

# Introduction to the Epistle to the Galatians

## WELCOME TO THE COURSE

We are about to begin the course on Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, and it may be a first experience of this Epistle or you may have heard or done studies in it once or more times. Like all biblical studies the text will always yield more than it has already done, especially if we are ready to receive it in a fresh way. For some of us the first full reading of Galatians was an unforgettable experience. We trust that all of us will find this a special time as we go through the text and bring out some of the great themes it contains. As in the Epistle to the Romans, the great theme of Galatians is 'justification by faith' and this is undergirded by the many references to the various works of the Cross, such as relating to sin, to the old humanity (in Adam), the curse, the flesh and the world.

## THE WAY WE WILL GO ABOUT THE COURSE

Two commentaries will be made available, namely (i) my *Galatians: A Commentary* (NCPI, 1982), and (ii) Noel Due's *Commentary on Galatians* (NCPI, 1993). Both will be useful to have, Noel's Due's being the most comprehensive. There will be no need for a student to use more commentaries.<sup>1</sup> Students in the Christian Workers' School will need to be fully acquainted with the Due commentary. I will be issuing some Theme Essays during the period of our Study. The themes will—so to speak—criss-cross the Epistle, bringing out the prominent ideas. In this Introductory Study we will briefly look at an overview of the themes of the Epistle.

Note: Our particular Studies will be differently headed from these below which are intended simply to give us a bird's-eye view of the Epistle. The particular Studies which follow this Introduction will differ somewhat in their headings, but will contain the same material.

## OVERVIEW OF THE THEMES OF THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PAUL AND THE GALATIANS

(a) He had founded the churches (1:8, 9; 4:19). This at great cost (4:11). They received him with love.

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<sup>1</sup> Other good Commentaries are: *The Message of Galatians* by John Stott ('The Bible Speaks Today' Series, IVP, 1968); *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Galatians* by John Brown (The Sovereign Grace Book Club, 1957); *The Epistle to the Galatians* by R. Alan Cole (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Tyndale, 1965); *Galatians* by Richard N. Longenecker (vol. 41, Word Biblical Commentary, Word, 1990); *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia* by Herman N. Ridderbos (Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1961).

(b) Most of the Galatians had been converted from paganism (see 2:5; 4:8; 5:2; 6:12).

#### THE OCCASION AND PURPOSE OF THE EPISTLE

(a) The converts lived in the new age, the age of the Gospel, the New Covenant, and the Spirit—that is, grace.

(b) Judaizers tried to draw them back to the old (Jewish) age (5:1ff.).

#### THE NATURE OF THE OLD COVENANT AND PEOPLE

(a) The Jews did not anticipate a change in law and worship, but yet knew that Messiah would bring changes.

(b) Jesus did not come to abolish the law (Matt. 5:17–18). Yet he came to bring grace (John 1:14–16).

(c) The Judaizers wanted to wed grace and law—a bit of both! This was to be self-saving (6:12).

#### PAUL'S EXPERIENCE OF LAW AND GRACE

(a) He was laid hold of by Christ (1:15–16).

(b) He was enlightened by Christ (II Cor. 4:6). Prior to that he *thought* he was enlightened, and *thought* he was righteous (Phil. 3:4–6).

(c) He was forgiven through Christ (Acts 22:16; I Tim. 1:15).

(d) He was recreated by Christ (5:6; 6:15; II Cor. 5:17).

(e) He was called by Christ (1:16).

#### THE MATTER OF PAUL'S AUTHORITY

(a) If Paul was truly an apostle then what he said would have to be accepted.

(b) Paul gave proof of his apostleship (1:11 – 2:10).

#### SOME OF THE BASIC TEACHING OF THE EPISTLE

(a) Grace is the primary determinant for all things (2:16–21).

(b) The Spirit is given as a gift and all life proceeds from Him (3:1–3; 4:4–6; 5:1, 16, 18, 22–23, 25–26).

(c) Promise transcends law and is the basis of justifying faith (3:15–22).

(d) Law—which cannot justify—shuts the sinner up to faith and the promises of God (2:16–19; 3:21 – 4:6).

(e) There is a life in the flesh—the old life. There is a life in the Spirit—the new life.

(f) One by faith belongs to a body (3:26–29; 5:13–25). Paul's Apostolic Authority in Galatians.

Much of Galatians is given to asserting the fact of Paul's apostolic authority. From 1:1 to 2:11 Paul asserts this authority, and then presses on to show that his loyalty to the gospel exceeded that of Peter, and we shall shortly examine his argument. His opponents were those who have come to be named as 'Judaisers' and who had told Paul's Galatian converts that Paul's teaching was not trustworthy, nor was it 'apostolic' in essence. We shall investigate the charges against him, but certainly these allegations would have had no validity unless Paul had *not* been made an apostle by Christ. If Paul were truly an apostle, then the accusations—if correct—would mean Paul had departed from the apostolic charge given to him.

### ***What is an Apostle?***

First, then, we ask, 'What was an apostle?' and the answer to this lies not so much in the contemporary meaning of the word as in what the Acts and the New Testament Letters tell us was the meaning of the term. Leaving for a moment a study of the technical meaning of the word we see it used by Mark in 6:30— 'The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and thought'— and by Matthew in 10:1–2 where the twelve were first called disciples and then apostles. Luke uses the term 'apostle' more freely and in 6:12–16 virtually repeats Matthew's naming the twelve first as 'disciples' and then as 'apostles', in 9:10; 17:5; 22:14; 24:10. It is difficult to know whether Luke is using the term reading back—as it were—the title by which the twelve had come to be known before and after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Mark 3:14 tells us 'And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons'. Such were signs of the Kingdom and its action. They were to be with Jesus and then were to be sent forth—as apostles—firstly during his ministry but most powerfully after his ascension .

Certainly the choice of Matthias in Acts 1:15–26 indicates the nature of an apostle, as the eleven prayed, 'Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which of these two [Barsabbas and Matthias] thou hast chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside, to go to his own place.' The qualifications there were of those

who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us -- one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.

The choice—by the drawing of lots—turned out to be that of Matthias and so he was named an apostle. The question is whether Paul can also be included among the apostles especially if their number was confined to an unrepeatable twelve. This issue has long been debated, and not to any definable conclusion. We are still left with the fact that Paul claims he was called by Christ and sent forth as an apostle.

### ***Paul an Apostle***

We follow this claim of Paul. He asserts this right in Romans 1:1; I Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:1 and defends it in this Epistle as also in II Corinthians. Especially he says in 12:12, 'The signs of an apostle were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works'. We should note two things here (i) the signs of an apostle were performed among them, and (ii) these signs of an apostle were not 'signs and wonders and mighty works' but were accompanied by them. These latter things were also done by others than apostles, e.g. Stephen in Acts 6:8, so 'the signs of an

apostle' must have been other than just 'signs and wonders'. Not also the signs of an apostle were 'with all patience'..

As to being a witness to the resurrection Paul's sight of Christ when he was on the Damascus road (I Cor. 5:8; cf. I Cor. 9:1) qualified him as a witness of the resurrection. It is also certain that Christ appeared to him a number of times, and chapters 9, 22 and 26 of Acts testify to Christ's commission of him as an apostle. In I Corinthians 15:8–11 he places himself amongst the apostles, conscious that he needed God's grace to bring him into the gospel but not at all reluctant to claim he had worked even harder than them all.

Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

In Galatians 2:7-9 he writes that the apostles at Jerusalem approved<sup>2</sup> his ministry.

but on the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter for the mission to the circumcised worked through me also for the Gentiles), and when they perceived the grace that was given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised;

Paul, then, could have been on no lower scale than the other apostles. Whether this attestation happened at the time of the church council in Jerusalem (Acts 15) or some other time, does not greatly matter. It seems that that occasion was an affirmation of Paul's apostleship.

## THE MEANING OF THE APOSTOLATE

By 'the apostolate' we mean those called by Christ to be apostles, and sent forth by him. This grouping has been called 'the college of the apostles'. There are others in the New Testament who are called 'apostles', but with a lesser—or other—meaning than that pertaining to those commissioned by Christ, since 'apostle' means 'a sent one'. When Judas hanged himself they replaced him by Matthias but when James was murdered there was no talk of replacing him. When Ephesians mentions (4:11; cf. I Cor. 12:28) 'And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers' this may have had reference to the college of the twelve, or it may have referred to apostles on a lesser basis: we cannot be dogmatic, but the twelve were certainly understood to be those commissioned directly by Christ, and Paul, as we have seen, was also commissioned directly by the Lord.

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<sup>2</sup> We will see that he did not seek approval as though he were uncertain and so needed such attestation.

## THE MEANING OF THE APOSTOLIC DOCTRINE

We cannot understand the apostolate unless we understand what they were commissioned to preach and that was 'the apostolic message'. That is it was the truth of Christ brought to their understanding by Jesus' teaching and the Holy Spirit leading them into all truth, teaching them, and bringing all things Christ had said to their remembrance. We need to elaborate this.

### THE APOSTOLIC TEACHING OR DOCTRINE.

The disciples, reasonably speaking understood their own Scriptures. They had been witness to the events of Christ as 'Messiah, the Son of the living God', the King of the Kingdom. These events began with Jesus' call to follow him and went on to the ascension of Jesus and his sending forth of the Holy Spirit. So then there were two distinct things, (i) what we call the Old Testament Scriptures and (ii) the event of Christ and his events. On the day of Pentecost when the Spirit came he did all Jesus had prophesied and suddenly there was 'the apostles doctrine' (Acts 2:42).

