gather from what he says in 5. Thus ardently did he contend for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3), thus firmly was he set for the defence of the gospel (Philippians 1:7, 17). We have already underlined the centralities of the gospel as unfolded in this epistle: justification by faith (1:4), identification and union with Christ (2:20), liberty in Christ (5:1) and the fruit of the Spirit (5:22, 23). We could with equal force underline issues such as: the authority of Scripture, the reality of the eternal world, heaven and hell, the necessity of regeneration and conversion, and the expectation of the return of Christ; for these doctrines also are comprehended in the phrase 'the truth of the gospel'. They are certainly not matters on which Paul would yield in any way or against which he would countenance an attack.

**22) 2:1-5**

The importance of what was said in the previous Note may be further underlined. The kind of discernment shown in these verses by Paul consists in being able to see clearly the logical outcome of wrong ideas, and determining to withstand them. It is sorely needed in our own day, for it is lack of it that has led to the parlous state of the Church's life and witness. It is only when the truth of the gospel is maintained that the way of salvation can remain known in the life of the Church and in the experience of men. The undermining of the authority of the Scriptures in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the emergence of theological liberalism, with its optimistic interpretations of the nature of man, was undoubtedly responsible for the eclipse of the true gospel of grace in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the darkness and ignorance of masses of people in our land. Likewise, only when the truth of the gospel is maintained can the life of the Church be healthy and vital. Only thus is there an authoritative message, and to try to restore the life of the Church without recovering its true message is labour wasted. Furthermore, it is only when the truth of the gospel is maintained that the moral standards of society are kept on a high level. It is not possible to keep the social and cultural results of Christianity after Christianity has gone, and high-grade efficiency experts and commercial fund-raisers cannot replace the energy of the Holy Spirit. In view of this, what we really need today is some thoroughgoing intolerance and some forthright condemnation of the muddled thinking and dangerously misleading ideas that do duty in the Church for a gospel message. This might cause sensation; it would certainly be unpopular; but it might also clear the air sufficiently for an authentic word from God to get through to the nation!

**23) 2:6-10**

Paul is still concerned to establish his authority as an apostle and the validity and apostolicity of his message, and he maintains that those in authority in Jerusalem in fact recognised his ministry, and acknowledged him to be the apostle to the Gentiles (8). There is a slight suggestion of impatience in his words in 6 - as if he had found that their acceptance of him was grudging and unwilling. If this be so - and there is evidence elsewhere in the New Testament that it may well have been so - it is some indication of the rigidity that can almost paralyse evangelical orthodoxy when the question of recognising the ministry of a Spirit-filled man with new insights and a hitherto unrecognised emphasis arises. One can understand, of course, their hesitation in accepting this new voice; but were there none at Jerusalem sufficiently sensitive to the Spirit's intimations to sense that it was a voice speaking for God and in His Name? As it happened, that voice was destined to eclipse every other in that orthodoxy by the very breadth of its insights; but for long enough Paul was as one crying in the wilderness. God give us wisdom and grace to recognise divine authority ringing in a man's message when we hear it, and humility to receive his word even when it cuts across our cherished orthodoxy in its challenge to mind and heart!

**24) 2:11-12**

Here is a very striking thing a conflict between the two greatest apostles. It is something we must study with great care. Paul's point in mentioning it here is to show that, so far from needing to apologise for his faith, as one of lesser authority than the other apostles, he is so sure of his own authority that he can rebuke even Peter when he sees him to have slipped from the true message of the gospel. It is as if he had said, 'Does it look as if I were of less authority than Peter, when it is clear that I had right on my side in this issue?'. We have the clue to the situation in 12 and we need to get the situation and its background clear before we can see the force of the lesson it presents for us. It was the question of eating meats with the Gentiles - the old question of Jewish legalism and the gospel. The proper background for this is the Acts of the Apostles, where we see that in the early history of the Church all the converts to Christ were Jews. It did not seem to occur to them that any save those within the covenant should become heirs of God's blessing of salvation. And, in spite of Christ's commission to the disciples in Acts 1:8, there is no evidence that the Church thought in terms of an outward movement from Jerusalem until about chapter 8, when the disciples were forced out by persecution. It was one of the Holy Spirit's greatest tasks to teach the Church that the Gentiles were to be fellow heirs with them, and it was a lesson that the Church found exceedingly difficult to learn, and it was learned very slowly and unwillingly. This is the force of the lesson that Acts 10 teaches us, with the vision given to Peter with regard to Cornelius. In that chapter there are two points in particular to note: (i) the slowness with which Peter 'got the message' that Gentiles were to be included in the blessings of God's salvation. He needed a special vision from God to break through his spiritual obtuseness and bigotry; (ii) his unwillingness and 'grudgingness' in submitting to it when he did see it, as witness Acts 10:28. More of this in the next Note.

**25) 2:11-12**

Slow and grudging as he was, however, Peter did at last see the light, he did finally grasp the message that the Holy Spirit was intent on teaching him, and through him, the Church, his fellow Jewish believers. Indeed, the whole significance of Acts 10 lies just here, and the blessing that came to the house of Cornelius flowed from the fact that Peter's eyes had been opened to the strategy of the Spirit, and that he had submitted in obedience to this new light and had made this new advance in the things of God. Now, it is in connection with this, and in this respect, that Paul rebuked Peter. For on this particular occasion here, Peter reverted to his old position, and he took a retrograde step (12) by withdrawing and separating himself from his Gentile fellow believers - because they were Gentiles - for fear of the Jews. This, then, is the position. Peter had seen the light of the Holy Spirit's leading, and had, in Cornelius' house responded to it, and entered into fellowship with the Gentiles, but at a later time he slipped away from what he knew was commanded by the Holy Spirit. Ah, it is costly to stand out for the truth, against pressure. It is easier to compromise than to be true to the highest we know! For Peter, the temptation was there, and he yielded to it.

**26) 2:11-12**

There are several factors here. Why was Peter so slow in grasping the truth, and so grudging in submitting to it? Because it was going to be a costly thing for him to face the implications of this step and maintain the new position to which the Spirit was challenging and calling him. Was this one reason why he could slip back so easily? It is certainly true that when our commitment to any position in the spiritual life is half-hearted and fitful, trouble will inevitably come of it. But, to look deeper, it may be said that the real problem was that Peter's attitude was a flashback to his old weakness, his old refusal of the cross. He was simply unwilling to die to his stubborn, ingrained religious prejudices - and it is this that costs many a man the blessing of God in his life and ministry! There was a death that Peter was refusing to die. This is how it was with him in his early disciple days, and what led him to deny his Lord. And here, once again, we see this ugly, dangerous tendency re-asserting itself in the moment of pressure - the same refusal of the cross, the same cowardice which he showed in Pilate's judgment hall - and for the same reason: fear of the Jews. The old Peter gained the ascendancy, the carnal, the uncrucified man reappeared. In the deepest sense, therefore, this was not only a spiritual or doctrinal issue; it was a moral issue. Peter was defaulting in the moral challenge of the cross. He was faced with a new 'death', which he refused to die.

**27) 2:11-12**

The principle underlying this incident bears a very solemn and challenging message. The challenge of the cross is a radical one. It cuts across so many things, so many natural affections. It costs to remain true to it. It is easy, for heart's ease, to slip back from its total demand, and desire a compromise arrangement, and convince ourselves it will do - but the bloom of our spiritual life fades, and the edge goes off our witness and service. Let us ask ourselves quietly if this story discovers in our spiritual lives some area of compromise. Is there a level of living where once we were glad to be, costly as it was, and now we are no longer there? Does death 'work' in us now as once it used to work, when God used us and made us a blessing as instruments of His grace? What Paul said in effect to Peter, he also says to us: 'Get back, Peter, back to the cross, back to the highest you know, back to the place of fruitfulness'.

What a picture this is! Peter was at the centre of the work, the honoured - and used - leader of the Church at Jerusalem, and yet he had slipped from a higher position to one much lower. And only one man saw he had done so, and - at what cost and with what pain we can only guess - helped him back.



**28) 2:13**

The tragedy with such a declension as Peter's is that it endangers not only one's own life, but also those around us. Others may be carried away by our dissimulation. Let us see the principle involved in this. The challenge of the cross is radical. It cuts across so many things, so many natural affections. It costs to remain true to it. It is not difficult, for heart's ease, to slip away from its total demand, and desire a compromise arrangement, and convince ourselves it will do - but the bloom of our spiritual life fades, and the edge goes off our witness to say nothing of the chilling effect on the lives of others. This is a word to search us all. Have we compromised our position? Is there a level of living where we once were glad to be, costly as it was, and now we are no longer there? Why? What compromise did we make? Ah, however painful and embarrassing it may be, we should be thankful to God for a faithful Christian brother who is prepared to risk losing our friendship to rebuke us rather than see us living on a level less than the highest we know. In this sense the old word is particularly true, 'Faithful are the wounds of a friend'.

**29) 2:13**

Peter yielded to pressure - from a pressure-group in Jerusalem. One feels sorry for him. It is not easy to live with pressure groups of various kinds around one, especially if they are pulling one in different directions. A man could become a piece of flotsam on a changing tide if he gave way to all the different pressures. The pressure group at Jerusalem had a lot to answer for, in what they did to Peter. But the fact remains that he did not act according to conviction: he acted to 'keep the peace' - which is what Paul refused to do, when he was at Jerusalem, even for a moment.

There are different kinds of compromise that are deadly dangerous to the spiritual life. There is the intellectual compromise concerning which James Denney writes so trenchantly: 'How many are there whose minds have been secretly loosened from what once seemed convictions, who have been intellectually estranged from the gospel, who would create a sensation if they stood up in the midst of Christian worship and revealed their whole thoughts about God and Christ, about Church and Bible, about prayer and sacraments?' There is the spiritual compromise which draws men away from their first love, and makes things like the spiritual discipline of earlier days, and indeed the spiritual practice of earlier days, matters of embarrassment, now that 'other things' have crowded out the earlier priorities. There is the moral compromise by which standards and patterns of behaviour are acquiesced in, accepted and even taken for granted which, even a few years ago, would have been simply unthinkable. This is the kind of challenge that this solemn incident presents to us all.

**30) 2:14-21**

The important doctrinal statement contained in these verses is fundamental to Paul's teaching in all his epistles, and we must pay close attention to what he says. A single glance at the verses will show that the Apostle is dealing with the doctrine of justification by faith apart from the works of the law. But the impressive thing to see is the way in which he brings in another doctrine into the reckoning - that of our union with Christ in His death and resurrection (20), which lies at the heart of the biblical understanding of sanctification. How naturally - and inevitably - he passes from one to the other! Indeed, there is a sense in which he deals with them both at the same time. This does not mean that they are identified with one another, or confused - Paul was much too precise a theologian for that - but it does mean that the one is implied in the other in the sense that there is no such thing as an experience of justification that is not at the same time the beginning of sanctification. Indeed, for Paul, justification involved the death of which he speaks in 20: 'I have been crucified with Christ'. For Paul the faith that justifies is a faith with a death in it. Justifying faith also crucifies! The experience of being crucified with Christ certainly did not, for Paul, belong to a further stage of Christian advancement after justification. On the contrary, he teaches that crucifixion with Christ is that initial form of consecration which takes place when by faith we lay hold of the justifying mercy offered us in the gospel invitation. Until we understand this to be so, we shall never emerge from the welter of confusion that surrounds the present-day exposition of the doctrine of sanctification.

**31) 2:14-21**

We should recall what was said earlier about the kind of problem that had arisen in Galatia and elsewhere: men were saying, 'Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved' - i.e. the works of the law were being stressed as essential for salvation, and salvation was by keeping the precepts of the law. Paul's assertion throughout is: 'It is not something we do, that brings salvation, but something we hear (cf also 3:2), a hearing of something *Someone else has done!* This is the heart of the gospel. The Shorter Catechism definition of justification speaks of our being accepted as righteous in God's sight 'only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone'. The operative word in this is 'imputed', and it is a keynote in Paul's teaching. The word itself means 'to reckon', 'to make over', 'to transfer', or 'to put to the account of'. What Paul means is this: The New Testament presents two pictures, one of man the sinner, man made in the image of God, the crown of His creation, but now fallen into sin - a temple made for God but now in ruins. Man has sinned, and come short of God's glory, guilty in His sight, and alienated from Him. To appreciate this picture in all its seriousness - and man's predicament in sin is so serious that no amount of repentance of the promise 'to do better next time' could ever hope to remedy it - is sufficient in itself to make it plain that nothing man can do can earn him salvation. Without the second picture (to which we shall turn in the next Note) the situation would be utterly hopeless.

**32) 2:14-21**

The second picture the New Testament presents is of another Man, one who was all that man the sinner had failed to be. The testimony of God and man alike concerning Him was that He was sinless. For thirty years He lived in quiet obscurity, and at the end of those years divine attestation of the worth of those years came in the words, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' - i.e. 'acceptable to Me'. For three years He walked among men in public ministry, and at the end, once more the divine imprimatur came upon His life, on the Mount of Transfiguration: 'This is My beloved Son...'. All that man as sinner has failed to be, He was, in His perfect life on earth. He was accepted, and acceptable, to God, as we, in our sin, are not. But if what He was could somehow be transferred to us, and reckoned to our account - this would be the answer to our need, and we would then be acceptable to God through Him. But this is just what the gospel is about. Christ came to do this very thing, to effect this very 'transfer'. All He did, in His life on earth, and supremely in His death and resurrection, was for us. It was all accomplished in order that it might be made over, or imputed to us; indeed, it was in the accomplishing of it that it was made over to us. As one of the early Fathers put it, He took upon Himself what was ours, in order that He might bestow on us what was His. His 'acceptableness' to God was made over to man, and man's 'non-acceptableness' to God was laid on Him. As Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 5:21, 'God hath made Him to be sin for us...that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him'. And the Cross was the place where this divine exchange was consummated, for the Cross was involved inevitably in His taking 'what was ours' - our condemnation, our separation, our alienation, our pollution. It was a real transfer, indeed a double one, that was effected on the Cross.

**33) 2:14-21**

We may look at 'what was ours' in this way: There is a twofold involvement in our sinful liability. First of all, there is the punishment of the sin, and secondly there is the repair of the injury to the divine majesty. The first refers to the demand of law for the penalty to be paid for its infringement. But this alone does not 'atone'; something else is required. The injury done to the divine honour must be repaired. Holiness demands an answering holiness. 'Be ye holy, for I am holy', saith the Lord. A simple illustration will suffice here. If a thief breaks into my house, and steals a valuable painting, I naturally report the matter to the police, and after due investigation the thief, it may be, is arrested and charged, found guilty and sent to prison. The due process of the law has been carried out in his case, and the penalty of the broken law has been exacted. But that is not the end of the matter, so far as I am concerned. I want my picture back, and not until it is restored to me are things set to rights again. This is how it is with God: it is not enough that the broken law be vindicated in the punishment of the sinner; He wants His picture back too, His 'picture' of man made in His image, and only when He receives this can He ever be at rest. This is the significance of our Lord offering Himself 'without spot to God for us', as well as 'bearing our sins in His own body on the tree'; for in that offering, God was 'getting His picture back' - a perfect manhood offered up in death. This 'double' aspect of Christ's death is beautifully expressed in two successive verses of Philip Bliss's magnificent hymn, 'Man of Sorrows':

Bearing shame and scoffing rude  
In my place condemned He stood

- that is the idea of the penalty being paid

Guilty, vile and helpless we;  
Spotless Lamb of God was He;  
Full atonement - can it be?

- that is the idea of His perfection being offered to God in the place of all that we were not. This is what the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us means.