What was this 'apostolic doctrine'? It was the truth of the Old Testament interpreted in the light of the events of Christ, and it was also the events of Christ interpreted in the light of the Old Testament. Thus a third entity emerged, namely the 'apostles' doctrine' or 'the apostolic truth'. Christ had claimed to be spoken of 'in all the scriptures' (Luke 2:25–27), so what happened in his birth, life, resurrection and ascension was not new or novel, but all in accordance with the Old Testament Scriptures..

And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

That revelation to two disciples caused their hearts to burn within them. Later in the day the risen Jesus appeared to ten of the apostles<sup>3</sup> in the upper room.

Then he said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high."

It is clear from this latter passage that they were taught the apostolic message and yet that teaching awaited the coming of the Spirit to bring it all fully to them. When they spoke that message it was an apostolic utterance, but others who—having the heard the apostles—took the same message to yet others were not thereby to be called apostles although the message that they gave was apostolic. The truth the apostolic college taught was unique. Only they had the authority to pronounce on the truth given to them by Christ though all believers had the right to declare that message to others.

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<sup>3</sup> There may have been less but we know Judas and Thomas were not present.

## PAUL'S CLAIM TO HIS APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

Paul makes it clear in a number of places that he had received the gospel directly from Christ and not from others, or even through others. In I Corinthians 15:1–5 he speaks of what he received.

Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast -- unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

It is in Galatians 1:11–12 where he speaks of having come to the truth by a revelation of Christ.

For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

‘a revelation of Christ could mean ‘Christ himself revealed the nature of the gospel to me’, or, ‘When I had a revelation of Jesus Christ then I knew the gospel’. Probably both things are true and go together. If we ask, ‘Had not Paul heard the gospel when he was the cruel persecuting Pharisee?’ then the answer must be ‘Yes!’. He had heard the Christians preach innumerable times. He knew the text of their proclamation. He knew also about Jesus and his claims. It was just that they seemed false claims and the gospel a false ‘good news’. That was why he has persecuted the Christians. However, when he saw ‘the Lord’ on the road to Damascus and realised it was Jesus, then he knew that what he had heard from the Christians was authentic, that Jesus was indeed the Christ. Doubtless, then, his mind flew to the Scriptures the Christians had quoted and these with the knowledge he already had of the Hebrew writings would have been such that the whole gospel would have come to him in a flash. In any case he spent three days in his blindness, contemplating these things where they must have come together. Doubtless Jesus had said many things to him.

There was also one more thing: Paul said, ‘God revealed His Son *in*<sup>4</sup> me.’ Surely that was the revelation of the gospel, to see and know Christ in this inner revelation! So then, the gospel was established in Paul as ‘the apostolic truth’ and it would have comported with all that the Christians knew and taught, and of course with what the apostles had stated to them. In I Corinthians 15:3–4 Paul stated,

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.

When, and how Paul ‘received’ according to this passage does not much matter. From the moment he was visited by Ananias (Acts 9) Paul knew the gospel for ‘in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus saying, “He is the Son of God.” ‘

We turn now to Paul’s claim in Galatians regarding his authority as an apostle. In 1:1 he says, ‘Paul an apostle—not from men, nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and [from] God the Father . . .’ If he was an apostle through Jesus Christ then that was

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<sup>4</sup> Some translations have ‘to me’ (RSV) and others ‘through me’ but the Greek has ‘in’ (*en*).

enough. How that happened we see above. That it was also through, from or by the Father is another matter<sup>5</sup>. Paul claims that the source of his apostleship was the Father and the Son—a high claim indeed. It shows he had relations with the Father. In some Epistles he says, ‘An apostle by the will of God’ and in I Timothy 1:1 he says, ‘an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Saviour and of Jesus Christ our hope’. These claims are high ones, and if true, then all Paul’s readers had to take note of what he said and treat it with reverence and—where called to do so—with obedience.

We need now to look at the text of 1:15–24,

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus.

Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cili'cia. And I was still not known by sight to the churches of Christ in Judea; they only heard it said, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they glorified God because of me.

In this passage Paul is saying that when he was commissioned by Christ as an apostle he did not go to Jerusalem to the apostle to be attested. There was no need for such affirmation.. Also to do so would have meant he had doubt in his mind. What came to him was ‘not from man, nor was he [I] taught it’. To seek attestation at Jerusalem would not only call Christ’s commission in doubt but also Paul’s own, direct assurance of it. It was at least three years after his conversion Paul went to Jerusalem and perhaps more.<sup>6</sup> That was a long time. When he did go it was not for attestation and it seems he saw only Peter saw him, and the churches knew nothing of him.

The second section that contains Paul's’ assertion of his apostleship is 2:1–10,

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up by revelation; and I laid before them (but privately before those who were of repute) the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain. But even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. But because of false brethren secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage -- to them we did not yield submission even for a moment, that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. And from those who were reputed to be something (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) -- those, I say, who were of repute added nothing to me; but on the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter for the mission to the circumcised worked through me also for the Gentiles), and when they perceived the grace that was given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised; only they would have us remember the poor, which very thing I was eager to do.

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<sup>5</sup> The one preposition ‘through’ (*dia*) is used for the two by whom apostleship came to Paul. This has been thought to be a chiasmus, but it does not matter. The Father is always the source and probably so here, but Jesus gave the commission directly. The main point is that the apostleship did not come from men but from God.

<sup>6</sup> Mistakenly some think Paul went to Arabia for three years, but the text does not say that. The ‘then’ of verse 18 indicates that he went to Jerusalem either three years after his conversion or three years after his return from Arabia to Damascus. We do not know how long he was in Arabia: it seems that was probably a short time.



Paul made a second visit another fourteen years later<sup>7</sup>, so that again, he was not anxious to have his apostolic calling certified. When he did go it was not to get such attestation. We note that he went up 'by revelation', that is not some impulse to test out the gospel but to do what God wished him to do. He talked privately with the apostles of the gospel which he preached 'lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain'. Some would say Paul was, at this later hour in his ministry, seeking to see whether he had been on the right lines. The text does not bear this interpretation. 'Run in vain' surely means, 'I spoke privately to the disciples so that when we discussed the gospel which I preach amongst the Gentiles so that they—the apostles—would see I was not even talking about the gospel as such but the gospel in regard to the way that I preach it amongst the Gentiles—the gospel to the Gentiles'. I wanted to let the other apostles see this was my special commission so that they would be in accord with this and my approach to the Gentiles would not be hindered by their—the apostles'—opposition. If they had opposed the gospel I preach to the Gentiles then I would have seemed to have run in vain.'

Of course the apostles agreed with it, and they 'perceived the grace that was given to me', that is the grace to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. They also saw Paul's special ministry was to go to the Gentiles whilst theirs was to go to the Jews. They could thus speak of 'the gospel which we preach to our brethren, the Jews'.

As if all that were perhaps not enough, Paul then speaks of the time he rebuked the Apostle Peter at Antioch, on one occasion,

*But when Cephas came to Antioch I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And with him the rest of the Jews acted insincerely, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their insincerity. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?" We ourselves, who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, yet who know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified.*

This section (2:11–16) shows that Paul rebuked Peter for an action which did not conform to the gospel, and certainly not the gospel as preached to the Gentiles. We need not discuss the nature of Peter's actions but they did comport with the known apostolic truth (cf. 3:28). The fact that Paul could rebuke Peter is significant for his own authority as an apostle. If we read from verses 15–21 we see that Paul renewed Peter's understanding of the meaning and significance of the gospel.

## WHAT VALUE DOES APOSTLESHIP HAVE FOR US TODAY?

If, as we have said, the apostolic truth was—is—composed of two distinct things, (i) that which we call the Old Testament Scriptures now interpreted in the light of the event and events of Christ, and (ii) the event and events of Christ interpreted in the light of the Old Testament. On the day of Pentecost when the Spirit came he did all Jesus had prophesied, namely he brought to their memory all that Jesus had spoken to them, he

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<sup>7</sup> It could be argued that Paul is saying he went up fourteen years after his conversion and not fourteen years after his first visit to Jerusalem after being in Damascus. The time factor does not matter,



taught them all things—the all things of the gospel, and he gave revelation of Jesus and the Father, so that suddenly there was ‘the apostles doctrine (Acts 2:42). Jesus had taught them this truth, the Holy Spirit had refreshed and renewed them in that teaching, and the unique thing, the gospel, was formed<sup>8</sup>. That is, the apostles’ doctrine was now a substantial entity<sup>9</sup>. Not only when he had been with them during his ministry, but in the forty days between Easter Sunday and Pentecost he himself had taught them regarding (i) himself and the Old Testament (Luke 24:25–27, 44–47) and (ii) the things concerning the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). This was the body of truth the Holy Spirit brought to them, or rather to which he brought the disciples<sup>10</sup>.

If today we want to know what is the apostolic truth, where would we go? Undoubtedly to the apostles and their writings, for they were uniquely given the apostolic truth from Christ himself. We have already seen that when others teach what the apostles taught it was the apostolic truth received and passed on. However the apostles themselves alone decided what was that truth. This meant that the authority lay with them, or rather with the commission given them and the substance of the truth given with, and in, that commission.

If, then, the Judaisers at Galatia, or the ‘super-apostles’ at Corinth could discount Paul’s apostleship they could also discount the gospel he taught. That is why Paul is insistent on his apostleship. To this we can add, ‘Today anyone who differs from Paul’s teaching must also differ from the apostolic truth’. It may well be that many may beg to differ from Paul, or Peter or John but then they cannot call what they think ‘apostolic truth’.

## CONCLUSION TO OUR ESSAY

The reasoning of our Essay may have been tedious, but our point is made: Paul spoke with the authority of his apostleship. The Judaisers therefore had no case if they differed from him. They may have had their own case but it was not apostolic. Those who wish to be apostolic have the great resources of the Apostles at their disposal and can have confidence that they thus have ‘the mind of Christ’ and ‘the anointing of the Spirit’ and that ‘they know all things’ that is, all things that are truly apostolical. The readers of the

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<sup>8</sup> When we say ‘the gospel was formed’ we must remember that in Galatians 3:8 Paul says, ‘And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.”’ The gospel already existed, but the Spirit brought it to the apostles as Jesus had forecast and of course it was in the form that we call ‘the gospel’, ‘the *kerugma*’ and ‘the whole counsel of God’, that is ‘the apostolic truth’, ‘the teaching of the apostles’.

<sup>9</sup> The apostle John writes to his readers in I John 2:20–21, ‘But you have been anointed by the Holy One and you all know [or, ‘you know all things’] I write to you not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and know that no lie is of the truth.’ He goes on to say in verse 27, ‘the anointing which which you received from him abides in you and you have no need that anyone should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it taught you, abide in him’. John seems to be saying that with the ‘anointing’ came also the body of truth, and this was an event which happened in their past, and, seemingly, their entrance into the Kingdom by new birth.

<sup>10</sup> In Romans 6:17 Paul wrote, ‘you having once been slaves of sin have, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were committed’, which presupposes there was a ‘form of doctrine’ (*tupon didasches*) prior to preaching. In II Timothy 1:13–14 Paul exhorts Timothy, ‘Follow the pattern of the sound words which have learned from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus; guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within you’. It would be easy to argue that the gospel Timothy learned from Paul was the truth the Holy Spirit taught and entrusted to him, Timothy. In his letter Jude speaks of ‘the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints’. Here ‘the faith’ seems to be that body of truth, the gospel and what we are calling ‘the apostolic truth’.

Letter to the Galatians may thus have confidence in the teaching of Paul. This is what makes the Epistle such a treasure

# The Law in Galatians

## PAUL'S VIEW OF LAW

In order to understand Paul's view of law<sup>11</sup> we must have some comprehension of the man himself, the world from which he came, and his perception of the gospel which gave him his view of law. We know him to have been a Pharisee. In Acts 26:4–5 he told King Agrippa, 'My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and at Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee.' In Philippians 3:5–6 he reports of himself, 'circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law blameless.' We have the evidence of his fierce persecution of the Christians in Acts 9:1–6. In Acts 22:3 Paul tells the Roman tribune, 'I am a Jew, born at Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as you all are this day.'

If we felt it necessary we would seek to study the life and views of the sect of Pharisees, and this would require us to use sources other than the New Testament. It is not difficult to trace their history in the available materials. For our purposes an examination of the Gospels and Jesus' assessment of the Pharisees is really all we need when it comes to our study on the law as it is the subject of both the Gospels and the Epistles<sup>12</sup>. In some matters Jesus held views which were compatible with those of the Pharisees, but he also opposed them on issues such as the Sabbath and their meticulous precepts which they set forth as authentic law. By the Sermon on the Mount he taught the real nature of law. In Matthew 23 Jesus delivered a long and powerful diatribe against the scribes and Pharisees. Many of the sect had become hypocrites, which could mean they taught one thing and did another (cf. Matt. 23:2), or just that they were superficial and professional rather than sincere and earnest.

Paul tells us in Philippians that 'as to righteousness under the law [I was] blameless.' In Romans 7:9, 'I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came,

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<sup>11</sup>It is important that we understand Paul's use of the term 'law'. He speaks to Jews generally in relation to the law of Moses. In 4:8–10 he appears to be talking of a law that pagans knew—the dominating law of the 'elemental spirits'. Then he often refers to law as that principle by which the conscience works, so that whether Mosaic, pagan or simply some rudimentary understanding that a human being cannot exist without law. Thus any law is *the* law to the person who is Jew, cultic pagan or even aimless. For them all that law presents the same principle, 'Keep me and be justified'. It is not always possible to know for sure which law Paul is referring to, but Romans 2:12–16 may refer in particular to the law given by Moses but yet it seems to say that it is possible, universally, to recognise the creational law of God and in seeking to obey it, and so be as one who works towards the goodness of God.

<sup>12</sup>We should be aware of the origins, history and beliefs of the Pharisees which can be read in any credible Bible Dictionary along with associated treatments of this sect of Judaism. It has been pointed out that the Pharisees whom Jesus often addresses are not wholly representative of the whole of the sect. Those Pharisees who opposed Jesus did so on their belief that he was seeking to destroy the law, which was not Jesus' intention. He did, however, set out to oppose the prevalent views of the Pharisees which we call by the names 'legalistic' and 'nomistic'. We all understand the meaning of legalism, but 'nomism' is not quite the same. It is an intense loyalty to the law of Moses, a love for it, and desire to defend it against its detractors. Both Hillel and Gamaliel who were leaders of the sect at the time of Jesus were men of deep piety. Paul, as we see, studied under Gamaliel and it was Gamaliel who gave wise counsel to the Sanhedrin in their judgement of the apostles and the gospel they preached.

sin revived and I died.’ Many are curious as to when this was that he was ‘alive apart from the law’ but none can be dogmatic. It seems there as a time when the law had not really come to him, although he was busy studying it. It may have been when Christ appeared that the law suddenly became alive. If this were the case then that was when he died, that is died to his old Pharisaic self, and came alive to God in Christ. It may also be what he means by Galatians 2:19, ‘I through the law have died to the law. I have been crucified with Christ.’

Whatever was the case Paul undoubtedly put himself—as he surely once was—among those of the Jews in Romans 10:2–3,

I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

Whatever that state was, it was far from the gospel state of grace. Paul came to know the gospel as the power of God unto salvation (cf. Rom. 1:16–17; I Cor. 1:18). ‘God’s righteousness’ in the above quotation means that God justifies sinners by his grace so that they come to believe. He accounts them as righteous by acquitting them from the charge of sin on the basis of the propitiatory death of Christ on the cross. Through faith in the efficacy of this sacrificial death persons can be pardoned from their sins because the wrath on those sins has been borne in the death of Christ. Such a teaching was what originally stirred Paul to persecute the Christians and to try to stamp out their pernicious teaching.

In the Epistle to the Romans Paul has a long discussion on the matter of law, particularly of persons using the law in try to justify themselves. This matter he also discusses in Galatians so we may now turn our attention to that.

## PAUL AND LAW IN THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS

In this treatment of Paul’s view of the law and the gospel, we will commence in the first chapter and follow his discussion through to the last chapter. It will not be an easy task, but should prove to be a rewarding one.

### CHAPTER ONE

#### *The False Gospel of Law*

In Chapter 1 Paul does not mention the law as such but he does refer to those we have come to know as ‘Judaisers’, that is those who taught that one really had to be a Jew in order to be a true Christian. Gentiles who had converted to Christ should be circumcised, so that Paul’s gospel of utter freedom—‘the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles’—had been changed into one that demanded the converts come under the law. It was about this false gospel that Paul was so irate. He then began to pour scorn upon the Judaisers and to present his apostolic authority afresh to the Galatians—his own converts—so that they might know that what Paul had initially taught them was the apostolic truth.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *The Battle Over Law for the Gospel*

In Chapter 2 Paul shows that he fought the battle for the gospel he preached to the Gentiles by talking privately with the apostles, and this in face of the fact that false brethren brought in secretly tried to undermine that gospel, even with the apostles. They did not succeed and the apostles agreed that Paul had a commission to preach the gospel of grace to the Gentiles.

It was when Peter came to Antioch<sup>13</sup> that Paul took him to task for giving way to ‘the circumcision party’. Prior to their coming Peter had eaten with Christians who had previously been Gentiles. Now he withdrew from them, refusing to eat with them<sup>14</sup>. This was, of course, a triumph for the law-circumcision party. Paul called that ‘acting insincerely’ and ‘not being straightforward about the truth of the gospel’, the truth he expounds in 3:22-28, ‘For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus’, meaning that no one is more spiritual or justified than another because he keeps the Jewish law. Indeed, we will see that to keep the law is a dreadful matter. Because it was a public scandal he rebuked Peter publicly, and gave the famous disquisition we have in 2:15–21,

We ourselves, who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, yet who know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified. But if, in our endeavour to be justified in Christ, we ourselves were found to be sinners, is Christ then an agent of sin? Certainly not! But if I build up again those things which I tore down, then I prove myself a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose.

### *Justification—by the Law—Shows Us We are Sinners*

Now we see that no one can be justified by the works of the law, but only by faith in Christ. Verse 17 tells us something of the nature of law. In saying, ‘But if, in our endeavour to be justified in Christ, we ourselves were found to be sinners, is Christ then an agent of sin? Certainly not!’, Paul is showing that the law teaches Jews that they are sinners. They had considered themselves not to be ‘sinners of the Gentiles’. All Gentiles were sinners but Jews were not! We see the power of the law to show people endeavouring to gain a ‘works-righteousness’ that such works are of no avail. In fact, these very works show they are sinners.