**34) 2:14-21**

Paul's doctrine of grace, however, raised problems for the Jewish mind. The Apostle's immediate concern here is with the law, and the believer's relationship to it. To him living under the law and living unto God are mutually exclusive. He dies to the law, as to everything else in the old life, in the death of Christ, and lives unto God, in the Spirit. But the Jews felt that dismissing the law from salvation was deadly dangerous and that it led to antinomianism - sinning that grace may abound (cf Romans 6:1). Their argument in 17ff is as follows (following J.R.W. Stott): 'Your doctrine of justification through faith in Christ only, apart from the works of the law, is a highly dangerous doctrine. It fatally weakens a man's sense of moral responsibility. If he can be accepted through trusting in Christ, without any necessity to do good works, you are actually encouraging him to break the law, which is the vile heresy of antinomianism'. But this, Paul maintains, is entirely to misunderstand the doctrine of free grace and of justification. Justification is not a legal fiction, in which a man's status in God's sight is changed without any corresponding change in his character. Indeed, as 17 makes clear, we are justified in Christ (not 'by Christ' as in AV), and 'in Christ' we are new creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17). We could put it this way: the picture Paul has of the gospel is like a parabola - the downward movement of Christ to the Cross, then the upward movement to the Father's right hand (cf Philippians 2:5ff). When this 'movement' touches a man's life and takes it up into itself, the miracle of grace takes place. He is incorporated into Christ - and into His finished work, in the sense that he partakes of its power and virtue. When we look at conversion in this way, we see that it involves not only justification, but also a being brought down into the death of Christ, and up into newness of life in Him. Thus, to have faith means not only to be justified, but also to be crucified - hence the tremendous assertion in 20. To repent, to turn one's back on the old life, is to die - and yet, it is not to die, but to live. We live, yet it is the life of Another within us - Christ's life, by the Spirit. This, we must surely see, is rebirth by the Spirit, the reception of the Spirit by which we become new creatures, who will not continue in sin.

**35) 2:14-21**

The new creation, then, is a sphere in which 'law' does not operate. Hence the emphasis on 'having died to the law' in 19. But what does the phrase mean? This speaks of what our forefathers used to refer to as 'the killing work of the law' - bringing us to an end of ourselves. On the one hand, it was through the law itself that Paul was led to abandon it and seek salvation in Christ. On the other hand it was through the law that he was brought to an end of himself, to the place of death to self - and this is where he found life. Paul's extended treatment of the law in Romans 7 is very important for a true understanding of his point here. There, he points out that the law is holy and just and good; but it becomes something else, through sin, namely, a destroying power, and it is from this destroying power that Christ sets us free, in His death and resurrection. It is not law as the expression of the character of God that is bad, but law as it has become, through sin a means of salvation. It is in this latter sense that it has an enslaving, destroying power. In the new creation we receive the law written in our hearts, and by this we fulfil it in its proper, original intention, by love. This is why we find seemingly paradoxical and perplexing references in Jesus' teaching - and in Paul's too - about 'keeping His commandments' (which is law). This general theme will come up again for discussion when we come to 3:17ff, with Paul's question, 'Wherefore, then, serveth the law?', and we shall say more on the subject then.



**36) 2:20-21**

The statement in 20 is a massive one, from any point of view. It says so much about the Christian life, and it can stand alone in its own right, apart altogether from its present context, although we best think of it in relation to, and as an exposition of, 19, 'I through the law have died to the law'. Indeed, the Reformers used to maintain that the true meaning of the words was this: 'That I may live unto God. I have been crucified with Christ'. And since 'living unto God' is but another way of speaking of the life of liberty that is in Christ through the gospel, it is clear that this statement about being crucified with Christ is the doorway into the Christian liberty.

The glory of the verse lies in the double paradox which lies at its heart: 'I have been crucified/I live' and 'I live/yet not I'. As to the first of these, this is what we must say: Sin has ruined man as made in the image of God, and made him a twisted, tainted, perverse creature. Since this is so, God, in redeeming fallen man, must do a new thing, and make him over again. He must destroy this tainted, twisted thing, and it is this destroying act that Paul refers to in the words 'I have been crucified with Christ'. He means that Christ, by His death on the cross, has done to the death the old, twisted, perverse life that has caused us so much trouble, and that in entering into this relationship with Christ by faith, he finds deliverance from the past. As he puts it in Romans 6:6, 'Our old man - the man we once were, has been crucified with Christ'. What we once were - by the grace of God, and in fellowship with Christ - we are no longer that! And here is the wonderful, paradoxical mystery: 'I' have been crucified with Christ, but a new 'I' appears to take the place of the old. We die to live; we find ourselves when we lose ourselves. We become our real selves when we are in Christ and Christ is in us.

**37) 2:20-21**

The second paradox in the verse takes us further: 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me'. The marvellous statement at the end of the verse, 'The Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me' bears witness to the substitutionary death of Christ for our salvation. But the substitutionary idea is of wide application, and it continues into the whole sphere of Christian life, not merely its beginning, at justification. It applies just as much to the life that we now live. It is very striking to observe that the words of the second paradox here, which can be translated 'No longer I, but Christ liveth in me' are paralleled almost exactly by Paul's words in Romans 7:17, 'No longer I but sin that dwelleth in me'. In the one, life is a tragic upheaval and disorder; in the other, indwelling sin is replaced by an indwelling Christ. And Christ is our substitute for life as well as in death. No longer that - with its dark shadows and bleak despair, but this with its infinite possibilities. The 'no longer I' means that our 'ego' is crossed out, done away with; but a new 'ego' appears in its place. However, we have to qualify that again and say, 'Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me'. That is to say, the life that we live in the flesh, taken by itself and apart from Christ, is, as it were, a dark, parasitic growth that is a parody of real life; but at last, this ugly tyrant that has 'taken over' our life, is dealt with and put to death, and a new power takes over. And the new life, which from one point of view is a total replacement of life by Christ, the risen, living Saviour, by His Spirit, is at the same time a true life for us. And for the first time, we become our real selves. We become peopled. 'The life that I now live' is a 'borrowed' life, borrowed and deriving wholly from Christ. This is what it means to live by the faith of the Son of God! Having taken our place outside of our lives, for our justification, Christ now takes His place within our lives, for our sanctification.

**38) 3:1-5**

With chapter 3 Paul passes from the autobiographical emphasis of the first two chapters - an emphasis he deemed necessary in order to establish his apostolic authority and message - to the doctrinal, and for two further chapters he unfolds sustained and impassioned argument in vindication of his position, and of the truth of the gospel. Throughout this section, then, there is the contrast between law and grace, between works and faith. It is clear that, for Paul, this is an issue which is quite fundamental. Not to be clear and sure in this, he means, is to be in jeopardy.

My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

This is Paul's central affirmation. This was the gospel he had preached to the Galatians and by which they had been brought into the kingdom of God. But now, these opposers had come proclaiming, 'Ah, yes, that is right and true, but in addition to Jesus' blood and righteousness, you need also circumcision and the works of the law'. Paul's concern is to show that

All other ground is sinking sand  
- circumcision, or any other aspect of the law.

The last verse of the previous chapter really begins the argument: 'If righteousness comes by the law, then Christ is dead in vain'; but the immediate background of 1ff may be seen in Acts 13, especially vv 38, 39. The gospel that saved the Galatians, that made such fruitful impact on their lives, called them out of darkness into light, and into the joy of forgiveness, was undoubtedly the gospel of free justification that Paul unfolds and insists on in the first two chapters. It is against this background that we look at what is said here.

**39) 3:1-5**

Paul's first words are remarkable (1). This, then, is how he considers and describes their falling away. They have been 'bewitched'. This is the nature of their folly. It is as if someone had cast a spell over them. The commentators point out that the 'who' in 1 is in the singular. Paul is not referring to the opposers as a group, but to one who was behind them. This could mean either their leader, the instigator of the false teaching, the leader of the pressure group who was behind the others, egging them on; or to the evil one himself, the arch-instigator of the harm that was being done. The two alternative interpretations are not mutually exclusive: if there was one ring-leader behind the trouble makers it would also be true to say that behind him was Satan, whose tool he was, either wittingly or unwittingly. 'I see', says Paul in effect, 'behind all this trouble the shadowy figure of the devil himself' (cf 2 Corinthians 4, 'If our gospel be hid...the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not...'). This blinding work of Satan can take place, alas, in believers as well as in unbelievers. 'Bewitched' is the right word to use, for there is a spellbinding power at work in this kind of error (of the deviationist sects - such people are simply not amenable to reason; there is a glitter in their eye, they have become obsessional in what they now hold, and reasoning in the Spirit is impossible with them). In contrast to this, one thinks of what is said in James 3:17: 'The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace'.

**40) 3:1-5**

The devil, then, is behind it. But that is not all. The result of the bewitchment, 'that ye should not obey the truth', indicates that Satan's wiles have a moral - or immoral - thrust and intent. Just as in the unbeliever blindness to the truth has a moral element of unwillingness in it, so here also, bewitchment, being led astray, has a moral issue involved: and it is disobedience to the truth. It should be understood far more than it is that obedience is a great and substantial protective to men's souls. Those that are determined with a full heart to obey the truth find that they are thereby kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. This is reinforced by what is said in the remainder of 1. Before them, Paul says, Christ has been placarded as crucified. They could not have missed the message, unless other, alien influences had been at work, encouraging, enticing them to close their eyes deliberately to the truth. The phrase 'evidently set forth' translates a Greek word which has three possible meanings: (i) to write beforehand (cf Romans 15:4) - perhaps a reference to the predictions of the Old Testament which Paul unfolded to them, in much the same way as Philip did to the Ethiopian eunuch; (ii) to write publicly, to placard, in the sense of displaying and setting forth for all to see; (iii) to write down something at the head of the list, as a priority (cf 1 Corinthians 15:3, 'first of all'). We may take something from each of these possible meanings, particularly the second and third, and in so doing we see just how inexcusable the Galatians were in their defection.

**41) 3:1-5**

Paul is very forthright and incisive in his dealings with the Galatians, and it is a measure of his urgent concern for their welfare that he should have written as he does here. He puts one question to them, which he regards as decisive in the whole matter: How, he asks, did their Christian life begin? This appears to be the meaning of the reference to receiving the Spirit. Lightfoot takes the words to refer to their reception of the gifts of the Spirit, but the words 'having begun' in 3 incline one to think that it is the beginning of the Christian life that is in view. Receiving the Spirit refers to regeneration by the Spirit (cf Romans 8:8). And we can see from Acts 13: 38 that the answer Paul expects to his question is 'by the hearing of faith', for it is the hearing of faith that is described in that passage, and the 'works of the law' are expressly there denied: justification is not possible by the law of Moses. If, then, salvation is by hearing, not doing, is it likely, or possible, that, a new life having begun that brings a man into a new order (2:20), that new life should revert back for its maintenance and continuance to the pattern of the old order, with its bondage?

Next, in 4, Paul appeals to their continuing experience. It is as if he said to them: 'When you received the Spirit by the hearing of faith, it was all so right, and the right patterns developed in you, and you suffered for the faith, and this was the mark of reality, that which proved your faith's integrity and validity. Is this all to be called in question and set at naught? A powerful argument indeed!

**42) 3:1-5**

In 5 a similar question is put to that in 4, but this time not from the point of view of the Galatians, but from God's, God's giving of the Spirit. The operation of God in their midst - was it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? A twofold interpretation is possible: either God's giving of the Spirit, and working of miracles among them, or Paul's ministering among them - i.e. 'Do you concede that when I came among you I ministered to you in the power of the Spirit? You are obliged to concede this, for you are the miracles that were wrought. Well, then, how did I do it - on the principle of works, or of faith?'

This is an important pragmatic consideration. Either way, it amounts to the question: Where is God working? Where has God worked in history? When has real revival come? Has it been through the message of good works? Or by the message of faith alone? What of the Reformation? How are we to explain it, except in terms of the rediscovery of the message of justification by faith alone? This is the dynamic that turned the world of the 16<sup>th</sup> century upside down. The history of our own Church in Scotland bears abundant witness to the truth of this. It is when the glorious gospel of grace has been obscured, and a barren religion of good works been substituted that the life and vitality of the Church has reached its lowest ebb. And the answer to this parlous state has ever been the recovery of a true message and a new emphasis on the cardinal doctrine of justification by faith. Church history has more to teach the Church than many are prepared to admit!

**43) 3:6-9**

Paul now turns to the Scriptures themselves to find substantiation for his argument, and chooses Abraham as an illustration. There is a greater significance in this choice than might first be realised. The pattern here is strikingly similar to that in Romans 4, where it is as if the Jews with whom he was in discussion were saying, 'We are suspicious of this new doctrine of yours, Paul. We stand by Abraham. What was good enough for him is good enough for us'. But this suits Paul perfectly. He proceeds to make Abraham a test case. 'All right', he says, 'take Abraham. What do the Scriptures say about him? They say, Abraham believed God, and it was accounted unto him for righteousness. Abraham was therefore justified not by works but by faith'. We should notice what Paul is doing in this: he is appealing to their religious past, to the spiritual heritage of their forefathers, to prove his point, and showing them, traditionalists as they were, that they were untrue to their own traditions. This is something that needs to be done, and should be done, in our situation today, when so many are clinging to the idea of salvation by works, in the mistaken belief that justification by faith is a new-fangled extremism held by fanatics, slightly disreputable and at variance with the best traditions of religious life in Scotland. Well, what do we think our forefathers did believe? This can be verified. Read the Westminster Confession of Faith!



**44) 3:10-14**

Having established the validity of his position on the matter of justification by faith by his reference to the Scriptures, Paul now issues his forthright challenge to those who trust in works. 'Do you really see the implications of your position', he asks, 'you who are resting on your works for salvation? Are you determined that justification will be by works? Very well! The standard is perfection. Cursed be every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them' (see also James 2:10). Now, it is no answer to this to say, 'Oh, but no one is perfect', for that is precisely the point Paul is making. Because no one is perfect, justification by works is impossible. God does not lower His standard for anyone. One would have thought that this much was obvious to any thinking person, but in fact it seems to be a source of almost endless confusion, and one can only conclude that an evil spirit has hidden the truth from them - which is in fact what Paul maintains, as we have already seen. It is the work of the god of this world to blind the minds of them that believe not. There is a word in Proverbs (14:12) which has a special relevance in this connection: 'There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is the way of death'. The way of life is by faith alone.

**45) 3:10-14**

It is impressive to see how Paul 'rings the changes' on the words 'blessing' and 'curse' in this chapter. One is reminded of the famous words of Moses in Deuteronomy 30:19, 20, 'I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life'. This is really what the Apostle is doing in this epistle. 'Faithful Abraham' are the last words in 9. The word 'faithful' is emphatic. As Calvin says, 'It is as if he had said that they are blessed, not with Abraham as circumcised, nor as endowed with the works of the law, nor as a Hebrew, nor as relying on his own work, but with Abraham who by faith alone obtained the blessing'. We should note also that the words 'blessing' and 'curse' are both used in a twofold way: the 'curse' is spoken of both in relation to man, whose it is, and in relation to Christ, Who takes it upon Himself. The 'blessing' is spoken of as God's, and Abraham's, and also as ours, to whom it is made over, so that there is a double divine transaction, in which both the curse and the blessing are exchanged, transferred. This is the force of the great word in 13, 14 about the redemption that is in Christ: He is made a curse for us, that the blessing might be ours, through the Spirit.

What many people do not seem to realise is that if justification is by works, then Christ died for nothing. His death is an irrelevance. The Scriptures make it plain that His death and resurrection were for our justification; but if justification is by the law, it cannot be by Christ, and therefore His dying was a mistake, and beside the point. It is hardly without significance, that those who do trust in good works for salvation tend to neglect Christ. He does not really come into their scheme of things, except perhaps as a Teacher and Example. They speak of God (sometimes) or of Providence (more often, perhaps) or of their Maker. But the name of Christ is seldom on their lips as it is on the lips of a true Christian. This may be a more searching test than many realise. There is something in the way a true Christian speaks the name of Christ that immediately marks him as His, and something in the way one who is a stranger to justification speaks of Him that raises a disturbing query in a true believer's heart. There is some indefinable note missing. He cannot be sure what it is, but - he wonders.