We note here, though Paul does not say it explicitly, that to work for righteousness is evil. It refuses the grace of justification and insists on using the law for what it was never intended. For Paul this evil is compounded when, once having found grace, the believer reverts to the old pattern of attaining righteousness before God by works of the

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<sup>13</sup> In this Essay the times of Paul going to Jerusalem and of Peter coming to Antioch do not really matter much. Paul is using these events to show his true authority as an apostle. See the Essay, ‘Paul’s Apostolic Authority in Galatians’.

<sup>14</sup> The Gentiles were looked upon by the Jews as ‘the unclean people’. Peter had been taught by God that they were no longer unclean, and had told the council at Jerusalem that this was the case (Acts 10:9–16, cf. 11:15–18; 15:6–11, 19–21). At this point it is irrelevant whether Peter’s coming to Antioch was before or after Acts 15.

law. Paul said they had ‘torn down’ that old pattern and fallacy. Now, under the influence of the Judaisers they were going to attempt it again!

### REVERSION FROM GRACE-RIGHTEOUSNESS TO LAW-RIGHTEOUSNESS

Paul’s conclusion is that to build those things again is dreadful. ‘I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification were through the law, *then Christ died to no purpose*’. Thus Paul shows the evil of law-and-works righteousness. Undoubtedly this is the thrust that human beings have and to which they constantly give way. It is all part of the Adamic pride which insists that we can ‘be as God’, that is, can attain righteousness of ourselves.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FAITH AND LAW, AND PROMISE AND LAW

In Chapter 3 Paul again attacks the Judaisers and their influence. He first addresses his converts. Have they been bewitched to this other gospel—this ‘gospel of law’. They had once been shown Christ crucified and understood the meaning of his death. They believed, and they received the Spirit. Did they receive the Spirit through faith or through the works of the law? Well, of course, through faith. If that be the case, then why are they seeking to complete themselves—come to maturity—through the flesh. Here the flesh is the proud religious ego, the cause of their law-endeavours.

### RIGHTEOUSNESS (JUSTIFICATION) IS BY FAITH

What kind of faith did they have when they had rejected law? Why, the same faith as Abraham—justifying faith. Abraham had had the gospel preached to him (v.8). It was the gospel of blessing, blessing being a gift of grace, and not an earned reward.

In verse 10–14 Paul brings out the nature of the curse that comes from being dependent upon the law for righteousness.

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be every one who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them." Now it is evident that no man is justified before God by the law; for "He who through faith is righteous shall live"; but the law does not rest on faith, for "He who does them shall live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us -- for it is written, "Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree" -- that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

### THE DREAD FASCINATION OF LAW

It is a curious word, ‘rely’. There is almost a parallel in 4:21, ‘Tell me, you who desire to be under law, do you not hear the law?’ Having known grace who would want to *rely* on the law, or *desire* to be under it? It is time for us to leave Paul aside for a moment and discuss the fascination law has for the human ego. There is a sense of security when one is a legalist. One is surrounded by the law. It is an authority in itself. One can be safe in it. Then there is the delight of doing something, tackling a great way of self-



justification. One's ethical sense is fulfilled by it. It seems to be a work which will satisfy the conscience. The question is whether anything is accomplished but some development of the religious ego. Conscience, when attached to law, is never reliable, nor is it ever satisfied<sup>15</sup>. It keeps on making demands. It compounds its insistence upon more and more 'obedience' to the law. Failures to keep the law—as they are many—compound the sense of guilt and drive the person to more and more 'obedience' to the law. Of course the law knows no obedience other than that of the heart, and the obedience is to God and not a separate entity called 'the law'.

### **ALL UNDER LAW ARE UNDER A CURSE**

Coming back to Paul we see he says that 'All who rely on works of the law are under a curse.' What does he mean by this? It could be that the Judaisers were almost threatening their hearers to obey the law, and this from Deuteronomy 27:26, 'Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them,' in order to frighten them into doing the works of the law.' What is missing is any reference to faith and blessing; there is only reference to curse. Paul shows that righteousness is by faith, not law, for this is the import of Habakkuk 2:4, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live'. Leviticus 18:5 is about 'doing the works of the law' so that it is not of faith. None of this comports with Abraham's justification which was by faith.

### **REDEEMED FROM THE CURSE OF THE LAW**

The curse of the law such as we saw in Deuteronomy 27:26 needs to be seen in all its fullness by reading the chapters which follow 27. The curse in Israel was a present dreadful threat and reality<sup>16</sup>, but Paul is thinking of the present nature of the curse, perhaps of the state of God's wrath as set out in Romans 1:18–32 where that wrath is really the guilt of sin working in the mind, heart, conscience and being of the sinner as he is constantly being given up to his own guilt of sin and this act is really God's wrath being revealed upon him or her, in which case Romans 4:13—'the law brings wrath'—and 'the law was added because of transgression' are relevant.

In saying, 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become [a] curse for us', Paul is telling his readers that their being under law could only bring them into the curse, but Christ has become them—as sinners under the curse—in order to remove that curse from them, or them from the curse. In this curse is the terrible power of the law made known<sup>17</sup>. In taking away the curse by becoming curse for us, that is, hanging on a tree in accordance with Deuteronomy 21:23, Christ has brought the blessing of Abraham on those who have faith ('faith-way'), though not on those who persist in what

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<sup>15</sup> When we separate the law of God from God Himself, then we have a dreadful entity, one which becomes tyrannical. When the law and conscience get together—so to speak—then the person of the conscience is fearfully harassed. When law is seen as 'the outshining of God Himself', then it does not pose the same threat. Certainly it would not seem to be the means of justification by doing its works.

<sup>16</sup> The curse was the plagues and diseases God wrought on Man, beasts, crops and the land. These blights and sicknesses were immediate ways of telling the covenant people of God's displeasure.

<sup>17</sup> In his commentary on Galatians (James Clarke, London, 1953, p. 283) Martin Luther said, "Wherefore there is no other way to avoid the curse, but to believe, and with assured confidence to say: Thou Christ art my sin and my curse, or rather: I am thy sin, thy curse, the death, thy wrath of God, thy hell; and contrariwise, thou art my righteousness, my blessing, my life, my grace of God and my heaven. For the text saith plainly: "Christ is made a curse for us." Therefore we are the cause that he was made a curse: nay rather we are his curse."

we might call 'law-way'. The blessing is justification (Gen 18:6) but also the promises of inheritance to the one who is justified.

### THE BLESSING IS THROUGH PROMISE AND NOT LAW

In one statement Paul undermines the law-person's basis for confidence in the law. The blessing of the gospel was never intended to be by law because it was promised prior to the law. In 3:15–20 Paul establishes this point.

To give a human example, brethren: no one annuls even a man's will, or adds to it, once it has been ratified. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many; but, referring to one, "And to your offspring," which is Christ. This is what I mean: the law, which came four hundred and thirty years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance is by the law, it is no longer by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise. Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained by angels through an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one; but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not; for if a law had been given which could make alive, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the scripture consigned all things to sin, that what was promised to faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

The argument is simple. The promise was given prior to the law so justification comes not from law but from promise, and so from grace. Had a law been able to give life then a promise would be unnecessary. Why then have a law at all? 'It was added because of transgressions', that is, 'It was added to bring us to know the fact and nature of sins' (Rom. 3:20, 'the knowledge of sin'; cf. Rom. 7:13) and this was its primary purpose<sup>18</sup>. It was not against the promise, but really supplementary to it. It was to operate in relation to transgressions until the time of fulfilling the promise should arrive.

### THE LAW A PEDAGOGUE

Paul is now free to speak of the use of the law other than to make the transgressions evident.

Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian; for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

'Before faith came' is speaking of a situation where law was extant. We were imprisoned or confined by it with a view to the coming faith and its revelation. The law's function in that time was to be a custodian or pedagogue (*paidagogos*), that is a 'supervisory guardian'. The task of the pedagogue was to supervise a child or children, training him in the ways of the family. In Paul's time the pedagogue was not a teacher

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<sup>18</sup> It is possible Paul also meant that sin was both incited and exposed by the law as seen in Romans 7:5, 7–13, and also to ensure the wrath of God, 'For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression' (Rom. 4:15).

but one who brought the child to a teacher to be taught. The point Paul is making is that the function of the law as a pedagogue ceased when Christ came. Baptism into Christ brought liberation from law. Grace was the new way of life. The argument is patent: the law has ceased its function of being a pedagogue.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE LAW, THE SPIRIT AND SONSHIP

The child of the family was as a slave when under the pedagogue but on reaching maturity was give status of adulthood and the assurance of being an heir In 4:1–11 Paul speaks of his converts being no more slaves, but heirs because, by the removal of the curse and the coming of the Spirit they have entered into full sonship<sup>19</sup>. Verses 8–11 speak of the foolishness of going back to law. Here it seems it is pagan law<sup>20</sup>, but the same principle obtains law always brings bondage.

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods; but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years! I am afraid I have labored over you in vain.

### BORN OF THE FLESH, BORN OF THE SPIRIT

In our Essay ‘The Holy Spirit in Galatians’ we see that the work of the Spirit is related revealing the gospel, liberating believers from law, the experience of adoption, and the new life of grace that is lived. Here, in 4:21–31, Paul addresses those who still persist in living ‘law-way’ instead of ‘grace-way’ that is to say, ‘faith-way’. He says, Tell me, you who desire to be under law, do you not hear the law?’ That anyone should *desire* to be under law is a mystery to Paul. It is obvious they are not hearing the law or they would not wish to be under it.