**46) 3:10-14**

Cole, in the Tyndale Commentary, sums up Paul's argument in these words: 'Why talk about Abraham when the real question is the law? Abraham stood at the very beginning of God's revelatory process. Centuries later God crowned the process by giving the law of Moses. It is by keeping this law that Israel looks for salvation. If God in His mercy used some other system with Abraham, that was because there was as yet no law to keep.... To them all this talk about Abraham was irrelevant to the main issue'. It is this that Paul decisively denies in the argument of these verses, the thread of which may be summarised as follows: (i) the way of salvation is by faith, not by the works of the law; (ii) the way of salvation by faith has always been the way, and it goes right back to Abraham's time; (iii) the way of salvation by faith, going right back to Abraham's time, is not in any way affected by the giving of the law. The law was a later addition, and could not have affected the promise, which was unalterably fixed, by covenant and blood. Redemption, in fact, has to be by promise and by grace, since the law cannot redeem. And Christ has stepped in, and stood in for us, to redeem us from the curse of the law and its condemnation, that we might have the promise of the Spirit, i.e. the gift of justification and eternal life. But in Christ becoming a curse for us, something real took place. A real bondage had to be broken, and a real price had to be paid. This is the meaning of the word 'redeem' - it means to set free by the payment of a price. That price was the condemnation and curse of God upon sin, and in paying it Christ endured in Himself the condemnation of divine wrath upon Himself.

**47) 3:10-14**

It may be helpful to add, as a final comment on this passage, two sections from the Westminster Confession of Faith (chapter 16):

'We cannot by our best works, merit pardon of sin, or eternal life, at the hand of God, by reason of the great disproportion that is between them and the glory to come, and the infinite distance that is between us and God, Whom by them we can neither profit nor satisfy for the debt of our former sins; but when we have done all we can, we have done but our duty, and are unprofitable servants; and because, as they are good, they proceed from the Spirit; and as they are wrought by us, they are defiled and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection, that they cannot endure the severity of God's judgment.

'Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them, they may be things which God commends, and of good use both to themselves and others; yet because they proceed not from a heart purified by faith; nor are done in a right manner, according to the word; not to a right end, the glory of God; they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God. And yet their neglect of them is more sinful, and displeasing unto God.'

**48) 3:15-18**

The language of the AV is somewhat difficult here, and the newer translations are more helpful. The phrase 'I speak after the manner of men' in 15 may be paraphrased thus (following J.B. Phillips): 'Let me give you an everyday illustration'. The point Paul is making is that once a covenant or contract has been legally drawn up and signed, it cannot be interfered with by any third party. Thus when God made a covenant with Abraham and his seed, it could not be affected in any way by the Law, which came into existence much later. If then the receiving of the promised blessing were now made to depend on the Law, this would amount to a cancellation of the original covenant or contract, which is both illegal and impossible. This is a weighty argument, designed not only to demonstrate the validity of Paul's doctrine of justification by faith, but also to prompt discussion on the function and purpose of the Law as such - hence the question in 19, 'Wherefore then serveth the Law?' The words in 16b are really a parenthesis. J.B. Phillips puts them in brackets, thus: (Note in passing that the Scripture says not 'seeds' but uses the singular 'seed', meaning Christ). Paul thus underlines the fact that the promise made to Abraham was fulfilled in Christ, and therefore Abraham's faith looked forward to what Christ was to do in the fullness of the time in His death and resurrection. Consequently it is only in Christ that we can know the blessings of the covenant, namely justification before God and the promise of the Spirit (14). Everything depends on a true relationship with Christ.

**49) 3:19-24**

Paul's insistence that the law was not meant to be a means of justification leads necessarily to the question as to what is its point and function. This is in fact one of the biggest and most important issues in biblical doctrine, and we must now come to grips with it. We speak of law and gospel, in that order; but this is not in fact the biblical order. According to the Scriptures, gospel comes first, then law. This is seen in what is probably the greatest expression of the law - Exodus 20, which contains the Ten Commandments. It is significant that this great passage begins with the words, 'I am the Lord thy God which brought thee out...' - that is gospel; this is followed by 'Thou shalt...' - that is law. The law was therefore given after the redemption of Israel out of Egypt. Next, we need to see law in its proper setting. The relation of Old Testament to New is not so much that of law to grace as that of promise to fulfilment. The Old Testament was a covenant of promise, not of law. It was a promise of redemption that was given to Abraham (Genesis 12), and faith in the Old Testament is faith in the promise, not in the law. The whole of the Old Testament is, so to speak, a journey towards the fullness of the time when God sent forth His Son.

This, then, is the basic reality of the old economy - a covenant of promise, and to this the law was added, as Paul puts it here, because of transgressions, that is, in connection with the fact of sin. What this means we shall consider in the next Note.

**50) 3:19-24**

It will help us to a fuller understanding of this question if we look at it in this way: God's supreme purpose in making Himself known to man, and in giving the promise to Abraham, was to rid the world of sin. God knew that only through a costly act of redemption could this be effected, hence His purpose was to direct the attention of men to a Redeemer. But men do not look to a Redeemer until they feel their need of one, and only when they are conscious of the reality and seriousness of their sin are they likely to feel this need. But sin blinds. Man cannot know his sin by himself; he is sitting in darkness. How then can a Redeemer be seen to be relevant, if that from which men are to be redeemed is not seen as the horrible, tragic reality that it is? Therefore the need is that it should be revealed to men, and therefore the law was added because of transgressions; for by the law is the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20). Hence the long centuries of preparation before the promise was fulfilled. The ministry of the law was designed to reveal man's sinfulness, and thereby develop the desire and expectation of a Redeemer. This in fact is the significance of Old Testament history. Down the ages Israel slowly learned the sinfulness of sin; hence, as time went on, the deepening yearning for One to come who would really deal with sin. And what is true of the divine plan of the ages is also true in the experience of individuals. This is the real place, function and significance of the law - not to provide a way of justification, but rather to bring us to a knowledge of sin, in order that we might seek the Saviour and find Him.

**51) 3:19-24**

One of the major problems, of course, in understanding the subject of the law of God is that in Scripture the idea of law is employed in a variety of different ways, and these we need to distinguish and clarify in such a way as to know which sense of the law is being employed or is intended in any particular reference. We shall therefore spend some time classifying these different uses.

We think first of all of the Hebrew word 'Torah', meaning 'law'. This is used in the Old Testament to refer to the Pentateuch (the first five books of the OT), as distinct from the Prophets and the Kethubim (the wisdom writings). It is also, however, used to indicate the whole covenant relation of the Old Testament, the sum total of all God has revealed to His people. Thirdly, it signifies (from its root meaning 'to direct') God's explicit claim, His direction for man's life.

This latter is expressed in a threefold way, in the civil (penal), ceremonial, and the moral law.

Next, there is the law of the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue. Then, there is the use of the law which contrasts law and promise, or law and gospel.

Then, there is the idea of the law which equates law with the Old Testament, the old covenant, in contrast with the New Testament and the new covenant.

Then, there is the idea of the law written in men's hearts. There is also the idea of natural law, in the sense of the order of creation.

Then, there is the law that 'slips in between' (Romans 5:20) - it enters, comes in between (Galatians 3:19) because of transgression.

Finally, there is the law conceived as a method of divine education, as Paul indicates in Galatians 3/4 in his use of the idea of tutors and guardians. More of this in tomorrow's Note.



**52) 3:19-24**

Having distinguished the various uses of the idea of law, perhaps we may be able to come to understand more clearly what Paul means when he uses it in this epistle, and what he does not mean.

We think, then, first of all, of law as expressive of the covenant relationship between God and man: 'I the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; thou shalt have no other gods before Me'. The law is therefore the expression of life within the covenant (not a method of entering into the covenant). God's will is to have fellowship with us. Since He is God, that will is expressed as a sovereign claim upon us. But since He is love, He desires that His sovereignty should be freely accepted by us. He wants to awaken a responsive love in us. Thus, the law, as God's explicit claim upon man, is to be understood in terms of the covenant established between man and God. When it is not thus understood, it degenerates into a righteousness of works. This is the distortion that Paul is battling against in Galatians.

**53) 3:19-24**

It is the idea of the covenant that, ultimately, excludes legal thinking. Law as the 'claim of God' becomes constantly misunderstood in legal terms, as something we must do; whereas that claim is not in the first place asking us to do something, but to be something: 'My son, give Me thine heart'. All God wants of us is that we should love Him. It is out of this that all 'doing' springs. This is the principle that needs to be understood. The biblical idea of covenant implies two truths: that God is free, generous love; and that He claims man for this love of Him. The first is God's gift, which man receives without any merit, towards which is only attitude is one of receptiveness. The second is God's claim on man. Man cannot receive the love of God save through being commanded to accept it, and in being claimed by God. God wants me for Himself. It is this radical personal commandment of love that has to be seen. 'Law' involves 'works', doing something definite; 'grace' involves an existence, a way of being, a being in the love of God, which issues in doing God's will.

**54) 3:19-24**

But law is also to be understood as a divine order established by creation. Law, in this sense, is something that God has established with man, and requires him to respect, and has to do with definite ways of human behaviour, as for example in the case of marriage and family relationships. What the husband owes to the wife, the wife to the husband, and what parents owe to children and children to parents - all this derives from the order of creation, which is the basis of all 'right behaviour', and is given for all time. It is not law in this sense that Paul is speaking of in Galatians or Romans; nor are we absolved from it, either by the gospel or any other consideration. In this realm, what is in view is not motive, but right behaviour. Brunner puts it (Dogmatics II, p.225): 'So far as motive is concerned, love, the love which is revealed to us in Christ, is all that matters. But where the material requirement is concerned...the norm is the order of creation.... The commandment of love never says what we are to do; it does not tell the Good Samaritan what he ought to do for the poor man who fell among robbers. All it says to him is this: Here and now do everything you can for him! What he has to do, he knows from observing the order of creation, and the sound human body. This he must observe if he is to do the right thing for the wounded man.' And these are the commandments of God. We are not absolved from them as a rule of life. Not ever!

**55) 3:19-24**

There is yet another distinction to be made - that between law as a righteousness of works and law as the structure of society. Law is built into the very structure of society as the way God intends that His world should operate - that by which (as the Reformers taught) the indirect kingship of Christ is exercised in the world, whereas His direct kingship is exercised in the Church by the gospel. As one scholar has put it, 'The State will never be governed by the Word - in the sense of the gospel - but exclusively by the word of the Law, quite simply by the Decalogue, which is not the actual 'Word' of Christ.' In relation to this, the same scholar says in another place, 'It cannot indeed be otherwise, if it be true that only in the Church, that is, in faith, the real word of Christ can be received, whereas in the State we have to take into account that many, indeed most, of its subjects will not know or will not believe the 'proper word of Christ'.' That this aspect of the law is a 'constant', and not changed one way or the other by the gospel, should surely be evident; there can be no question of this being superseded, nor is it in view in Paul's teaching in Galatians.

**56) 3:19-24**

Finally, we consider the purpose and function of the law, which Calvin sums up in the following three ways:

(i) The law discloses to men the righteousness of God, and in so doing convinces them of their sin. This is the 'accusing' function of the law. Through the law man must learn that he is a sinner, before the message of the forgiveness of sins can mean anything to him.

(ii) The second office of the law is, to cause those who without constraint feel no concern for justice and rectitude, when they hear its terrible sanctions, to be at least restrained by a fear of its penalties. This is the 'civil' use of the law, and it serves the purpose of God's common grace in the world at large.

(iii) The third use of the law is that it is a rule of life for believers, reminding them of their duties and leading them in the way of life and salvation. It is 'an excellent instrument to give them from day to day a better and more certain understanding of the divine will to which they aspire, and to confirm them in the knowledge of it'.

One supremely important consideration, however, underlined by Calvin, is that the law 'no longer exercises towards us the part of a rigorous exacter, only to be satisfied by the perfect performance of every injunction'. We are no longer slaves, but sons, members of a family.

**57) 3:23-25**

After our long discussion on the meaning of law, we take up once more Paul's argument with the words in 23, 'Before faith came'. Paul is thinking here historically and dispensationally, but what he says is just as true in the lives of individuals. The law has its 'killing' work to do in individual hearts, 'shutting them up' to faith, in order to bring them to Christ. This twofold application is relevant throughout this whole section of the epistle, right up to 4:7. The law is being spoken of here in a particular context and sense, of course. Paul does not mean that in the old economy no one was in the enjoyment of spiritual life and freedom - we know this is not the case, as Hebrews 11 indicates. But he is contrasting two orders of existence, and it is in this sense that he can speak of 'before' and 'after' faith has come. 'Faith' here could almost be taken as 'the faith', if we think in terms of the coming of the gospel. In this respect, 23 is best understood in the first instance in a dispensational sense - i.e. with reference to God's providential dealings with the Jews, as a people. The words 'shut up' translate the same word as is rendered 'concluded' in 22, and the same kind of contrast is made: 'shut up under sin' and 'shut up unto faith'. 'Schoolmaster' in 24 means something different than our modern sense of the word. It was used to describe the slave employed by Greek and Roman households to have general charge of a boy (age 6-16), exercising moral supervision and watching over his behaviour, and attending him whenever he went from home, e.g. to school. Again, the idea here is of the historical succession of one period of revelation upon another, and the displacement of the law by Christ and His coming.

**58) 3:25**

The implications of this verse are very considerable. In the absolute sense the work of the law is finished when faith is born, and this can admit of no reservation. That is Paul's point here. But we must be careful lest we assume that the sanctions of the law are thereby superseded and can therefore be ignored. On the contrary, we are by faith 'en-lawed' to Christ (1 Corinthians 9:21), and bound to a new obedience by a far more inexorable chain than before. Not only so. Faith enables us to honour the sanctions of the law, by virtue of the new nature that we have received in Christ. And insofar and inasmuch as we live the life of faith the law is unnecessary for us, for we will naturally keep it anyway, by virtue of the indwelling Spirit of God. But each believer is also at the same time an unbeliever ('Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief'), and since this is so, faith must pass through the disciplines of the law again and again - as often, in fact, as faith stumbles and falls and 'reverts', so to speak, to the old order. The sheepdog is, strictly speaking, unnecessary so long as the sheep keep on the pathway; but as soon as one strays, the dog is at its heels in a flash, to oblige it back to its proper place. So it is with the law and its sanctions. Ever and again, as we stray, it hedges us in, and leads us back, to Christ, to the place where faith once more makes its presence unnecessary.

**59) 3:26-28**

There are just as decisive implications in the closing verses of the chapter as in 25. We note, firstly, Paul's emphatic assertion in 26 of the primacy of faith, as opposed to works, in our becoming children of God. We note also the sequence in the expressions he uses in 26, 27 - faith in Christ, baptized into Christ, put on Christ. Faith in Christ incorporates us into Him, and also brings Him to us, and the new life we 'put on' is the outshining of the new life which has come to us, namely Christ Himself by His Spirit. The famous words in 28 are so well known and oft-quoted that we may miss their import in relation to Paul's argument here. His point is that in the new order of existence into which we have been brought by Christ, the distinctions that the legalists were seeking to perpetuate by their teaching and their prejudices, were in fact non-existent. In Christ Jesus we are all one; there is but one level at the mercy seat where we find pardon, and Jew and Greek find it on precisely the same terms. We should also note that unity is possible only in Christ, and when men are consciously in enjoyment of their position in Him they do not need to work for unity - it is a glad reality in the fellowship of the Spirit.



**60) 3:29**

This verse brings to a conclusion Paul's illustration drawn from Abraham's experience. It is useful to link it with 16, in order to see the line running through the whole argument. The important thing for us to see is the unity that this gives to the Old and New Testaments. We, through faith in Christ, though we be Gentiles with no connection with the Jews by birth or heredity, are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. Nothing could show more clearly the fact that from beginning to end the Bible, in spite of the amazing diversity of its writings, has one dominant theme throughout - redemption through Christ - and that however varied the surface-pattern may be, the real subject-matter is the unfolding and outworking of the divine plan of the ages, and the preparation for the manifestation of Christ as the Saviour of the world. To understand this is to hold the key not only to the Scriptures but to history and to life itself. One cannot but marvel at the grandeur of Paul's conception of the gospel. Well might he say 'This thing was not done in a corner' (Acts 26:26)! Corner indeed! It is the mighty drama of redemption played on the stage of history against the background of God's eternity. That is how big the gospel is!

**61) 3:29**

To sum up, then: in Christ (a) we are the sons of God (the reference in 27 about 'putting on Christ' may refer to the 'toga virility' which a Roman boy would put on when he entered into manhood, a sign that he had grown up, 'come of age'); (b) we are all one, and neither race, class or sex make any differentiation between us - all are equal in our need of salvation, in our inability to earn or deserve it, and in the fact that God offers it freely to us in Christ. As John Stott puts it, when we say Christ has abolished these distinctions, we mean not that they do not exist, but that they do not matter. However, in this regard, equality of status and differentiation of function must be carefully distinguished - in the body of Christ we are members in particular, each with different parts to play. Failure to recognize this distinction leads to endless confusion; (c) we are Abraham's seed. Again, as J. Stott says, the gospel relates us to God, to man, and to history. In Christ we are caught up, incorporated into the divine purposes for the world, into meaning (cf 1 Peter 1:18) 'ransomed from futile ways', from futility into meaning and purpose. To be separate from God is to be separate from meaning also, for He is the author of meaning. It is sin that robs life of meaning, and grace, in bringing forgiveness and newness of life, brings meaning and purpose back into life.

**62) 4:1-3**

Although the climax of Paul's argument is contained in the closing verses of chapter 3, he continues it here with a further and fuller explanation of what is involved in being a 'minor' as compared with adult freedom. Constraint and discipline and, in a sense, bondage, belong to the one, liberty and fulfilment to the other. The contrast is of course between the time referred to in the phrase 'before faith came' (3:23) and 'the fullness of the time' (4:4) when Christ came forth from God to redeem (this does not, however, mean that before Christ came there was no faith. The saints in the old economy had faith in the promise. This is not Paul's point here, he is simply concerned with the contrast of law and grace.

An intriguing thought arises here. It is often said that childhood days are the happiest of one's life. This is a statement Paul would call in question in the natural as well as in the spiritual life, for the reasons which he gives in these verses. Only people who have never experienced the fullness and freedom that years of maturity and responsibility bring to life could ever hark back wistfully to the so-called halcyon days of childhood. Childhood days are for children, not adults, and the poets are deceiving us when they encourage us to return to them in the hope of finding true happiness. To refuse to grow up is to retreat from life, not to find it.

**63) 4:1-3**

What Paul says here has a bearing on the debate between the weak Christian and the strong (see Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 9). If we apply these words to this problem, we shall see that the Christian who is in bondage to scruples and prejudices and restrictions is not - as he and others so often assume - the strong, mature believer, but weak and undeveloped spiritually, with little knowledge of the glorious freedom that is ours in Christ. The truth is that there are some Christians so much in bondage to an accepted collection of shibboleths (and this was the danger the Galatians were in) that they never get beyond the stage of being preoccupied with certain forms and patterns of behaviour which they magnify until they become for them the major, if not exclusive, issues of Christian discipleship. It does not seem to have occurred to them that there could conceivably be a realm of Christian maturity and freedom and 'grown-up-ness' in which such issues are not only less important, but even irrelevant. And it is a salvation all in itself to have the eyes opened to this realisation, and to be released from such restrictions and bondage. How free are we in the basic attitudes of our Christian lives?

**64) 4:1-3**

The 'we' in 3 should first of all be regarded 'dispensationally', i.e. as referring to the Jews as a people under the disciplinary jurisdiction of God, in the terms in which this has already been described. This, Paul means to say, is what it was like under the old order, 'under the law' - like the position of an heir who is placed under a guardian or regent for an appointed time, till he reaches a certain age, and 'comes of age'. He is restricted in his freedom and is virtually, to all intents and purposes, like a slave, though he be the son and heir. The word 'tutor' in 2 is different from the 'paidagogos' of 3:24. It is when the time appointed by the father comes to be fulfilled that a change takes place, and all becomes different. Then, it is no more servants, but sons (7).

But Paul also, in 3, speaks of being in bondage under 'the elements of the world' (cf also 9, 'the weak and beggarly elements'). What does he mean? Some have suggested that 'elements' here are 'elementary things', the ABC which we learn at school - that is to say, the Old Testament economy is thought of as the rudimentary education of the people of God, from which they advanced when Christ came. But, we may ask, is this a bondage? Hardly. And we should look more deeply for a more adequate explanation than this.

**65) 4:1-3**

The RSV and NEB render the phrase 'elements of the world' as 'the elemental spirits of the universe' (cf 8, 'ye did service to them which by nature are no gods'). But how can this apply to the law? Are we to think of the law as a tool of Satan? To speak like this is to bring us into the thought of Paul's remarkable words in Romans 7. It is true that the law, in itself, is holy and just and good (how could it be other, since it was given by God?). But, if we interpret Paul aright in Romans 7, what he says is that the law becomes something which by nature it is not, viz. an instrument of the devil, who twists it to his own evil purposes, in order to enslave and destroy man. As J. Stott puts it, 'Just as during a child's minority his guardian may ill-treat and even tyrannize him in ways which his father never intended, so the devil has exploited God's good law, in order to tyrannize men in ways God never intended. God intended the law to reveal sin and to drive men to Christ; Satan uses it to reveal sin and drive men to despair. God meant the law as an interim step to man's justification; Satan uses it as the final step to his condemnation. God meant the law to be a stepping-stone to liberty; Satan uses it as a cul-de-sac, deceiving his dupes into supposing that from its fearful bondage there is no escape'. It is from this destroying power - the elemental spirits of the universe - that Christ sets us free in the gospel.

**66) 4:4**

Paul has been speaking of the 'coming' of faith, and now he refers to that coming as being in 'the fullness of the time'. This is a tremendous word, in the conception it gives of a divine strategy in the gospel. There was nothing haphazard in the sending forth of the Son of God to be our Saviour. He came at the strategic moment, and that in several ways. It was the fullness of the time in relation to the Jewish people, after the Law had done its work of preparation in them, as Paul has already pointed out, both in the education of the people in the knowledge of sin, and in the preparation of the promised Seed. But it was also a strategic moment in an even wider sense. There was a preparation for the revelation of Christ in the ancient world as a whole, for that world had been opened up for communications and travel by Roman civilisation and law, and there were no language barriers. Never was the problem of communication more completely under control. Not only so: the ancient world was ready for the word of the gospel, for it was a world of despair and frustrated hopes, a lost world. One of its philosophers said of it, 'The best thing of all is not to be born, and the next best thing is to die'. It was a time of utter pessimism. The vision of the man from Macedonia, and the existence of the altar in Athens with the inscription 'To the unknown God' are eloquent symbols of its dark agony, and of the truth penned by Paul to the Corinthians, 'the world by wisdom knew not God'. From the world point of view, God's time was indeed the fullness of the time.

**67) 4:4**

We have already said that the teaching in this section of the epistle is true both dispensationally, in terms of the history of the Jews as the people of God, and also individually, and that the historical sequence, in which the Jews were 'shut up unto faith', by being 'shut up under sin', repeats itself also in the life of the individual, who is in the same kind of way brought to an end of himself, and thus to the place where he is ready and able to hear the word of deliverance and liberation in the gospel. There is a fullness of the time for man in that sense also. When we are brought to an end of ourselves by the work of the Law, or by other varied means - the disciplines, frustrations, disappointments of life - then is the time that God can meet us in mercy. There was a fullness of the time for the prodigal son, and it came when he came to himself; until that point was reached, nothing could happen to him in the way of a change of heart. As our forefathers would have said, the Law has its 'killing work' to do before grace can make alive. There has to be the 'shutting up' unto Christ before we can truly experience His grace. In this sense it is the poor in spirit - those who have been broken down and brought to an end of all self-trust so that there is nothing else we can do save put our trust in Christ - that are truly blessed with salvation. This is simply another way of saying that we must die in order to live (cf 2:19), and we may see here the justification for the kind of preaching that disturbs and hurts and wounds before it brings the healing balm of the gospel. These necessary preliminaries to the work of grace in the soul deserve more consideration than they have often been given, and the neglect of them may well explain why so much gospel work today seems to be abortive and non-productive. Suppose we have our times wrong?



**68) 4:4**

In the fullness of the time, says Paul, God sent forth His Son. There is indeed great drama in these words, for we must needs interpret them like this: in the fullness of the time, something happened, something decisive, unique, once-for-all: the intervention of God, the invasion from beyond, a special, unique visitation by which God has made Himself known in grace and mercy to the world. This is the central affirmation of the Christian Faith. Christianity stands or falls on this basic reality. Either this is true or the whole fabric of the Christian Faith falls to pieces. There can be no kind of modification of it, for this is Christianity. It is a Christian duty to be intolerant of anything that ignores, denies or attempts to explain it away.

Calvin teases out this verse into a whole theology, a whole Christology. The Son, he says, who was sent must have existed before. From this is proved His eternal divinity. He was made of a woman, because He put on our nature. So Paul means that He has two natures. Next, he says, Paul expressly intended to distinguish Christ from the rest of men as having been created of the seed of His mother, not by intercourse of man and woman. Calvin sees therefore a reference here to the doctrine of the virgin birth. This is not the place for a full discussion of the mystery of the two natures united in one Person, in Christ, but we do well to remember that He, the eternal Son, became true man, and truly man, for our sakes - true man, and yet, in the mystery of His Person, true God. This is what constitutes the true glory of our redemption, that He, the God-man, should become our Redeemer.

**69) 4:4-7**

Calvin goes on to comment on the phrase 'made under the law': 'Christ the Son of God, who was by right exempt from all subjection, became subject to the law. Why? In our name, that He might obtain freedom for us...a free man redeemed a slave by constituting himself a surety; by putting the chains on himself he takes them off the other'. (But Calvin adds later a significant comment: 'We are not...so exempted from the law...that we no longer owe any obedience to the teaching of the law, and may do what we please. For it is the perpetual rule of a good and holy life'.)

C.S. Lewis has a fine and beautiful sentence in his book on 'Miracles' that may be profitably pondered in this connection: '...Humanity must embrace death freely, submit to it with total humility, drink it to the dregs, and so convert it into that mystical death which is the secret of life. But only a Man who did not need to have been a Man at all unless He had chosen, only one who served in our sad regiment as a volunteer, yet also only one who was perfectly a Man, could perform his perfect dying; and thus (which way you put it is unimportant) either defeat Death or redeem it. He tasted death on behalf of all other. He is the representative 'Die-er' of the universe: and for that very reason the Resurrection and the Life. Or, conversely, because He truly lives, He truly dies, for that is the very pattern of reality. Because the higher can descend into the lower, He who from all eternity has been incessantly plunging Himself in the blessed death of self-surrender to the Father can also most fully descend into the horrible and (for us) involuntary death of the body. Because Vicariousness is the very idiom of the reality He has created, His death can become ours.

**70) 4:4-7**

The coming of Christ into the world (and, of course, the death He died must be held to be implicit in that coming, as its significant content) is said here to have had a twofold effect: (a) to redeem them that were under the law, and (b) that we might receive the adoption of sons. Not merely is there the rescue from bondage but also there is the making of slaves into sons. Nor does this happen consecutively, but simultaneously. The rescue from slavery is of a sort that it inevitably makes us into sons. This is the new position, the new status, that has been given us. And for this, and because of this, He gives His Spirit (6). The words 'sent forth' in 6 are exactly the same as 'sent forth' in 4 - so that, in the fullness of the time God sent forth both His Son and His Spirit. It is true, of course, that historically, there was a time lapse between these two 'sendings', between Bethlehem and Pentecost; but we know also that theologically they both belong essentially together, and the one is precisely irrelevant without the other. The sending forth of the Spirit into men's hearts is the logical and ultimate fulfilment and completion of the movement of eternity which constitutes the gospel. We could put it like this: the fact of the Incarnation taking place once-for-all in history has necessary and inevitable implications in the here and now. Christ has entered into human life, once for all; but this necessarily means that He enters into our lives now by His Spirit - hence the parallel statements in 4 and 6. As John Stott puts it, He sent His Son to secure our sonship in the family of God; His Spirit, to assure us of our sonship, the one, to give us the status of sons; the other to give the experience of it.

**71) 4:4-7**

Notice the sequence in 5, 6: redemption - adoption of sons - the gift of the Spirit - prayer (Abba, Father). The adoption of sons is something that God bestows - it is the gift of His free, sovereign grace in the gospel - cf 1 John 3:1 - this is God calling those things that are not as though they were (Romans 4:17). This is the inestimable gift of God, that we should be born into His family, and known of Him (9). Now - if this is true, if this is what has happened to us, then, because this is His sovereign enactment and pronouncement, He has sent His Spirit into our hearts. And it is this that enables us to call Him 'Father'. This is the grace by which we are enabled to be what God has made us, in Christ. The challenge implicit in these words is well summed up in the lines of the hymn,

Think what Spirit dwells within thee,  
What a Father's smile is thine,  
What thy Saviour died to win thee;  
Child of God, shouldst thou repine?

Nor is the challenge needless, for it is possible for freemen to continue to have a slave mentality and a servile spirit. This is what was happening to the Galatians: they were slipping back almost inadvertently, through wrong thinking, into the bondage from which they had been delivered by the gospel. This is the force of Paul's expostulation in the verses which follow.

**72) 4:8-11**

The servility of the old life is well underlined in 8. 'Not to know' the true and living God means to 'act as a slave' to false gods, and Paul expresses astonishment that any who had become Christians and therefore members of the new order could possibly revert to the old. Let us also be quite clear about this. To adopt legalistic attitudes is not to advance in spiritual life, it is to take a retrograde step that always proves disastrous. The man who is committed to slavish observance of rules and regulations has not - as, alas, he is prone to imagine - reached a deeper stage of experience; on the contrary, he is in bondage of his own making, and needs to be set free to live in the liberty of Christ. This is a word that has more relevance than we might care to think for the many prohibitions and taboos that exist in evangelical life today, and that are responsible for the 'negativism' in so many lives. It is true, of course, that there are decisive negatives in the Christian life - the 'thou shalt nots' of the Ten Commandments are of permanent validity for all true believers - but when the most marked characteristics of a man's life are the prohibitions and taboos that control and direct it, then something has gone seriously wrong with his experience and calls for a frank and honest - and courageous - reassessment of the situation. He is not free, but in bondage.

**73) 4:8-11**

It seems clear, from what Paul says here, that, so far as the Galatians were concerned, their religion had degenerated - or was in the process of degenerating - into an external formalism that was robbing them of all the glorious freedom that was theirs in Christ. As Stott puts it, 'it is no longer the free and joyful communion of children with their Father; it has become a dreary routine of rules and regulations'. It is clear, from what we have already studied in this section, that Paul bases his exhortation on the facts of the situation, the facts of our position as sons of God in the adoption of grace. This is the force of the words in 9, 'But now, after that...ye are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements...?' The great thing for Paul is that we should recognise our position in Christ, and what God has made us in Him. To quote the same commentator again, 'It is not impossible to turn back to the old life: the Galatians had in fact done it. But it is preposterous to do so. It is a fundamental denial of what we have become, of what God has made us, if we are in Christ.'