Thus Paul launches into an allegory—a story which explains a another story or a principle—and the substance is that Hagar was born of a fleshly liason<sup>21</sup>, and Isaac of a spiritual one. Hagar then represents the law as against Sarah who represents the promise. All in Hagar are of the Jerusalem that spells slavery. All of Sarah are of the spiritual city, Jerusalem above which is free. Sarah’s children—children born of the Spirit—are free. Those of Hagar are slaves. This being so, who would *desire* to be under the law?

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<sup>19</sup> In the Essay, ‘The Holy Spirit in Galatians’—as also in the commentary on the text—we open up the matter of sonship. but here it is to be noted that in Romans 9:4 both ‘adoption and the ‘law’ were part of the gifts given to Israel.

<sup>20</sup> ‘the weak and beggarly elemental spirits’ can mean that Paul’s Gentile converts are reverting to the laws of the gods, or can mean they are using those principles of the gods—‘the elemental spirits’—which really parallel the ‘principles of law’ that the legalist Jews always used. Paul may even be including those Jewish law principles as well.

<sup>21</sup> By a ‘fleshly liason’ we mean Abraham jumped the gun, having a child by his concubine instead of waiting for it to come by faith in God’s promise.

## CHAPTER FIVE.

### FREEDOM IN AND BY THE SPIRIT

Paul's first words are 'For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.' This seals all Paul has said up to this point: the law is slavery, the gospel is liberation. Stand in the liberty and do not go back to law'. He goes on to warn against circumcision for 'I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he is bound to keep the whole law'. It is *either* law *or* grace: it can never be both together. It is the law *or* the gospel.

Paul then speaks strongly against the Judaisers who have brought their cursed doctrine of 'law and gospel' to the Galatians as though this were the true apostolic gospel. Having done this he comes back to the point with which he commenced the chapter, namely standing in freedom, living in freedom.

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another.

Paul first points out that freedom is for love and that freedom operates in that love. When one loves the neighbour then one *fulfils* the law<sup>22</sup>. When Paul says that then we faced with a dilemma. On the one hand he has said we are free from law, and on the other we fulfil the law when we love. Yet we must note he is not telling us to fulfil the law: he is saying we are doing that when we love. In Romans 13:8–10 Paul brings out the same point. To love is to fulfil the law, but Paul is not saying, 'Obey the law and you will fulfil love,' but 'Love and you will fulfil the law'. This still leaves us with the fact that there is a law. It is 'the law of God' (Rom. 8:7) whatever we may understand by that.

### FLESH/LAW:/WORKS: GRACE/SPIRIT/FRUIT

Paul works a parallel and a contrast in the two systems, the one being of law and flesh, and the other of liberty from law by the Spirit and the fruit that results. To be under the law, and to walk in the flesh are the one thing, in effects. The one who is of a legal mind and spirit finds the curious fact that he—or she—plunges into fleshly excesses. The one

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<sup>22</sup> We have to note here that 'fulfilling' is one thing. Deliberately *doing* the things of the law is the way we go about doing 'works of the law'. Simply loving and carrying out what is love is not a doing with justification or reward in mind so much as it is an almost unconscious fulfilling of the law, whether the person realises that this is the case or not.

who is free by the Spirit produces or bears the fruit of the Spirit. When Paul says, ‘Against such there is no law’, he means that there is a law against the works of the flesh (cf. Rom. 8:5–8), but none against the Spirit. In one sense the fruit of the Spirit transcend the law.

In our Essay on ‘The Spirit in Galatians’ we will open up this issue. There is a new life in the Spirit and it is this freedom in which the believer must stand continually. One is not only justified from the law: one lives in the Spirit of love and bears such fruit as are no less than the substance of the law (Rom. 13:8–10; Gal. 5:14). This living may well be equated with ‘the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’ which is, of course the gospel, but then, also, the power by which one lives the new life.

## CHAPTER SIX

### FINAL COMMENTS ON THE SPIRIT, LAW AND GRACE

The first thing we come across is ‘Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ.’ What is this law of Christ? The matter has been much debated since it seems Paul is substituting one law for another, and however fine Christ’s law may be, to obey it will land us back in the same law-syndrome we have known.. In I Corinthians 9:21 Paul speaks of himself as ‘not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ’. Christ gave commands to his disciples from time to time (John 14:15, 21; Matt. 28:20; Acts 1:2) and Paul speaks about the mind of Christ towards certain issues—ethical and otherwise. Did Christ then formulate a law, even though it was to be in the heart (cf. Jer. 31:31–34) and would work out as ‘the law of the Spirit’ for the Spirit would lead a person at any point in what conformed with Christ’s law? Was ‘the law of Christ’ simply ‘the law of God’ the creational law which was always extant (cf. Gen. 25:5), but was formulated in a certain way within the covenant with Israel? Was it the law Christ himself obeyed, even though he interpreted it richly and in a way the scribes and Pharisees could not see and understand?

Whatever this law of Christ was—and is—it entailed bearing one another’s burdens. As we have seen in Romans 13:8–15 and Galatians 5:14 (cf. James 1:22–25; 2:8–13) one does not approach the law as a set of regulations by which that one abides, but when one loves from the heart (Deut. 30:6) then one fulfils the law not as a standard or even an exercise, but because that is the way things are. Anarchists refuse an ordered state; antinomians refuse law as the way to go in life, and nomists know only law-way, as against faith-way, and as against Spirit-way. When we look at the fruit the Spirit produces it must be—as is the law of God—summed up as love. It may well be that if we really understand ‘the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’ we might see that it gives us not only a better view of the law of God, but the only view, and a view so radically different that we may join the writers of Psalms 1, 19, and 119 and thus without a legal view we will ‘fulfil the just requirements of the law’, rather than just *do* those requirements as nomistic exercises<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> We need to ponder Romans 8:1–4 since it speaks of ‘the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’ and whilst some see this as the principle of the gospel, yet it may be that that principle is so dynamic as to change our view entirely, of ‘the law of God’ and lead us into a thrilling understanding of the nature of law which will promote obedience from the heart within us, transforming all our wrong ideas of law and especially abolishing the idea that we can be justified by doing the works of the law. Those ‘works’ would this seem impossible to even contemplate as saving acts.

### ***Paul's Parting Shot***

In verses 12–16 Paul makes his final comments regarding the Judaisers—those who wholly misunderstand the gospel and so do not really know the law.

*It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that would compel you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For even those who receive circumcision do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh. But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God.*

Just as those who are under the law become those who do the works of the flesh, so these Judaisers did not themselves keep the law they so insisted upon. They had a motive for getting Gentiles circumcised—to put themselves in well with the other Judaisers and even other Jews. Paul goes back to the Cross by which sins were taken away, by which the sinner was crucified with Christ, dying to the law, to the flesh and to the world, and here he finds his home base. What joy is there in plodding after the law, with a legal mind, and in having a meticulous conscience that is a tyrant?

How does all that compare with the sheer freedom of grace having met every demand of the law in the cross of Christ, and in having been raised the sinner with him? It is being a new creation that counts above all.

## **CONCLUSION TO OUR ESSAY**

If we had to recapitulate all said in this Essay it would be a long conclusion. The sum of the matter is that for those once in sin, gripped by their sins to be part of the present evil age, enslaved to the tyrants of the aeon—the elements spirits—and unable to walk in other but the flesh so that they could never enter the Kingdom of God, that these then are liberated by the gospel, and brought into that freedom by the Spirit. A person is either ‘in the flesh’ or ‘in the Spirit’, is either under legal bondage to the law and not yet liberated from the driving power of guilt and sin or is freed from the law and walks in the Spirit.

Our Essay has not dealt conclusively with the matter of ‘the law of God’ but has taken us long way to understanding ‘the law of Christ’ and ‘the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’. It has shown us that we are utterly free from law as a way of justifying ourselves, and so being free we naturally ‘fulfil the law of Christ’ and so are not victims of our conscience. Now our consciences can bear us witness in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 9:1) because ‘law-way’ is not the way of the renewed mind but ‘grace-way’ and ‘faith-way’ are.

Without this penetrating understanding of law given by Paul in the Epistle we would surely be fumbling about in trying to understand ‘the law’. How grateful we are for Paul’s brilliant exposition.



# The Spirit in Galatians

## INTRODUCTION: THE SPIRIT AT THE GALATIAN BEGINNING

Galatians 3:1–5 is a good place to start.

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so many things in vain? -- if it really is in vain. Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?

### *The Gift of the Spirit Received Through Hearing With Faith*

From this passage it can be seen that the first hearers of Barnabas and Paul in Galatia had had two wonderful things happen. The first was that they saw and understood ‘Christ crucified’. The second was that they had received the gift of the Holy Spirit. In terms of this Letter they had been justified and received the Spirit and all this by faith. The situation was that they through Paul and the apostolic band had come in the fullness of the Spirit—’in the fulness of the blessing of [the gospel] of Christ’<sup>24</sup>—and had proclaimed the fulness of the gospel, and the Galatians had heard and believed.

In this passage above, Paul marvels that this having happened they could put it down to ‘works of the law’. The law had never ‘gospellised’ anyone. It could not. If they could have been justified by the law then there would be no need of the gospel.(v. 21). No: they had been changed by the message of the cross, and had received the gift of the Spirit. Both may have been simultaneous, but in any case they happened through the hearing with faith—with hearing by faith. The law had nothing directly<sup>25</sup> to do with the matter.