**74) 4:8-11**

We follow on from the previous Note. This is a very big issue on the pastoral and, so to speak, psychological, level, as well as the doctrinal. Indeed, it is one of the very biggest of all issues. For with so many, there seems to be a built-in inability to believe the position God has given them in the adoption of sons, and therefore just to believe they are really children of a loving Father, and that God really looks upon them with a Fatherly care and tenderness and love. Instead, they have a basic, inbuilt conception of God as a rather stern, forbidding, almost tyrant-like Figure, standing over them threateningly, ready to criticize or condemn their slightest deviation from the standards He has set them - or, rather, the standards they have set themselves (for so many of these standards are man-made and man-arranged). The repercussions of this are truly vast and far-reaching in Christian life.

Consider our Lord's parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30, especially 24, 25) in this connection. The unprofitable servant said to his Master, 'Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man...and I was afraid'. But is there any slightest evidence in the parable that the Master was hard? Did the other servants think so? Of course not. The problem with this servant was that he had a totally wrong conception of the Lord in whose service he was. He had got it all wrong! And just look what this wrong attitude did to him: it paralysed him as to any service he might have rendered; and it lasted for a lifetime. All through life he was gripped and conditioned by this wrong attitude towards the Lord he served. This is the measure of how serious the issue can be!

This is what a servile spirit, and a misconception of what God is like, can do to us as Christians. Bondage indeed! Have we got it all wrong, too, about the Master whom we serve? Think about this today!

**75) 4:8-11**

Different explanations have been offered to explain why people should develop such a misleading idea of God as that described in yesterday's Note. Some would have us believe that an overdue emphasis on the sovereignty of God, His holiness and majesty, tends to create this kind of attitude. But this is itself a misunderstanding; for the most thoroughgoing views of divine sovereignty have often gone hand in hand with the greatest kind of filial trust - as may be seen in the words of the lovely hymn, 'My God, how wonderful Thou art'

O how I fear Thee, living God  
With deepest, tenderest fears

Yet I may love Thee too, O Lord  
Almighty as Thou art.

It may be nearer the mark to speak of the very real psychological disability of an unhappy family background. Parents are to children in the place of God in the first instance, and children get their first instinctive ideas of what God is like from their parents. If a parent has been harsh, arbitrary, indifferent, tyrannical, or demanding, it is hardly surprising that this kind of 'picture' should be imposed on a young mind - and, alas, imposed permanently, making belief in a loving God very uphill work for such an one. But, whatever the reason, the need is really to know this truth about the Fatherhood of God, and know it in the depths of our being, allowing the healing grace of our sonship by adoption to touch and transform us there.



**76) 4:12-16**

Paul's appeal in 12 seems to be that they should become like him in his abandonment of Jewish legalism, as if he should say, 'Imitate me in this thing. Follow my example and yield no conformity to those rites and customs. I have become as a Gentile among the Gentiles, Jew though I am'. The reference to injury here is somewhat obscure. The NEB translates it, 'It is not that you did me any wrong', and J.B. Phillips puts it, 'I have nothing against you personally'. The idea would seem to be that Paul is emphasising that this is not a matter of personal injury - something higher is at stake, the truth of the gospel. This underlines the importance and significance of 16, 'Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?' It is a solemn fact that enmity can arise between a man of God and those to whom he ministers, not because of any personal issues - although these are generally fastened upon as a pretext - but because the truth he has proclaimed to them has challenged and hurt them and become an offence to them. Peter tells us in his epistle that there are those who stumble at the word, being disobedient (1 Peter 2:8). When truth comes to men, it comes almost in the nature of an invasion, and it is often resisted with all the vehemence and stubbornness shown in a long and bitter siege. The sinful self is deeply entrenched, and it resents any inroads and encroachments made upon its territory! Many a man of God has found, like Paul, that because of his faithfulness he has become the butt of men's implacable enmity and hatred. His failure, his idiosyncrasies, or his inconsistencies, are blamed, of course, but the real truth is that the truth he has told them has convicted their hearts. And nothing maddens and embitters a man so much as conviction resisted.

**77) 4:12-16**

The words in 12b, 'ye have not injured me at all' have been interpreted in different ways. Cole (Tyndale) suggests it may be taken as a question: 'Never wronged me, did you?' with Paul speaking indignantly to them, indicating his sense of hurt. But it is perhaps better to take it as the RSV renders it, 'You did me no wrong' - that is, formerly, in the past, when their relationship was good, and before it had deteriorated. He had indeed no complaint about their former treatment of him, as the following verses show, for in spite of the fact that he had been among them in great weakness (13, 14), they had received him 'as an angel of God', and 'would have plucked out' their very eyes for him. The reference in these verses is clearly to some physical disability he was then suffering from. 'My temptation' in 14 is better rendered as in RSV, 'Though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me'. The bodily ailment, whatever it was, must have had some unpleasant and unsightly symptoms, which might, in some circumstances, have caused them to belittle or despise him. But not only did they not do so then, but on the contrary they received him as a messenger from God. They got behind and beyond the embarrassment of bodily symptoms to the message that he was speaking to them. But now it was so different (15): they were disaffected, and therefore disenchanted - and critical. This was the supreme sadness of the situation.

**78) 4:17-20**

We see in these verses something of the costliness of a faithful ministry. It is very evident, from statements in many of Paul's epistles, that a peculiar bond exists between believers and their spiritual father, and we should not be surprised at the fierce concern expressed in these verses by the Apostle, at the thought that the spiritual wellbeing of his sons in the faith was being threatened. The words he uses of his concern are expressive of the agony involved in begetting spiritual children, and remind us of what is said of Christ Himself in Hebrews 2:10, 'It became Him...in bringing many sons into glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings'. This is a constant element in the work of the gospel. The service that costs little is worth little, and accomplishes little.

It may not be possible to define exactly what stage of regeneration Paul refers to in the words 'until Christ be formed in you', but at least we may gather that he made no easy assumptions about those who professed to have received Christ, but rather laboured in prayer for them until he could see something of the lineaments of Christ appearing in them. This is something we can learn from the Apostle. Not every recorded 'decision' for Christ turns out to be a true conversion. How we need the parent-heart of Paul in our attitude to those we seek to influence for Christ!

**79) 4:17-20**

Paul is contrasting his own attitude to the Galatians with that of the false teachers, the Judaisers, to them. The RSV rendering of 17, 'They make much of you' ('they pay court to you' - Calvin) illuminates the sense better than the AV. The meaning would then be that the false teachers were flattering the Galatians, making much of them, in order to win their allegiance to themselves. The point at issue is not, however, that Paul wants them to give their allegiance to him, rather than to them; what Paul is concerned to do is to win their allegiance to Christ. Cole adds an interesting suggestion: 'It is quite consonant with Paul's position to say that the true psychological reason for the onslaught of the Judaisers on the Galatians is that they secretly envy the Galatians both their freedom in Christ and the spontaneity of their relations with Paul. They want to 'cut them out' from both of these and to reduce them to the pitiable state of envying the Judaisers themselves'. Jealousy of Paul, and of his authority and influence over the Galatians - is this what lay at the root of the whole Galatian trouble? If this be so, how courageous of the Apostle to challenge them so forthrightly on the issue!

**80) 4:19-20**

Before we pass to the next section, we must look at the wealth of metaphor Paul uses in this address to the Galatians. In 19a, they are his 'little children'; in 19b, it is mother-love and mother travail; in 12 they are his 'brothers'; and in 20 it is the firm, disciplinary tone of the father. The four metaphors all have one thing in common: they are family metaphors, and they speak of an intimacy in the bond that binds him to them. What a pastor's heart the man had! The tenderness and gentle care of a mother - travailing and agonising over spiritual children; the friendship and the enduring bond of a brother, strong, robust and faithful; the strength, firmness and sternness of a father's discipline - and never the one without the other, and the one always tempered by the other. And can we not say something else - this is also what God is like - His tenderness, His care, His gentleness, but never a gentleness, never a tenderness that degenerates into sentimentality - always there is the firmness of the fatherly hand that stands no nonsense. God's love, as has been said, is a love that will not let us go, that will not let us down, that will not let us off. Yet, at His sternest, we know that that sternness is ever tempered with tender and gentle love. That is why we can take it, and that is why we need to take it.

**81) 4:21-27**

Paul continues his argument against the law and the wrong understanding of the law, and turns to the Old Testament for an illustration to confirm what he says. The story he chooses is that of Abraham and his two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. The first impression we have on reading this passage is that this is by no means an obvious illustration of the point Paul is trying to make; it sounds rather complicated and involved, representing a rather arbitrary use of Scripture, allegorising in an unusual manner. Indeed, many regard this as the most difficult passage in the epistle. Who, it might be said, in reading the story in Genesis 16/17, would have imagined it to have had an allegorical meaning of this nature, to have any other meaning, in fact, than its obvious, literal meaning? This opens up a biggish issue on the interpretation of Scripture in general. We need first of all to know the meaning of the terms that are used in this field. There are three, in the main, that are in frequent use in this field of interpretation - parable, allegory, type. A parable is distinct from the other two in that it bears one main message, and the various details of the parable are not meant in the main to convey particular truth. In this it is distinguished from the allegory, which does have a point-by-point comparison and agreement. Again, a type means a 'shadowy outline', but an allegory means that an event may have a spiritual significance over and above the historical, as here. To say that this story is an allegory does not, however, mean that it was originally written with an allegorical meaning in mind, still less that the historical truth of it is in dispute. Paul certainly regards the history as true, but shows it also had a prophetic and doctrinal significance.

**82) 4:21-27**

The strangeness of the allegory to modern thinking is due to the fact that we do not think in biblical terms as Paul did. He is neither arbitrary nor fanciful in finding an allegorical significance in the story of Hagar and Sarah, for in fact it illustrates a fundamental principle in God's dealings with men, which comes up again and again in Paul's writings, namely, the promise. Divine, electing grace, according to promise - this is what the whole story of the Bible is about. The great Antitype is seen in the New Testament, and the Old Testament gives pointers towards it, enacting the drama on a small scale, so to speak, that was to fill the world-stage in the fullness of the time. When this is appreciated, then it is obvious that we should expect drama all through the period that was preparatory to its full manifestation in history.

This is why, rightly considered and rightly understood, this story from the book of Genesis is absolutely authentic and relevant for Paul's purpose.

**83) 4:21-27**

John Stott gives a useful summary of the argument, as follows: 'There are three stages in the argument, of this paragraph. The first is historical, the second allegorical and the third personal. In the historical verses (22, 23) Paul reminds his readers that Abraham had two sons, Ishmael, the son of a slave, and Isaac, the son of a free woman. In the allegorical verses (24-27) he argues that these two sons with their mothers represent two religions, a religion of bondage which is Judaism, and a religion of freedom which is Christianity. In the personal verses (28-31) he applies his allegory to us. If we are Christians, we are not like Ishmael (slaves), but like Isaac (free). Finally, he shows us what to expect if we take after Isaac.'

The force, then, of the question in 21 is this: 'Do you know what you are letting yourselves in for, you who desire to be under the law?' And Paul proceeds to show them all that is involved in being under the law. 'Listen to the law', he cries, 'for the very law, whose servant you want to be, will be your judge and condemn you'. Indeed, the law itself rejects the law (30) and Paul's use of this story from the Old Testament shows that this is so. Such is the argument, in summary. We shall now go back to look at it in more detail.



**84) 4:21-27**

The controversy Paul is dealing with in Galatians centres upon the claim of the Jews to be the sons of Abraham, and because so, to be heirs of eternal blessing. That this was a major issue at the time of the establishment of the gospel we can see in the gospel record itself. 'We have Abraham to our father' (Luke 3:8), said the Jews to John the Baptist; and 'We be Abraham's seed' (John 8:33), they said to Jesus. Paul's point is this: Abraham had two sons, one of a bondswoman, the other of promise. And, as this was so, there are two posterities flowing from him, a natural one, comprising all the natural descendants, and one according to promise, the spiritual, who through like faith with Abraham, became Abraham's children. Therefore, the alternative to being in the line of promise is to be in the natural line, and Paul shows here what happened to it: (a) it went into bondage. To be the son of a bondswoman was to be born into the realm of servitude and slavery. There was no way out of this, it was natural and inevitable; (b) it meant being cast out and having no part in the inheritance of promise. This, in fact, is the double truth about those who insist on remaining under the law - 'working their passage' to heaven, seeking to earn their salvation by good works. They are in bondage, not least to a constant anxiety about salvation! They have no assurance, and through fear of death they spend their lifetime under bondage. And they are cast out eternally. 'Depart from Me', says Christ, 'I never knew you'. Seen from this standpoint Paul's illustration is not only relevant, but urgently challenging.

**85) 4:28-31**

Paul pursues the illustration still further. In the record of the animosity and shown by Hagar and Ishmael against Isaac, he sees another expression of a fundamental principle. Not only is there a contrast between the two sons, there is conflict. The one opposes the other. The one always, invariably, resents the other. Not only in the story of Ishmael, but in the history of Ishmael's posterity has there been that irreconcilable opposition on their part against God's elect. So also in the days of the New Testament, the two seeds of Abraham, the natural and the spiritual, are set in opposition, in the Baptist's day, in Christ's ministry - they finally crucified Him - and in the early Church alike. We have only to think of the terrible persecution engineered by the Pharisees against the Apostles in Acts to realise the truth of this. And what of Paul himself, before his conversion, 'breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord'. This is inevitable. It lies in the nature of the case that there will always be this antagonism. This is why it will always be an uphill fight to establish the truth of the gospel in the midst of error.

But the truth of the gospel, acceptance by faith rather than works is ultimately vindicated by God Himself. What does the Scripture say about this conflict? 'Cast out the bondwoman and her son.' This is the divine verdict upon the contention. These are chosen, those are left and rejected. Such is the import of Paul's words at the close of the chapter.

**86) 4:31**

But - and this is the wonderful thing - God's 'outcasting' of those who trust in good works for salvation, His condemnation of them in His Word, is in mercy, and in tenderness. It is because He loves us that He takes away our props, and everything else we lean on, so that we may at last lean wholly on Him. The law does this condemning work precisely for this reason - to bring us to despair, in order finally to bring us into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Thus it was with Paul and the Galatians - the hard things he said to them were said in love, to bring them to an end of themselves, and to lead them into the liberty of Christ once again. Nor is it different today: the seemingly hard and unpleasant aspects of the Word are meant to smash our self-confidence and self-dependence, and bring us, naked and forlorn, to the true Rock of Ages, where we find salvation. Thus the word from the passage may be regarded as one of tender appeal: Come out from the old covenant - it carries nothing but loss and woe - into the gracious provision of the new. It is possible to change over - Paul did, and oh, the difference it made to him! Well might he cry in 12, 'Be as I am' - and do as I have done, take your stand with the people of God, and enter into His great salvation.

**87) 5:1**

The Apostle now comes to exhortation, based upon what has gone before. In chapters 1 and 2 he has defended his own right to preach to the Gentiles and his own authority as an apostle; in chapters 3 and 4 he has answered the arguments of his opponents in favour of the imposition of legalism upon Gentile Christians, by expounding clearly and unequivocally the nature of our position and liberty in Christ. Now comes his fervent exhortation not to surrender that position and that liberty. The immediate connection is with 4:31, 'we are...children of the free' - therefore stand as those that are free. This, as we have frequently seen, is Paul's favourite pattern. He invariably bases the exhortations of the gospel on the great affirmations of the faith. 'This is where you are, this is where God has placed you - therefore stand there, take your place in Christ, and be the Lord's freeman.' This is the response of faith to the summons and provision of the gospel, and only when we take this stand is faith proved real, just as Peter's faith and confidence in Christ's word to him was proved real when he ventured out on the waters of Galilee and walked towards Him. This incident from the gospel record is as good an illustration of the principle involved as we could have, for it underlines the fact that what Peter did was contrary to nature - and this is Paul's whole point here, for what we are in Christ is contrary to what we are by nature. In Christ we are no longer the persons we are by nature, and this is what we must dare to believe - and act upon it!

**88) 5:1**

It should be noted that many of the modern translations of the New Testament give different renderings of this verse, and something requires to be said about them. The difference in the translations is due to different readings in the Greek manuscripts, the best of which read as the modern translations render the words, e.g. the RSV and the NEB: 'For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast, therefore...' (RSV); 'Christ set us free, to be free men. Stand firm, then...' (NEB). The AV follows other manuscripts in its rendering. The difference between them lies in a one-letter word in the Greek, which is omitted in the manuscripts followed by the RSV and NEB. So considerable a scholar as Lightfoot holds that to omit this one-letter word is to give the Greek a reading so difficult as to be unintelligible. And, certainly, the RSV wording, 'For freedom Christ has set us free' is an extremely awkward and unusual sort of statement, and hardly, one feels, what Paul would be likely to say.

If, then, we follow the Greek on which the AV bases its translation (as I think we should), we may still nevertheless translate differently from the AV, that is, by linking the verse with the last words of 4:31: 'We are not children of any bondwoman, but of the free, by virtue of the freedom with which Christ has made us free. Stand fast therefore (in that freedom), and be not entangled again...'. Either way, however, the two possible renderings of the Greek (followed by the AV) do not really alter the Apostle's meaning.

**89) 5:1-6**

Paul's words here are very strong, and it is some measure of his anxiety for the Galatians that he should speak so plainly and bluntly to them. The point in 2 about circumcision is not, of course, that anyone who has been circumcised (i.e. a Jew) cannot be profited by Christ, but rather someone who has trusted in Christ and later committed himself to the Jewish rite. This was the problem vexing the Galatian Church (see Acts 15:1) and explains Paul's words in 4 - 'ye are fallen from grace'. Thus the emphasis in 5, 6, on 'righteousness by faith' and 'faith which worketh by love'. This is the real heart, and the true nature, of the Christian religion, and it is clear from what he says here that it is of a totally different order of existence from the realm of the law and its rites. It is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision nor any other observance, but a new order, a new creation (cf 6:15) wrought by the Spirit of God (5) by Whom we are begotten unto a lively hope, as Peter also puts it in his epistle (1 Peter 1:3). The inter-relation of faith, hope and love in Paul's teaching here is interesting and suggestive, safeguarding his gospel from any charge that it was undermining moral values - none has stressed more fervently than he that we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works (Ephesians 2:10), works that are the expression of a living and loving faith in Him. It is this fundamental distinction between the idea of working for salvation and that of works that follow and flow from salvation that lies at the heart of Paul's teaching. Everything, literally everything, depends on a right understanding of it.

**90) 5:1-6**

We should note the contrast Paul makes in these verses between false and true believers: in 2-4 the false is underlined, and in 5, 6 the true. First of all, in 2-4, he makes three very strong and blunt assertions as to the consequences of becoming bogged down with the rite of circumcision: (a) Christ shall profit them nothing; (b) they become debtors to the whole law; (c) their relation to Christ becomes severed. These are strong words, indeed, but they were required to be, to meet a very critical situation in the Galatians Church. The point is that if the Galatians accept circumcision, it must be because they consider it to be necessary for salvation, and this would mean that they considered that Christ's death was not enough for their salvation. Put like this, the issue comes clear. And, in fact, rightly understood, it really was an either/or situation. For, to the Jew of Paul's day was 'the first act of obedience to that law which would henceforth, if he was a pious Jew, rule every tiny detail of his life. Through complete obedience to all its precepts he hoped to win merit in God's eyes, and thus attain 'life'' (Cole). To accept circumcision as obligatory, therefore, was a symbol, it was to accept the whole law as obligatory. And this represents a defection from the truth so radical as to cut one off from Christ. Paul is not, indeed, expounding here a doctrine of the possibility of losing one's salvation after being saved, rather, he is simply being blunt and categorical, saying, 'If you place yourselves under the law, it raised the whole question of whether you are saved at all' - as in fact he has already suggested in 4:20, in the words, 'I stand in doubt of you'.

**91) 5:1-6**

In contrast to 2-4, Paul next states the true attitude of faith in 5, 6: 'We (believers) through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith'. This is the real heart, and the true nature, of the Christian religion. And, indeed, it represents a totally different order of existence from the realm of the law and its rites. It is another world (as Paul has already indicated in the illustration of Hagar and Ishmael in 4:20ff). Two things are said here, both emphasising faith: (a) 'We...wait for the hope of righteousness' (5). Believers are saved in hope (cf Romans 8:23-25). It is a sure and certain hope. But it is the consummation alone that will bring us perfect righteousness - cf Romans 8:30, '...them He also glorified'. This is the hope of the Christian. We do not work for it, we wait for it. It will surely come. It is ours now, in the promise! (b) What matters is faith (6). It is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, but faith that is the hallmark of the true Christian position. This statement should be compared with two other similar ones, in 6:15, which speaks of 'a new creature', and 1 Corinthians 7:18, which speaks of 'keeping the commandments of God'. Together, these three statements are a comprehensive definition of true faith and of Christian experience: new creation underlining the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, faith coming to effective expression in love, keeping the commandments of God representing the working of love. The threefold emphasis is one that is worthy of careful and earnest study.



**92) 5:7-12**

From false and true believers Paul now turns to false and true teachers. His words here reveal a very penetrating discernment into the true nature of error. The 'persuasion' which had led the Galatians astray was not something intellectual, and the question at issue was not one of 'believing' a doctrine, but one of 'obeying' the truth, i.e. submitting to its moral demands on one's life. It is in this sense that the word 'hinder' must be understood in 7. This is the real problem that lies behind every deviation from the truth. Scholars tells us that the root idea behind the word 'heretic' is that a man 'chooses on his own' to depart from the truth and propagate different teaching. It is thus that heresy comes to mean false teaching. But the important thing to see, in the original meaning of the word, is that heresy begins with a moral problem, self-will, self-assertion, self-display. It is significant that in this connection Paul speaks in 11 of 'the offence of the cross'. In this wrong 'persuasion' at work in the Galatians, there was a challenge they were baulking at, because of its cost in terms of moral submission to the divine will. There was a death they were refusing to die. This sheds more light than we might realise on the question of lack of understanding or apprehension of spiritual truths, either in the unbeliever or in the believer. We sometimes refer to Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4:4, 'The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not', and this is of course true - but it is a willing blindness that prevents the light from breaking through. There are none so blind as those who will not see, and at the end of the day this will be the condemnation - not that men could not see the truth, but that they would not.

**93) 5:7-12**

Two further points should be noted in these verses before we proceed. The first concerns 'persuasion' in 8. It is a strong word. They were 'fully persuaded', Paul means to say. It had amounted to a conviction, and what Paul is implying - indeed, asserting - here is that a man can be terribly convinced that he is right and still be completely wrong. There is something very frightening about this, but it is true to experience. One of the things that strikes one very forcibly about adherents of the heretical sects is the utter, even fanatical, conviction that grips them. They are totally convinced that they are right, and nothing will budge them. And Paul says here that even a persuasion like that does not necessarily mean that it comes from God. But, apart from heresies, this raises interesting and important questions for believers. It is possible to be very convinced about something, and still be wrong. 'Try the spirits', says John, 'whether they be of God'.

The second point concerns what is said in 12. The AV rendering makes what is said a statement similar to that in 10b. But, the scholars tell us, this can hardly be the meaning of the word Paul uses, which, literally translated, should read, 'cut themselves off'. The reference is to a custom prevailing among heathen priests in Galatia and elsewhere by which bodily mutilation was practised in order to gain merit with the gods, and Paul is scornfully comparing the Judaisers' preoccupation with circumcision with the mutilation practised by the heathen votaries (cf the similar strong language of Philippians 3:2).

**94) 5:13-15**

A new development in the argument is now seen in 13. The words 'called into liberty' sum up all that has thus far been said in the chapter, but now the Apostle turns to warn his readers of the danger of allowing liberty to become licence. To be free from the law does not mean to be free to sin. Paul's doctrine of freedom does not remove the restraints that keep men from licence and immorality, and to interpret it as if it did is simply to misunderstand it completely. The alternatives here as 'an occasion to the flesh' and 'by love serve one another', and what Paul is insisting is that, in the new order of existence into which we are brought by the Spirit of God in the gospel, 'love' and not 'the flesh' is the controlling factor ('the flesh' refers to fallen human nature, that element in man's nature which is opposed to goodness, and makes for evil). To give occasion to the flesh is simply to be in bondage, and means that we have not understood what it means to have been set free in Christ. This corresponds to the teaching in Romans 6:1ff, where Paul avers that to say 'Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?' is completely to misunderstand what it means to have 'grace reigning through righteousness' (Romans 5:21). For just as to be 'under sin' and 'under the law' means to be in the control of sin and law, so to be 'under grace' means to be in the control of grace and under its blessed dominion. The flesh is not allowed to 'have occasion' when grace dominates the life. That is Paul's point.

**95) 5:13-17**

If we stand back, so to speak, from these verses, and see them in perspective, we shall see that Paul continues to emphasise in them his characteristic pattern of indicatives followed by imperatives. 'You have been called unto liberty' - this is the indicative; 'Walk in love, and in the Spirit' - this is the imperative. This is exactly the same emphasis as in 4:31-51 - 'We are children of the free' and 'Stand fast therefore in the liberty...'. When we project this pattern further, we see the logical sequence in the rest of the passage: there are in fact two ways of life unfolded here - life in the flesh, and life in the Spirit, as we see in 16, 17. And both follow the same kind of pattern, and the resultant behaviour in each case is an inevitable expression of the respective basic positions. To be in the flesh produces the works of the flesh, as enumerated in 19-21. This is a natural and inevitable, and indeed spontaneous, outcome from the facts of the situation. To be in the Spirit, and to walk in the Spirit, produces the fruit of the Spirit, as unfolded in 22, 23, and this likewise is an inevitable and spontaneous outcome from the facts of the situation, viz., that we are, in Christ, a certain kind of person, and the fruit is the dynamic result of responding to the challenge to be what God has made us in Christ, through the gospel. This is the background against which these verses are to be understood.

**96) 5:16-17**

Once again we have an imperative - 'Walk' - based upon the truth of our position in Christ (see notes on 5:1), and once again we must see this to be the activity of faith, the expression of faith in action. It corresponds to 'Let not sin reign in your mortal bodies' in Romans 6:12, and 'Sin shall not have dominion over you' in Romans 6:14. The statement in 17 indicates an unresolved conflict in Christian experience. The question is, how are we to interpret this? There are two senses in which it is true. In the first place, there is a sense in which this is a permanent element in Christian experience, for the reason that as Christians we are called to live our new life in the old order of existence. This necessarily means that the Christian is in a paradoxical position; he is both 'free from sin' and also 'subject to the condition of sin' (in the sense that he is not able 'not to sin'). Because therefore he is both 'in Christ' and 'in the flesh' (in the sense of still belonging to this present life - see Galatians 2:20), there will always be tension in his life, as expressed in this verse. Thus Paul can speak - in Romans 8, in the chapter which above all others reveals the Christian life of victory in the Spirit - of groaning within ourselves, waiting for the adoption (8:23), and this because sin has not yet vanished from our lives, even though in Christ we are free from sin, and the will to do right is therefore often in tension with the inability to perform it. We cannot, as Paul indicates here, do the things that we would (see Romans 7:19).

This, however, does not necessarily exhaust the application of Paul's words in 17. Granted the truth of this constant, necessary tension in the normal experience of the believer who is in the Spirit, there is also a subnormal, sub-Christian experience of bondage and defeat in the life of the Christian which can come about because there is a stand that has not been made in terms of 5:1, and a walk that has not been maintained in terms of 5:16, and a death that he has refused to die. In Romans 6:11 the operative word is 'reckon'. What does this mean? It means to 'obey from the heart' (Romans 6:17) the form of teaching delivered to us, and this involves allowing the cross to do its gracious work of slaying the old man, putting the flesh out of action, making it inoperative. The pattern of the cross must 'repeat' itself in our experience if the Spirit is to be a reality in our lives. Life, the Spirit, love, fruitfulness (22) - these all lie on the other side of the cross. It is as those that are 'alive from the dead' (Romans 6:13) that we know and enter into the life of the Spirit and the liberty of the children of God. This kind of life is no theory or idle fiction. The cross has really to touch our lives if we are to know what it means to live in the Spirit. Not for nothing does Paul say at the end of the epistle (6:17), 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus'.

**97) 5:18-21**

As an introduction to the thought in these verses it will be useful to look back to 13, where Paul warns the Galatians against using liberty as an occasion for licence. It would seem that there were those in Galatia who had swung away from the barren legalism of the Judaisers' attitudes and position to an opposite extreme, distorting Paul's teaching on liberty into a licence for unlimited self-indulgence. It is one thing to quote Augustine's famous dictum, 'Love God and do what you like' - rightly understood Paul would certainly endorse this statement - but it is quite another to take 'do as you like' as a charter for licence and 'an occasion to the flesh', and fail to recognise that to 'love God' lays a far more stringent encirclement and circumscription on our behaviour than the law itself does. This can be seen very clearly in Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount: 'Ye have heard that it hath been said...but I say unto you...' - i.e. the law says the act is wrong, but love (Jesus) says that even the thought is wrong. The Christian doctrine of liberty never relaxes the sanction of the law, never ever! Christian freedom is 'freedom from' but not 'freedom to' - not freedom to indulge the flesh (13a), not freedom to exploit one's neighbour (13b), not freedom to break the law (14). Such a freedom would simply be bondage, and the nature of that bondage is graphically expressed in the ugly recital of the works of the flesh in 19-21.

**98) 5:18-21**

We should notice three things in particular in this passage describing the works of the flesh. In the first place there seems to be a near identity between 'flesh' and 'law' in Paul's mind. Not that they are the same thing, of course, but it is true that to be 'under the law' means also that a man is 'in the flesh' - for this reason, that both 'law' and 'flesh' belong to the old order of existence from which we are delivered by Christ. Secondly, Paul does not speak of the 'fruits', but of the 'works of the flesh', although he goes on in the next verses to describe the fruit of the Spirit. What he means is that the flesh is completely non-productive and can bring forth nothing that is pleasing to God, even if it 'works itself to the bone'. 'They that are in the flesh cannot please God' (Romans 8:8 - cf Romans 6:21), 'What fruit had ye then in those things...?'). Thirdly, it is striking to see the kind of activity that is included in the works of the flesh - not only the various forms of uncleanness, but also idolatry and heresy. This should serve to remind us that there is a moral question involved in these things. The worship of false gods is never merely a question of ignorance and darkness, there is also a moral fault. It is a willing blindness that keeps men's eyes from being opened. This applies equally to heresy (see Note on 5:7-12). Error in doctrine is always in the first place error in life and in their minds. Men go wrong first, then their minds.