We could trace similar happenings in the Acts, especially the gift of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost to the 3000 who were baptised, and, later, the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius in Acts 10 and 12.1. In the first case the simple exhortation was ‘Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’ In the second case no promise seems to have been made of the gift of the Spirit. Peter simply said, ‘To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.’ In both cases the hearers believed and received the gifts of forgiveness of sin and the Holy Spirit. Hence in Galatians 3:13–14 Paul wrote, ‘Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree”—that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit

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<sup>24</sup> Although this is a quotation from Romans 15:29 yet it could equally be applied to the Galatians for they had had their sins borne away, had been redeemed by the gospel, liberated from the bondage of the law, made sons by the Spirit, been led by the Spirit and enabled to bear the fruit of the Spirit, all of which were elements of ‘the fullness of the blessing’.

<sup>25</sup> Of course the law as a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ, and in this sense the law did have a part in their coming to justification.

[the promised Spirit] by faith.’ Thus it is clear that the gift of the Spirit came through the hearing of—or with—faith.

### *The Nature of the Experience*

It is interesting to note that the gifts of forgiveness and the Spirit came together in the Acts. Galatians 3:1–5 reveals that the message of the cross brought the Galatians to saving belief. This must have been a deep and rich revelation of the Spirit of all the meaning of the Cross. We have examples of this in the apostolic preaching, but the key lies in the fact of the Spirit being the Revealer. What no eye had ever seen, no ear had ever heard, nor any mind ever imagined were the things the Spirit revealed to the hearers (cf. I Cor. 2:6–11). We have no hint that receiving the Spirit was something in itself for itself, an experience to be pondered and enlarged before an audience. Forgiveness of sins and justification by grace seem to be the prime matters. Even so Paul could ask whether they received the Spirit by law or by faith, but he did not ask whether they had received the Spirit<sup>26</sup>. There was no doubt in their minds about that fact. It was so palpable, so actual a happening that they knew it to have happened. In it was included the knowledge of the gospel—’the whole counsel of God’.

We may now proceed to look at the work of the Spirit in the Epistle.

## THE EPISTLE OF JUSTIFICATION AND THE SPIRIT

There can be no doubt about the fact that Paul’s primary purpose in the Epistle is to show up the heresy of the Judaisers and bring his readers back to the reality of the gospel. In doing this he shows the secondary place of the law as against the primary one of justification. As we saw above, the Spirit came with justification so that the two are intimately the one in the experience and thinking of the believer.

### 3:1–14: THE GIFT AND BLESSING OF THE SPIRIT

The placing of the gospel of the cross together with the gift of the Spirit in 3:1–14 shows that Paul’s primary reference to the Spirit here is in the light of the Galatians attempts to be justified by law and in their setting up the law above the gospel, even if unwittingly. We notice in verses 2 and 14 that the Spirit is a gift and one which accompanies justification. We see in verse 3 that we begin in the Spirit so that where there is no Spirit, there is no beginning. Hence Paul says in Romans 8:9, ‘Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him’.

Understanding of justification and forgiveness *is* the beginning. We began in the Spirit, and so we go on in him. Later Paul will talk about being led by the Spirit and walking in the Spirit. Here in 3:1–5 he is warning against seeking to be perfected by the works of the law which is really an attempt to be made complete by the flesh—a dreadful thought! All Christian life is by the Spirit. If we pursue the ministry and work of the Spirit in the life of the church and the believer then all elements of the person’s

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<sup>26</sup> IN acts 19:Paul asked some disciples of John, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed,’ and their answer was, ‘No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’ Paul must have sensed the absence of the Spirit as a gift in their lives. This was not the question he asked the Galatians. He had no doubt they had received the Spirit. He simply asked them to consider whether that gift came by the hearing of faith or by works of the law.

and church's life are by the Spirit<sup>27</sup>. It is both incredible and wonderful to realise the interior ministry of the Spirit, something of which we discover in this Letter.

In verse 5 Paul speaks of God supplying the Spirit and working miracles among them. His point is that God does all this without the law or works of the law. It is God's direct giving to them, so law is not to be thought of. The *fact* that He supplies the Spirit is important<sup>28</sup>. In verse 14 Paul shows that one of the reasons for the taking of the curse by Christ was that the Spirit promised by God would come to the Gentiles. If we read Acts 10:44–11:18 we see that the giving of the Spirit to the Gentiles was no little thing. In fact Peter had to repeat the significant fact to the church at Jerusalem (Acts 15:6–11). So the Galatians must realise two things, (i) that God had intended to give the Spirit to the Gentiles, and (ii) that the *gift* of the Spirit had nothing whatever to do with the law. In itself verse 14 is interesting since Paul has been emphasising that the blessing Abraham received was by faith (Gen. 15:6), and this blessing was both justification and the promise of the inheritance. These two elements now come to the Gentiles who believe. In addition, but linked with the Abrahamic blessing is the gift of the Spirit. Since Paul does not quote an Old Testament promise in this regard, we have to look at other New Testament references which refer back to the Old Testament prophecies. This is legitimate because Paul here speaks of 'the promise of the Spirit' and Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; and Ephesians 1:14 refer to that promise. In Acts 2:15ff. Peter refers the event of Pentecost to Joel 2:28f. where God promised He would pour out His Spirit upon 'all flesh'. The words of Jesus to his disciples that they would be baptised in the Spirit, and when the Spirit came upon them that they would witness to him in Palestine—to the Jews—and then in Samaria to the Samaritans and the Gentiles—the nations to the end of the earth—suggests the Spirit was to come to Samaria and to the Gentiles, which of course happened and was happening.

So then, all of these references show us that the gift of the Spirit was anticipated, and especially as *the gift of faith*. The crowning factor in the promises, of course, was the ministry of John the Baptist who stated that Messiah would pour out the Holy Spirit, that is, baptise those who anticipated the Kingdom and believed in him<sup>29</sup>, and Jesus carried on this teaching. All this is to be included in the idea of 'the blessing of Abraham' for the covenant promised to him was to embrace all nations, as we see in Galatians 3:5–18.

#### 4:1–7: THE SPIRIT OF SONSHIP

3:6–29 really covers being sons of Abraham, inheriting the promises and the inheritance promised to the new people in Christ the Son. The passage we now need to discuss relates to sonship of God, the Father and the inheritance which goes with this.

I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no better than a slave, though he is the owner of all the estate; but he is under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father. So with us; when we were children, we were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe. But when the time had

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<sup>27</sup> Without giving references to these elements of ministry we note that love, unity, fellowship, ministry, gifts, prayer, worship, proclamation, teaching, holiness, the fruit, guidance and other such things are associated with the Holy Spirit/.

<sup>28</sup> From the text we might gather that He supplied the Spirit in the past. It can also carry the idea that He goes on supplying the Spirit and goes on doing miracles amongst them. This may simply be a principle Paul is stating—God giving as a against us earning by means of the law.

<sup>29</sup> In the Old Testament the outpouring of the Spirit was always related to the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel. Acts 1:3–8 confirms this. However the gift of the Spirit was not to be limited to Israel, nor was the kingdom only to be restored to Israel. It was to be for all people of faith.

fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.

In 3:21–29 under the pedagogue the covenant child was little more than a slave. The law acted as that pedagogue with the view to shutting the child up to faith, but not to the pedagogue—law—itself. Paul said, 'Now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian (*paidagogos*); for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. For as many as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ.' We see that the law shut us up to faith. Christ came and we had faith. We became sons *through faith* because we put on Christ the Son in baptism. Hence we moved out of the child-slave category into the free sons category. And how? The answer is (i) by the redeeming work of Christ, and (ii) by the ministry of the Spirit.

We were taken out from under law and came under Christ. Redemption—that is justification—was with a view to adoption. Adoption (sonship) as a legal category by the propitiatory work of the cross becomes a relational category by the interior dwelling and work of the Spirit. From being 'no-sons' we became 'His sons', that is the sons of the Father. This was done by putting on the Son in baptism. It was done by the Father sending the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. At that point the incoming Spirit was crying 'Abba! Father!' which is what Jesus did as the incarnate Son of the Father (cf. Mark 14:36; cf. Luke 10:21). So the gift of sonship of God (adoption: *huiiothesia*) became a relational reality. Adoption had been given to Israel (Rom. 9:4) and had to do with (i) relationship with God as Father<sup>30</sup>, (ii) working with the Father as sons (Exod. 4:22; Deut. 14:1; cf. John 5:19ff; Rev. 21:7) and (iii) finally coming into the inheritance, the inheritance offered to Abraham.

This sonship could not be known apart from the Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:14–21, 29–30). As the Spirit led the Son (Matt. 4:1; Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1–13) so he leads the sons (Rom. 8:14). He is also the Spirit of inheritance as we see in Romans 8:14–17 and Ephesians 1:14; 4:30. All of this is a far call from being child-slaves under the law. A son is a mature person, responsible for life and work, and is an heir.

#### 4: 21–31: BORN OF THE FLESH: BORN OF THE SPIRIT

The interest for us in this passage is the fact that Ishmael is said to have been born of the flesh, of the union of Abraham with Hagar, and that Isaac was born of the Spirit, the union of Abraham with Sarah. Paul represents Hagar as being allegorically the law and bondage, and Sarah as being allegorically faith and freedom. In our Essay on 'The Law in Galatians' we expand this passage further. For us it is sufficient here to see that the Spirit relates to faith and freedom and the flesh to works and bondage.