There are two further points to note before we pass from these verses. The first is the word 'manifest' which Paul uses in 19. The word occupies an emphatic place in the sentence. The works of the flesh will out, Paul means, that is to say, a fleshly attitude cannot ultimately be hidden, it will come out and find expression, on the surface of a man's life. The second point relates to what is said at the end of 21, that those who practise such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. This does not mean that people who have in the past committed such things will be excluded from the kingdom: there is no condition of sin or uncleanness that cannot be reached, and rectified, by the grace of God. The reference is to those who continue unrepentantly in them. Now, we must be careful not to fall into the error of supposing that 'we would never fall as low as this', for this would simply mean that we had not read our own hearts aright. It is true that these grim verses do not give a picture of all human behaviour, but they do accurately picture human nature, and what we read here is what every human heart is capable of, and would certainly fall into, but for the restraining grace of God. If we do not see this, we do not know the truth about ourselves.

**99) 5:22-23**

It is necessary to see these great words of Paul's in their context of the teaching of the epistle, before we study them in detail. It will help us to a fuller understanding of this if we remember that he has been expounding the theology of the Christian life. He has spoken of the nature of our new life in Christ. By the Holy Spirit we have been incorporated into Christ, and given a new status and a new position in Him. As believers we are 'in Christ'. Yet this new thing has to be lived out in the old order, and this, as we have seen, means that we are in the paradoxical position of being both 'free from sin' and yet 'subject to the conditions of sin'. Sin has not yet vanished from our lives, and it is this that explains the tension in the true believer's experience, as expressed in 17. But it is not an equal tension, the new life is incomparably greater than the old (cf Romans 5, 'much more'). Therefore there really is in fact the emergence of a new life, manifest and evident for all to see. It is recorded in Acts 11:23 that Barnabas saw the grace of God in Antioch. It is this visible manifestation that Paul refers to in these verses. The fruit of the Spirit is the evidence that something has really happened in our lives, something that cannot be controverted. We are not only liberated from sin, but unto Christlikeness, and where this liberation is real, it will never be without this unmistakable evidence of becoming increasingly conformed to the image of God's Son.



**100)5:22-23**

The fruit of the Spirit comes as the end-product of the process of sowing to the Spirit (cf 6:8), the result, so to speak, of what Paul has been discussing, and pressing upon the Galatians. We should also note, however, the connection between 'Thou shalt love' in 14 and 'the fruit of the Spirit' in 22. It is the command of God that we should love, but it is also His perfect work in our souls through the gospel to enable us to fulfil His command and to produce in us what He requires. This seeming paradox between the divine imperative to love, and the divine provision of fruit in the believer's life should not be allowed to mislead our thinking, for it is simply that the gospel is presented in it from two viewpoints: from one aspect it is seen to be a summons, from another as a divine offer and provision. Paul's words in Philippians 2:12, 13 express it very graphically: 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling' - that is the summons - 'for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure' - that is the divine provision and activity.

We should also note that Paul speaks of 'fruit', not 'fruits'. The fruit is one, not many; and the one fruit has a ninefold expression. D.L. Moody used to say that this ninefold fruit is simply love in its many manifestations. Thus, joy is love exulting; peace is love resting; longsuffering is love on trial; gentleness is love in society; goodness is love in action; faith is love on the battlefield; meekness is love at school; temperance is love in training. Plenty food for thought here - more than enough for one day!

**101)5:22-23**

There is a significant parallelism between Paul's teaching here and that in 1 Corinthians, where he was dealing with disorder and dissension in the fellowship, for which problem he challenged them with the message of the cross and, significantly enough, showed them that the highest and best grace of the Spirit - love (1 Corinthians 13) - is possible only when the message of the cross is received. It was because the Galatians had not obeyed this challenge that the difficulties mentioned in the epistle had arisen in the fellowship. Love is not possible, in individuals or in fellowships, where the discipline of the cross is refused.

Now to go on. The 'oneness' of the ninefold fruit stresses the 'balanced' nature of the life in the Spirit - it is an 'all-round' wholeness, and the one grace does not appear without the other, any more than the flower can appear without its colour and its texture. This 'balance' is seen also in the threefold division that is often made in this cluster of Christian graces: the first three - love, joy, peace - speak, as someone has put it, of the life of the Spirit in its innermost secret, and refer to our relationship with God, and flow from it. They spring from communion with Him. The next three - longsuffering, gentleness, meekness - refer to the life of the Spirit in its manifestation towards men; while the last three - faith, meekness, temperance - refer to the life of the Spirit in relation to the difficulties of the world, and to ourselves. As such they parallel Paul's famous trilogy in Titus 2:12 - godly, righteous and sober living.

**102)5:22-23**

The application of the cross to our lives and our submission to its discipline means that we are set free - to love. Love belongs totally to the new order into which we are brought by grace. It is not something that the unregenerate heart can show forth at all, but is planted by the finger of God. Only thus can the demands of the law of God be met. Only grace can enable us to love, thus fulfilling the just requirement of the law. But to many this is a difficult idea. Is it possible to turn on love like a tap? Ah, love is not to be confused with natural generosity. It is a poor man that does not give way occasionally to generous impulse towards his fellowmen. But this is not what the New Testament means by Christian love. We are not asked to have certain feelings towards people, but to adopt a certain attitude towards them - in fact, God's attitude towards them. This, then, is the difference: we cannot have nice feelings towards an obnoxious person, but we can, and must act towards him as Christ would. This is love. And only grace can produce such an attitude of will in us. And when we will to let the death of Christ do its appointed work in us - i.e. when we will to be crucified with Him in practical experience, His love breaks out through us to men.

**103)5:22-23**

How, then, to encourage this fruit of the Spirit to become a reality in our lives? Well, the origin and fountainhead of love is God Himself. 'We love, because He first loved us', says John (1 John 4:19). And Paul says, the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5), and this means the love of God in Christ coming home to us in a truly personal way. Take, for example, the words of the hymn,

And when I think that God, His Son not sparing  
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in,  
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,  
He bled and died, to take away my sin;  
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art!

It is a sense of this love, its greatness and wonder, that begets love in us towards God and others, as indeed it begets joy and peace and every other fruit also. This is just another way of saying that when a consciousness, and sense of Christ fills our minds and hearts, this is when the fruit of the Spirit will begin to be seen in us. The feeling awakened by the words of the hymn is not in itself the fruit of the Spirit, but it is, so to speak, the soil in which that fruit can grow - and will, if we allow it to grip and master us, and become the mainspring of our lives. Much the same things can be said about the other parts of the trilogy - joy and peace; for where the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, there is joy and there is peace. But more of this in tomorrow's Note.

**104)5:22-23**

The joy and peace which are also the fruit of the Spirit are likewise no natural qualities...Christian joy is the joy of the Lord, and its fountainhead is in God Himself, 'We joy in God', says Paul in Romans 5:11, and since God is unchangeable, and His salvation an accomplished work in Christ, our joy is not only full, but constant, and in no wise dependent on outward circumstances for its continuance, and cannot be subject to ebb or flow. There is therefore no conceivable circumstances on the human level that can possibly prevent us from knowing that joy which the Spirit brings to the birth in our hearts. It is this unchanging joy, independent of, and detached from, all possible circumstances around us, that the prophet Habakkuk knew in the midst of all the perplexities and forebodings that beset him in his ministry (Habakkuk 3:17-19). To joy in the Lord is just as independent of mood as Christian love is, and we may say the same for the peace of God, for peace is not in the first instance a subjective experience, but an objective reality, wrought by Christ in His atoning and reconciling work on the cross and applied to us by the Spirit. The mainspring of peace is seen in such statements as 'If God be for us, who can be against us?', and it is when this basic and unalterable reality dawns on our souls and grips us that the peace which is described as passing all understanding (Philippians 4:7) and as being like a river (Isaiah 48:18) fills our experience.

**105)5:22-23**

One or two further thoughts before going on to the next trilogy of graces: the joy of the Lord, as was implied in the previous Note, is not a false emotionalism, something to be worked up, but something with a solid basis and foundation. When the Spirit of God works in a man's life the miracle of regeneration, by which old things are passed away and all things are made new - there is joy! For we are brought to love the God we used to hate, and to enjoy the company of Him from whom we used to turn in fear and embarrassment! As the Psalmist says, 'Happy is that people whose God is the Lord'. Two results flow from this, one in us, and the other in the work of God. In us, this is calculated to produce a carefree, childlike naturalness, free from pose or unreality. This does not conflict with the basic seriousness of the gospel, for seriousness is not sadness. D.L. Moody was one of the happiest and joyous of Christians, yet he could not speak of a lost soul without tears in his eyes. In the work, this will produce an irresistible gaiety in the onward march of the gospel. The sheer attractiveness of the early Christians, and of every true movement of the Spirit, is one of the great hallmarks of genuine Christian experience. What can withstand it? It took the old world by storm.

Let us notice once more the paradox of grace and command in all this. Love, joy, peace, these are the fruit of the Spirit; yet the divine imperative is issued in connection with each: Thou shalt love...Rejoice in the Lord...Let the peace of God rule in your hearts. In this, as in much else in the Christian life, God's commands are His enablings!

**106)5:22-23**

Love, joy, peace, as we have seen, represent the life of the Spirit in its deepest secrets, pertaining to, and flowing from our relationship with God, and from our communion with Him. The next triad of graces give us the horizontal reference - the life of the Spirit in its manifestation towards men. In Christ, and through grace, we are set free - to love, and that love, filled with joy and peace as it is, will express itself in longsuffering, gentleness and goodness. It is when the first triad of graces is established, in the terms in which we have described them, that right attitudes to others is possible. And here again, the twofold emphasis applies: on the one hand God has planted these graces in our renewed hearts, as holy seed, in the new life that is ours; on the other hand, the challenge comes to us to live them out, and express them in our lives.

The important thing for us to realise is that these are positive qualities, not negative, and signs of the new order. This needs to be said, in an age when such qualities are at a discount, and regarded as evidences of weakness. Rightly understood, however, they are neither negative nor weak. This world is a world antagonistic to Christian standards of any kind, and consequently no one who seeks in earnest to live in accordance with these standards may expect to find it an easy matter. There will be much to put up with, and he must learn not to be discouraged by many difficulties and rebuffs. This is the meaning of longsuffering. It is forbearance towards men whose conduct is calculated to provoke anger. It is not too much to say that Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:58, 'Be ye steadfast, unmovable...' gives a true indication of the characteristic that produces the grace of longsuffering - it is to be unchanging in our attitude, to refuse to allow ourselves to be moved from our position, or to allow others' attitudes to us to dictate our attitude to them. To live always, and in spite of everything, by the royal law of love.

**107)5:22-23**

Nor is it difficult to see how what was said in the previous Note will merge into gentleness which combines the idea of good-naturedness with that of kindness. This must not be taken to mean an easygoing attitude to the point of sacrifice of principle. It is rather the vibrant quality shown by Christ in His attitude towards those on whom He had compassion - the woman with the issue of blood, blind Bartimaeus, or the lepers. This tender sensitiveness in dealing with human need is possible only to real strength. Only the truly great and strong can be gentle. In the moral and spiritual realm, gentleness has the strength of steel!

The quality of goodness is perhaps best exemplified in the record we have of Barnabas, in the Acts of the Apostles. The son of consolation (Acts 4:36), he was the kind of man we would instinctively want to have beside us in time of trouble. Goodness 'minds the things of others' (Philippians 2:4), and has 'a heart at leisure from itself to soothe and sympathise'. There is nothing very negative in all this, is there? Love on trial, love in society, love in action - this is the Christian 'lifestyle' that is called for today - to be in the world as Christ was in the world, living a life of suffering love. Well, is this how we live? Is the fruit of the Spirit showing in our lives?



**108)5:22-23**

If we fail and fall short in all this, it may be that the answer is to be found in a consideration of the third triad of Christian graces. We fail because we do not have a right attitude to ourselves - that is to say, the life of the Spirit in relation to ourselves, in relation to faith, meekness, and self-control, needs fuller and more unhindered expression. Christian life is a life that is subject to pressures from without and from within, and faithfulness, meekness and self-control are the qualities needed to enable us to live it effectually. Faithfulness, rather than faith, is what Paul has in mind here - the ethical, rather than the spiritual, aspect of faith. The question that this word puts to us is not, 'Have you faith?', but 'Are you faithful?' One can see how challenging this must have been to the Galatians, unfaithful as they had been to the gospel they had received, and to the man who had brought it to them. Bunyan's lines well express this:

One here will constant be  
Come wind, come weather.

This is the quality which Paul says is the fruit of the Spirit, and nothing adorns the life of a Christian so much as this. To have a faithful spirit is to have a priceless possession. To be steadfast and dependable, to be true to one's loyalties, and to allow no consideration to interfere with them - this is the fruit of the Spirit.

**109)5:22-23**

But there is a brand of faithfulness which loses all its attractiveness by being dogged in the wrong way, and stubborn and obstinate, and this God will not own. Meekness is needed in our faithfulness, that mellowing quality which makes a faithful man 'easy to be entreated'. Not that meekness is weakness; on the contrary, it is obstinacy that is the sign of weakness. Moses was 'terrible in his meekness', and all the more so because he was under the strictest discipline and self-control (which is what 'temperance' means). The life of Moses is indeed a good illustration here: look at him at the Red Sea, smiting the waters with the rod of God, or coming down the mount of God to confront the Israelites with their sin in making the golden calf, anger blazing in his eyes. No, meekness is not weakness!

Finally, self-control. This grace is designed to deal with the pressures from within, the fifth column seeking to nullify the effects of all our striving for God. It means 'getting the mastery inside oneself'. Sin has disrupted the unity and harmony of body, soul and spirit in the image of God in which we were created, bringing about a state of 'civil war' within, in which the lower orders have mutinied and usurped authority over the higher, with the physical dominating the emotional, the emotional the mental, and all three dominating the spiritual. The Spirit comes, in the gospel, to restore order, to subdue the usurping parts and put them in their proper place. This grace of 'self-control' comes last in the list, because it is the crown of the Spirit's work in a renewed heart. The disorder wrought by sin in men's lives does not disappear in a day, and not without tears and a cross can control be regained.

**110)5:24-26**

The phrase 'they...have crucified the flesh...' has caused difficulties in some minds. There are those who differentiate between 'the flesh' and 'the old man', and maintain that the destruction of the old man is something Christ accomplished in His death on the cross, but the crucifixion of the flesh is something we must do. This, it seems to us, is to misunderstand Paul's teaching. Paul does not teach that part of the work is done by Christ and part by us. What he says (e.g. in Philippians 2:12, 13) is, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure'. This is the principle that underlies Paul's thought here also. We must crucify the flesh, because in fact God has done so in the death of His Son, and it is only because God has in fact dealt with the problem, and only on the basis of what He has done, that we can do this work of 'crucifying' or - as the Apostle puts it elsewhere - 'mortifying' the deeds of the body.

We note once again how the cross and the Spirit are intimately connected, both in doctrine and in the experience of the believer. This is the force of 'living in the Spirit' and 'walking in the Spirit' in 25. Life in the Spirit is what is ours in the gift of God, our position in Christ; walking in the Spirit is the outworking of that life in our lives, through the daily experience of the cross in our hearts. As always, we die to live.

**III) 5:24-6:1**

The reference to crucifixion in 24 links up with Paul's earlier statement in 2:20, and gives the 'manward' side where 2:20 gives the Godward, and underlines faith's response to, and expression of, the divine reality of what God has done for us in Christ. If that is our position in Christ - crucified with Him and alive unto God - this is faith putting it into practice as a reality in experience. Let us live, Paul means in 25, in character with our position, that is, walk in the Spirit, and be loving, longsuffering, gentle, self-controlled. Two specific examples of this now follow, in 26 and 6:1, one negative and one positive. 'Vain glory' refers to self-conceit, to having a false or inflated idea of one's own importance. This clearly can affect our attitude and conduct towards others. On the one hand, it provokes people, for there is a challenge inherent in it - this is the essentially competitive element in 'self', which always wants to be on top. On the other hand, envy is the obverse reaction, since we are always likely to encounter someone who is better than we are, a fact which self resents bitterly. J. Stott puts it thus: 'If we regard ourselves as superior to other people, we challenge them, for we want them to know and feel our superiority. If, on the other hand, we regard them as superior to us, we envy them. In both cases our attitude is due to 'vain glory' or 'conceit', to our having such a fantasy opinion of ourselves that we cannot bear rivals.... The correct attitude to other people is not 'I'm better than you and I'll prove it', nor 'You're better than I and I resent it', but 'You are a person of importance in your own right (because God made you in His own image and Christ died for you) and it is my joy and privilege to serve you'.'