#### 5:1–6: THE ESCHATOLOGICAL SPIRIT OF JUSTIFICATION

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Now I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he is bound to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away

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<sup>30</sup> That is, as Covenant-Father, although this term is never used explicitly, See Exodus 4:22; Deuteronomy 14:1; 32:5–6; Isaiah 63:16; 64:8; Jeremiah 3:14, 19; Hosea 2:10; 11:1; Malachi 2:10. Some commentators take the 'one Father' to mean Jacob, but it seems better to take it as God Himself.

from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love.

In the Letter to the Galatians it is fair to link the Spirit with freedom; that is to say freedom from the law, freedom in justification, freedom in sonship and freedom in sanctification and fruitfulness. This freedom is not confined to this Epistle for the principle is seen in Romans 8:1–5 and II Corinthians 3:17. In Galatians 5:1–26 we see an exposition of both freedom and bondage. In our present passage we see Paul’s thrust at the Judaisers who were seeking to have the Gentile believers circumcised. Paul told that those who would be justified by law have severed their connection with the gospel of grace. Those who are in grace ‘through the Spirit, by faith, wait for the hope of righteousness’. The Spirit is the eschatological Spirit, that is, the Spirit of the end things<sup>31</sup> and this is borne out by such passages as Romans 8:18–30; Ephesians 1:14; 4:30. When we say that through the Spirit we wait for the hope of justification we are saying that the end judgement has already taken place in us, via the work of the cross, and that the Spirit has made this to be so for us *now* in faith. In our present state we wait by faith for it because the reality of acquittal is not apparent to sight. Our assurance of this fact is always being contested by evil powers outside us, and the flesh and indwelling sin<sup>32</sup> He is the Spirit of hope as we see in Romans 5:5 where he floods the heart with love and stimulates it to be assured in hope. By the Spirit believers wait by faith for the outcome. That outcome will be the God-attested verdict of ‘Not guilty!’ or ‘Justified!’ That being the case sonship will be vindicated in the granting to us the filial inheritance.

There are many other ways in which we can show the Spirit to be the Spirit of hope. Those who work hard at being justified by works of the law will be fearfully disappointed in the end. Those justified by faith will persist through faith that is aided by the Spirit to keep looking to the end. The Spirit within gives substance to such a hope.

### **5:13–26: THE POWERFUL SPIRIT OF HOLINESS AND FRUITFULNESS**

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its

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<sup>31</sup> A true understanding of eschatology does not project ‘the end things’ to the end time, but recognises the presence and effects *now* of that which is to come. For example, Paul can speak of us being glorified *now* (Rom. 8:30). The judgement which is at the end-time has already happened for us on the cross. eschatology is Christ, and as such, is the guarantee that our judgement has already happened on his cross, since we are *now* in Christ.. Eschatology is now: that is, we have the benefits of what will be declared at the end-time.

<sup>32</sup> Romans 8:18–39 shows the work of the Spirit in supporting us in hope (cf. Rom. 5:5), and verses 31–39 show us that God the Father stands against this accusation and Christ intercedes for us in this continuing circumstance. For this reason nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ: the word of God assures us our judgment has taken place and so we wait for the hope of this to be the reality of future sight.



passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another.

In our Essay on Law in Galatians we have noted that Paul does not speak to his Galatian readers as telling them to keep the law, but shows them that when they love one another they fulfil the law, since to love is to fulfil the law. If, in this chapter, we take the continuity of the work of the Spirit in aiding believers to stand fast in the freedom for which they have been made free, then the mainstay of that will be the love that the Spirit brings. Paul is not saying there is a freedom to be lawless but a freedom to fulfil the law without any idea of self-justification by doing its works. Nor is such loving an option among other legitimate options. If the Galatians think their freedom allows them to ‘bite and devour one another’ then this deadly antinomianism will destroy them as persons and as churches.

### ***Excursus on ‘The Flesh’***

To bite and devour one another’ does not arise directly from antinomianism, but the drive that is behind antinomianism and every other kind of evil, is ‘the flesh’. When we ask ‘What is the flesh?’ then the answer is that it is Man in his fallenness. It is Man opposed to God, Man setting up his own kingdom, working his own autonomy. It is the contrariness of humanity against its Creator and even God as its Redeemer and Father. Some translators have spoke of it is ‘Man’s lower nature’, but this idea presents problems. Man as created does not have a higher and lower nature, but one nature. In his fallenness he is sinful, and opposed to God. Even his religious exercises are his attempt to reach self-justification by any means, even religious means. So the flesh may take the forms of dreadful depravity or seemingly high religious endeavour as in the case of some of the Pharisees.

Even this description is not enough: Man fallen is in the system called the world system whose prince and ruler is Satan, and he has his hosts of evil, fallen angels, demons and other creatures in this cunningly devised organisation. This world-system is the arena of sin, and so fallen Man has his place in a vast complex of evil. This aeon is always about him, trying to keep him strong in his rebellion against God. So then, the flesh is not simply an aspect of a person, but the way of a vast system in which Man is embedded and enmeshed, and in which he can oppose all that is lawful and true. Galatians 5:24 says, ‘Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires,’ and—as in all other references to the cross in this Letter—that crucifixion takes place with Christ on the cross. Such crucifixion does not benefit us willy-nilly, but demands our wills to agree with the work of Christ so that, by faith, we are crucified to the flesh.

### ***The Conflict of the Flesh and the Spirit***

At first sight Paul seems to speak of an internal warring that goes on between a person’s ‘flesh’ and that person’s spirit. Not so: the conflict goes on between the *system* of flesh and the Holy Spirit. The flesh is not what drives the new creation but the Spirit, but the flesh seeks to overcome the work of the Spirit in the believer. Here we have to correct the RSV translation which says in verse 16, ‘But I say, walk by the Spirit and *do not* gratify the desires of the flesh’. It should really be, ‘But I say, walk by the Spirit and you *will not* gratify the desires the flesh’. It has been suggested that if we would use a



capital for ‘flesh’—‘Flesh—then there would be no confusion<sup>33</sup>: we would then understand the Flesh system as not being innate to the believer, but now an intruder from outside<sup>34</sup>.

In verses 16–26 Paul shows the war that goes on between the flesh and the Spirit. The believer is not so much ‘the meat in the sandwich’ as he is the one whose will should always go with the Spirit against the flesh. As in Romans 8:5–8 the flesh and the Spirit represent two different and opposed systems so here in this Galatian passage. Whilst the warfare is internal it is not two elements of the one person warring with each other, but there is a constant battle by two powers—the flesh and the Spirit—for the will of the believer.

In verse 18 Paul says something of immense importance, ‘But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law’. Being under the law and doing the works of the flesh is the strange contradiction of seeking virtue. That seeking of virtue is egotistical, fleshly, and not spiritual and the law allows no inroads into itself by such a self-justifying person. Rather it turns the tables on the self-righteous person. All that is innate in fallen humanity has its expression in what are called ‘the works of the flesh’. These are dreadful and horrifying, but they are the expression of human autonomy, the loss of created love (*agape*), and the competition that goes on between human beings who seek to have the ascendancy one over the another.

By contrast the person who does not give way to the flesh but gives way to the Spirit is given the high privilege and joy of bearing the fruit of the Spirit. The word ‘fruit’ (*karpos*) may be translated ‘harvest’. Such fruit are the product of the Spirit, and—if we may put it thus—the harvest of the gospel-seed sown. We avoid saying that sanctification or holiness now comes by the Spirit and is beyond justification, but we can say that justification and sanctification are so much the one that justification is the power and basis for sanctification, and justification without sanctification is a contradiction of that reality. Thus at the end of his list of the fruit of the Spirit Paul says that there is no law against such fruit, thereby inferring there is *a* law against the works of the flesh, namely *the* law itself. Fruit-bearing is the natural outcome of being crucified to the flesh.

The closing verses of chapter five sum up Paul’s argument regarding true freedom from both the law and the flesh. The Spirit is ‘the Lord and giver of life’—a principle found in the Old and New Testaments alike. Therefore since one is dependent upon the Spirit for life, that one always walks in life by the Spirit. This ever-present Person is the power by which life obtains and continues in the life of love<sup>35</sup>, the very love of verse 13, ‘By love serve one another’.

## 6:7–10 SOWING TO THE SPIRIT

Paul really pursues further the theme begun in 5:13. It should also be read in the light of Romans 8:5–8. One either walks by the Spirit, and is led by the Spirit or one walks by

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<sup>33</sup> The suggestion is made by F.F. Bruce in his *Commentary on Galatians* (New International Greek Testament Commentary, Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1982) p.243.

<sup>34</sup> Redeemed man is a new creation, but old patterns have been habituated in him, and he needs to work in the Spirit to resist these and even ‘unhabituate’ himself, but new habituations. Whilst there is indwelling sin there is a resident factor for aiding the flesh in its attempts to affect the believer.

<sup>35</sup> In the New Testament, and especially in the Epistles, love is lived by the presence and power of the Spirit. Romans 5:5 speaks of love being poured into our hearts by the Spirit who becomes resident there. In Romans 15:30 this love of the Spirit is stated. In Colossians 1:8 believers love one another ‘in the Spirit’. Galatians 5:22–23 nominates the fruit of the Spirit, and the other eight fruit are subsumed under the primary one—love (*agape*). We might say that together they constitute eight elements of love.

the flesh and is led by the flesh. The first equals ‘sowing to the Spirit’ and the second ‘sowing to the flesh’. Those who were gripped by illicit ‘freedom’, that is, untrammelled license, would feel the fleshly excitement of it all, but such must not deceive themselves they will reap a dreadful harvest. Sowing to the Spirit will bring a glorious harvest of eternal life<sup>36</sup>. Sowing to the flesh will bring a dreadful harvest of corruption and death. Whilst the believer might sometimes grow weary with the incessant struggle involved in holiness of life he—or she—must never give up. This moral struggle will result in a great outcome. Many times the farmer is in despair and would abandon the field, but the rich harvest which is the outcome of the struggle is more than compensation.