**112)6:1**

Next comes the positive example of what Paul has been saying. There is a significance in the order, for as long as vainglory, provocation and envy hold the stage in our lives, love does not have a chance to express itself. Indeed, the one cancels out the other. Which may explain why this compassionate work of restoration is often at a discount, and left undone. The force of the words is 'If, nevertheless, a man be overtaken...', i.e. in view of what has been said in the previous chapter there is nevertheless the possibility of sin and failure even for those who have been brought into the liberty of Christ. There is in fact no level of spiritual attainment we can reach from which it is not possible to fall. But it follows the thought of the previous chapter in another sense also. Notice the position of this tender appeal - after the teaching about the fruit of the Spirit. There is something important here. The work of restoration in the gospel is possible only after the establishment of grace in the believer. It is 'ye who are spiritual' - that is those living in the Spirit and controlled by His power - who alone can do this gracious, Christlike work. It is a measure of the importance Paul thought the preparation and equipment of a believer for service to be that he should have spent so much time instructing the Galatians in the deep things of the spiritual life before he could exhort them to do the work of spiritual rescue and rehabilitation. This should serve to remind us that spiritual qualifications are necessary for the care and cure of souls. Why should we glibly suppose that inexperienced and often brash young Christians are able as a matter of course to do this work, before ever they have had time to become established in the things of God. If we followed the scriptural pattern more and gave ourselves time to become grounded in the Spirit, we might avoid the costly dissipation of spiritual energies which has bedevilled so many young lives, and made them spent forces just when they should be starting out in the service of the gospel.

**113)6:1**

The nature of the work of restoration is finely expressed in the word Paul uses here. It is a word elsewhere translated 'to make perfect' (cf Ephesians 4:12; 1 Peter 5:10). Yet a more accurate translation would be 'to bring something into its proper condition', and the idea it conveys is that of being brought back into the divine plan for one's life. The story of the lost coin in Luke 15 illustrates this perfectly. The coin bore the image and superscription of the king, it was minted for a particular purpose, but was no longer fulfilling it, being 'out of circulation'. It was 'restored' to circulation, and brought into its true function and destiny when the woman who searched diligently for it found it. What volume this speaks to us both of the tragedy of sin and the wonder of God's redeeming and restoring love and grace. For to be a sinner not only means to have fallen short of the glory of God and to be taken captive by Satan, it means also to have lost the sense of purpose in life and to have no sense of direction and no true anchorage, to be rootless and shiftless. This is the real despairing element in sin, and to be rescued from purposelessness and meaninglessness and frustration is one of the chief glories of the gospel. With what care and concern, therefore, and with what spiritual resources must we approach this tremendous work! Well might Paul say of such a ministry, 'Who is sufficient for these things?' (2 Corinthians 2:16). 'Ye who are spiritual'!

**114)6:2-5**

The words 'ye who are spiritual' form a useful introduction to these verses, which describe what the spiritual man should be doing. There is still a continuity of thought from the previous chapter, as we see from the reference to fulfilling the law of Christ. It is in this work of restoration that Christ's law of love operates effectually, and this, in fact, is the burden referred to in 2. It is in the context of temptation and sin that help is needed and must be given. The truth is, every man who takes the Christian life seriously is engaged in a battle for character and integrity, and often it is a fierce and sometimes a desperate fight, against constitutional and temperamental hazards which may lead a man, even when he is responsive in the main to the Spirit's working in his life, into numerous faults. It is here that a man needs help and encouragement, here that the burden needs to be shared, here that he needs a shoulder under the burden with him, not in grudging and reluctant aid, but in willing, sympathetic sharing. This is called 'fulfilling the law of Christ', and it is well named, for this is in fact what Christ did. He came down to where we were and in His Incarnation took His stand beside us and put His shoulder under our burden of sin. The verb 'be overtaken' can be either 'to be caught doing something wrong' or 'to do something wrong on a sudden impulse'. If the first, it would mean exposure in wrongdoing, and consequently what is expressed here is the spiritual and Christlike attitude to adopt and follow in such a case (the spirit of meekness advocated is of course the fruit of the Spirit as mentioned in 5:23, and is wonderfully exemplified in Christ's own treatment of the woman in John 8). If the second meaning is adopted, the reference will be to someone who has been 'surprised' and 'seized un-awares' by sin. This suggests two things; first, the waywardness of sin, hinted at in the word 'paraptoma', meaning a false step, a blunder; and secondly, the fact of Satan, who blinds men, especially to the ultimate consequences of actions, and thus deceives them into making wrong moves.

**115)6:2-5**

The 'burden' in 5, however, is different from that in 2. What Paul means is that there is always a tendency to develop a censorious, self-righteous spirit, and lay claim to a spiritual superiority over a fallen brother. Thus he warns, in 1, 'consider thyself'. All comparisons between ourselves and others must cease, and each man ought to aim at having his own work of such sterling worth that he will have something to boast about on his own account, and not in comparison with his fellows. There is, for every man, a burden of personal responsibility which he cannot shift to other shoulders, that can never be shared with another - his responsibility to God - and if he devotes his mind to it he will not have time or inclination to compare himself with others. This is the emphasis that Paul makes in passages like 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 solemn words which ought to take our eyes off the lives of others, and prevent us from ever adopting Peter's attitude in John 21:21, 22, when he said, 'Lord, and what shall this man do?', and earned the rebuke of our Lord, 'What is that to thee? Follow thou Me'. We have all responsibility enough in this sense to keep us from even a sideways glance at others.



**116)6:6-10**

The twofold word about bearing burdens expressed in 2 and 5 is now thrust by Paul on his readers in a particular instance, and also as a general principle, which is itself applied in a number of ways in relation to the theme of the flesh and the Spirit in 5:17ff. In 6, he indicates that the burden of the teacher's support and maintenance is one that must necessarily be borne by others, since he is to live by the gospel. On the other hand, the responsibility each believer has for 'communicating' in this way is one that lies fairly and squarely on him alone, and cannot be passed on to another. In this particular sense every man carries his own responsibility in the sight of God. Paul feels so strongly about this that he can go on to say that a solemn law of spiritual life applies decidedly to this. To evade one's responsibility in this is to sow seeds that will reap a certain harvest (7). To neglect it is to mock God. Christian liberality - not merely in the sense of giving money, but also in the sense of giving oneself 'in all good things', in a stewardship of time and talents, compassion, and encouragement and care - is a bearing of others' burdens, and it is also a responsibility concerning which we shall have to give an account before God. It is also an evidence of the Holy Spirit's working in the life of the believer. The discipline of the cross, and the life of the Spirit - these are the roots from which this flows.

**117)6:6-10**

The fact is - and this is the general principle enunciated here - all life is lived under the shadow of judgment. It is an inexorable, inescapable fact of our existence, operating all the time, not merely at the end of life, and Paul has in mind the harvest that is reaped in this life as much as in that which is hereafter. He was already seeing some evidences of a sorry harvest in the Galatian Church. That is what disturbed him so much, and made him write as warningly as he did. Nor would he have had far to look, in Scripture, for illustration of his point. The story of Abraham and Lot in the book of Genesis is a practical example of the two alternatives before us of sowing to the flesh or sowing to the Spirit. Lot's history is significant and characteristic, showing a downward progression, from 'looking on the cities of the plain', through 'pitching his tent toward Sodom', to 'sitting in the gate of Sodom'. There is nothing stationary or static in the life of the flesh, there is a momentum involved in it, and the harvest is always sure and inevitable: his testimony was scorned and ignored by the citizens of Sodom. But how could he have expected to reap a spiritual harvest, when he sowed such seed? In contrast, Abraham's sowing was to the Spirit, and he set his mind on things that were above. And the reaping? He became the friend of God, and the father of the faithful! God is no man's debtor!

**118)6:11-13**

There are two things to note in these verses, and both are brought out more clearly in the modern translations than in the AV. First, Paul points out that these false teachers urged circumcision on the Galatians 'to escape persecution for the cross of Christ' (NEB). From which we may learn that it is easier and far less costly to adhere to a legalistic creed of observances than to take up the cross and follow Christ. All too often a preoccupation with rules and regulations has become a substitute for the real discipline of Christian living even in our day, and we need to see some of the narrower expressions of the legalistic spirit for what they really are. Secondly, underlying their desire for the Galatians to be circumcised was no real concern either for the law or for their truest welfare, but the unworthy motive of wanting to be able to boast in the Galatians' submission to their ruling. It is as well that we should learn to discern the real motives of people in the service of the kingdom. It is possible to be tireless in one's zeal, and yet be driven by a subtle, selfish ambition, which calls in question the worth of all we do, and renders it unacceptable to God. The question, then, is not what we do, but why we do what we do.

**119)6:11-13**

These verses really sum up the central controversy that has been the subject of the epistle, viz., the outward versus the inward in true religion. 'Throughout, Paul has insisted that the essence of true Christianity lies in inward realities, not outward observances; on grace, not law. It is to this that he now reverts here, going with a devastating thrust to the heart of the matter, exposing the motives of the Judaisers and enemies of the cross of Christ. The charges he makes against them are pretty devastating, but he is simply being realistic. It is just not possible to deviate from the truth without becoming wrong men. For the issue is never one of mere ignorance or mistake: there is always a moral issue involved. With them, there was a death they had refused to die. It is easier (for the flesh) to make a show of religion than to be right with God, easier to compromise with the truth and hold to outward observances than to take a stand for Christ, easier to 'count heads' and tabulate 'ecclesiastical statistics' than to bring sons and daughters to the birth in Christ.

Here, then, were men who were substituting external observances for reality. It is not even that they themselves were keeping the law they were advocating for others. Even by their own standards they were a living lie, concerned only to glory in the ensnaring of as many as possible in the meshes of law keeping.

**120)6:14-15**

It is in contrast to the false glorying mentioned in 13 that Paul gives utterance to these tremendous words in 14. The ground of his glorying and boasting is the cross of Christ. It is a magnificent statement, and it contrives to sum up in a comprehensive way the whole heart of his message in the epistle, and all that he means by the gospel and what it can do for men. Paul glories, he says, in the cross of Christ; and there is little doubt, if his other epistles are any criterion, that the cross was at the heart of his experience. For him, all roads led to the cross. In 2 Corinthians 5:14 he speaks of the constraint of divine love, giving true direction to a man's life. And look at the 'direction' it gave to Paul in his thinking - to the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection, and the great reconciling work of the cross. Always where the love of Christ grips and masters a man, this is where it will bring him in his thinking and in his testimony! (2 Corinthians 5:14-21).

**121)6:14-15**

What is so impressive about Paul's statement here is that it sets the gospel in a true perspective. We have seen in this epistle, and elsewhere, the challenge of the gospel of the cross, we have seen that that gospel summons men to a terrific discipline, to a personal crucifixion. But here, in these words, we see that this is not something to shrink from, or fear, but something to glory and exult in. How can this be? The answer is that, strict and demanding as the discipline of the cross may be, and costly, it provides such a glorious overplus of the blessing of God that any cost it might involve is abundantly worth it. Paul gives two reasons for his glorying in the cross - on the one hand, it brought him deliverance from the world, and on the other it brought him deliverance from his sinful self. What he means is that 'the world' - whether in the general sense of this present evil world with all its seductive charm and fascination, or his own particular religious world which meant so much to him, and which he counted loss for Christ - was 'crossed out' of his life by the cross of Christ; and likewise that the 'I', the sinful self which made him cry out in despair, 'O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' was cancelled out by the cross. Crucifixion to Paul was not so much something to endure as a liberation, a 'way out' into a 'new creation' (15). Is it any wonder that he gloried in the cross?

**122)6:16-18**

These closing verses of the epistle contain yet another impressive statement from the Apostle (17). It is a striking word, and there is a ring of authority, and even awesomeness, about it. There is almost the growl of a lion in it, a great king of the forest disturbed by intruders that have presumed to assail his rightful place, by firing darts into him.

Lightfoot interprets the plea as meaning, 'Let no man question my authority henceforth', that is to say, Paul ends the epistle as he had begun it, with an assertion of his apostolic authority.' One has only to think of some of the notable autobiographical passages in Paul's other epistles (1 Corinthians 4:9-13; 2 Corinthians 11:23-33) to realise what he means by the 'marks of the Lord Jesus', and how truly and deeply he shared the sufferings of the Son of God in bringing sons and daughters into glory. In the last analysis, this is the highest authority a man can have for asking others to trouble him no more but rather accept his message. A man who bears the marks of the cross upon him has the right to speak as bluntly as Paul had done in this epistle, without any fear of overstepping himself; for when the world is crucified unto him and he to the world, it means that Christ is in all things pre-eminent in his life, and therefore it is Christ Himself who speaks. This is the authority by which Paul wrote to the Galatians. A crucified man has the right to say anything to those who are on his heart.

**123)6:6-18**

The ground of Paul's plea is that he bears in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. The Greek word is 'stigmata'. Catholic and mystical interpretations of this say that they refer to actual marks that appeared on Paul's hands and feet and side, corresponding to Christ's wounds, so close was identification with his Lord. But there is nothing here to suggest that this is what Paul was speaking about, and we agree with J. Stott's comment that 'those cases which seem to be well attested would today be termed 'nueropathic bleedings', caused by sub-conscious auto-suggestion', and therefore of little necessarily spiritual significance. The reference is much likelier to be to the marks of suffering in his body which he had borne for Christ's sake, the stripes, the beatings and the stonings he had endured on his missionary journeys - his battle scars, gotten through faithfulness to Christ.

The word, however, was also used to describe the brands that distinguished a slave as belonging to a particular master. Cole, in the Tyndale commentary, remarks that such 'brands' are often mentioned in the 'placards' that announced the escape of runaway slaves, and many such documents have survived among the papyri. It was also used for 'religious tattooing' and 'religious cicatrices' common to many ancient religions. Perhaps Paul is thinking of circumcision and saying to his opposers, 'You impose ritual cuttings on men's bodies; I bear marks already, but they are those that make me out as being Christ's. Persecution, not circumcision, is the authentic Christian mark.'



**124)6:16-18**

The idea of being Christ's slave and captive is one that stands out also in 2 Corinthians 2:14, where Paul speaks of being led in triumph as a captive at Christ's chariot wheels. It is of this wonderful verse that Denney says, 'Wherever Christ is leading a single soul in triumph, and the fragrance of the gospel should go forth...the lowliest life which Christ is leading in triumph will speak infallibly and persuasively for Him.' How true this was of Paul! It is not a big step from this to 2 Corinthians 4, another of the passages where Paul speaks of the 'marks' of Christ upon him, as he shared in His sufferings, and of the way in which the 'treasure' of the gospel light gets out to men - by the breaking of the earthen vessels (Matthew Henry suggests that Paul is thinking here of the story of Gideon and the earthen pitchers in which his men carried the lights - the pitchers were shattered, the lights exposed, and the enemy were scattered). And Paul adds, 'Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body' (2 Corinthians 4:10). These are the marks that Paul makes the ground of his plea in 17. And is there not at least a suggestion, a veiled warning to his opposers: 'I am Christ's property, the Lord's anointed, and he that touches me will have Him to deal with.' (cf Psalm 105:15).