## CONCLUSION TO OUR ESSAY

There is so much in this Epistle in regard to the Spirit that we have not fully explored and explicated. Could it ever be otherwise? We need, even so, to add a few observations. The first is in regard to the trifold work and ministry of the Godhead. As we take the Fatherhood of the Son and of us, and the Father’s love in sending His Son to redeem and makes us sons of the same Father, then we see the work of the Spirit along with the Father and the Son. The Son in his work of the cross and resurrection does the bidding of the Father, and that work is applied to the elect by the ministry of the Spirit. Christ sets us free, but the Spirit leads us in the way of freedom. In so many ways the Trinitarian work of the Godhead is presented to us.

Then there is what we might call the intimately personal work of the Spirit. The Father we can recognise in His Fatherhood because He sent His Son to die for our sins and rescue us from the wrath, the world, from the flesh, from death, and now we, with and by the Spirit, can call him ‘Abba! Father!’. The Son we know as a Person because he loved us and gave himself up for us. The Person of the Spirit is a matter on which we do not often dwell, because we have the curious idea that because he is unseen there is something of an insubstantial nature about him. The Father is never seen, except in the Son and today we are dependent upon the Spirit to give us sight of the Son.

What then of the Spirit? Well, he is in our hearts. We received him as the Person and for the Person which he is. This is a rich miracle. Within us we hear his voice crying ‘Abba! Father!’ and we follow suit. Is he not *personal*?

How then do we fight the flesh and the world? Is it alone or by the *personal* presence of the Spirit? When we are liable to go the terrible and lonely way of the law, does the Spirit not lead in life, and into further experiences of life? Who else is our Guide, and who else comes with his power to enable us in the battle against the flesh and corruption? The very fruit of the Spirit lead us to the essential nature of this Person. Love! Joy! Peace!—these are the elements which constitute our emotional and affectional life and determine the way of our will.

It is good then to see that the Spirit compasses the whole of our life. We begin in him, and we are brought to completion in and by him. If he brings us Divine love then

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<sup>36</sup> Perhaps it is surprising that we must sow to the Spirit in order to reap eternal life. Surely the thrust of Paul’s thought is not that one earns eternal life through such sowing, but that one has the opportunity to use every moment of life with a view to an expanded harvest. Peter spoke of ‘an abundant entrance into the Kingdom’ in contradistinction to a drivelling and sterile one. Paul is surely speaking of the present life, as he does in Romans 8:13 where to put to death the deeds of the body by the power of the Spirit *now*, is *now* to have the fruits of that operation. The lack-lustre life of the indifferent believer is a contradiction of the glorious Spirit in his powerful and stimulating presence within the believer.

we must learn to love him, and be glad to be led by him through all the perils we face,  
and so be brought by him to the ultimate richness of eternal life.

# The Cross in Galatians

## INTRODUCTION: THE CROSS AND JUSTIFICATION

This Essay may seem somewhat repetitive of our Essay ‘Justification in Galatians’ where it takes up the references to crucifixion in the Epistle but we will need to deal again with these in this present article. In that Essay those references are discussed specifically with a view to Paul’s argument regarding justification, and of course they are unintelligible apart from that subject. Even so, the cross is a wide theme in the New Testament and it may be said that most of the treatment is Pauline. Even so, the matter of the cross needs to be looked at not only in regard to justification but in relation to Man’s whole situation in this world, as well as the age to come. Man has many enemies and powers which rule him—those that Luther called ‘the tyrants’, tyrants such as the law, sin, the curse, the flesh, and the world<sup>37</sup>, along with the gods who are ‘the weak and beggarly elements’. Known as ‘the victory theory’ the wide effects of the saving work of the cross need to be fully considered. These ‘tyrants’<sup>38</sup> are vicious enemies of Man, and it is the cross which liberates sinful humanity from them

## THE CENTRALITY OF THE CROSS IN PAUL’S MINISTRY<sup>39</sup>

Paul told the church at Corinth that he had resolved to know nothing but ‘Christ crucified’ among them. This was the same unswerving resolution he had when amongst the Galatians and, chronologically, this quite some time before he visited Corinth<sup>40</sup>. 3:1 makes this obvious; ‘O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.’ Whatever ‘publicly portrayed’ means it is certain that Paul’s primary message was Christ crucified. This should not be thought to be unusual as though Paul had sometimes preached otherwise. It is clear that

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<sup>37</sup> Students of the theology of the cross are aware that there are many theories or rationalisations of the work of the cross. It is not our purpose or need here to go into them, but Luther’s commentary on Galatians has something in mind which seems to approximate to Gustaf Aulen’s book *Christus Victor* which claims that the classic view of the defeat of the tyrants—especially the defeat of Satan—is the true view of the work of the cross, as against Anselm’s theology of Christ giving God ‘satisfaction’ for the sins of Man, a concept related to the evangelical substitutionary theory of the work of Christ.

<sup>38</sup> In his commentary on Galatians at 2:20 Luther wrote, ‘Wherefore, even as Christ himself was crucified to law, sin, death and the devil, so that they have no further power over him; even so, I through faith being now crucified with Christ in Spirit, am crucified to the law, sin, death and the devil, so that they have no further power over me, but are now crucified and dead unto me.’

<sup>39</sup> A quick, practical way of testing Paul’s adherence to the doctrine of the cross is to remove every reference to it—implicit and explicit—from his writings. In that way we will see little else remains of his text.

<sup>40</sup> Some commentators of the First Corinthian Epistle argue that Paul did not preach ‘Christ crucified’ at Athens. At the best he preached ‘Christ risen’, and thus having failed to grip the Athenians as he had in other places, he resolved to ‘know nothing except Christ and him crucified’. It is doubtful whether this was really the case. Before going on to the Areopagus ‘he preached Jesus and the resurrection’ (17:18). It is difficult to know how preaching the resurrection would make sense without also preaching the cross, that is, the death. Acts 2:22–24 was the apostolic explanation of the theological rationality of the cross, otherwise the preaching of the resurrection was *in vacuo*. The passage of 17:22–31 is not a reasoning from general revelation, but one which strikes at the heart of sin—Man’s idolatry—and must be seen in the light of Romans 1:18–32. It is doubtful whether Paul concealed the message of the cross. The resurrection in the apostolic preaching was with a view to Christ’s saving work, his Lordship which made valid his forgiving and justificatory powers.

for many reasons this was the primary message, the true gospel. Not only do the passages of 1:4, 2:19–20; 3:1, 13; 5:24 and 6:14 contain so much material related to the crucifixion, its centrality and its power effects but the whole Epistle pivots around the work of the Cross. For example, it is quite remarkable that Paul only once explicitly mentions the resurrection 1:1. It is certainly implied in 2:20, and it is assumed as the background of the apostolic faith which Paul is asserting in this Letter. Doubtless, also, Paul is doubly emphatic regarding the cross because the Judaisers are really attacking its essential power, the power which lies in the forgiveness of sins and the justification of the sinner.

We have to conclude that Paul ever burned with the message of the cross, and no less, of course, the resurrection. There is no thought that they were two distinct messages, but the one. Together they constituted the full atonement, the propitiatory sacrifice which was 'he was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification' (Rom. 4:25). This is certainly the thrust of Galatians.

We may now proceed to examine all references to the cross within their contexts of this Letter.

### 1:3–5

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father; to whom be the glory for ever and ever.

What we have to see in this passage are four things. The first is that the cross was 'according to the will of our God and Father'. Leaving aside for the moment the great doctrine of God's father of both Christ and us, we need to see the work of the cross was the initiative not of the Son but of the Father, the Son nevertheless being one with the Father in that plan and work. Primarily it is the Father seeking to deliver us from 'the present evil age'. In Romans 3:25 the Father 'set him forth as a propitiation by his blood' (cf. Lev. 17:11; I John 4:10) and this initiative is seen powerfully in II Corinthians 5:21 where the Father 'made him to be sin for us'.

The second point is that the Son 'gave himself for our sins', his will being perfectly one with the Father and his love being no less for us (Gal. 2:20). Here Paul uses the verb 'to give' (*didomi*) as against the verb 'to give up, abandon' (2:20:*paradidomi*) but a look at I Timothy 2:6, Titus 2:14 and Mark 10:45 show it to be a strong word. What matters is the force of his giving, i.e. 'for our sins'. If we read the references in the note below<sup>41</sup> we can see the use of the Greek 'for us' can mean 'on our behalf', that is, 'to do what is necessary to release us from our sins'. This third point—'for our sins'—must mean 'so to make propitiation for them that we are now forgiven and justified (Rom. 4:25)'. The fourth point is the intention of the act of the cross 'to deliver us from this present evil age'. In our commentary we see more fully the nature of this 'age' (*aeon*) or 'world' (*kosmos*) as we see in 6:14. It is this 'present age' as against 'the age to come'. In I Corinthians 10:11 Paul speaks of us as those 'upon whom the ends of the ages has come', meaning we are simultaneously within the present age and the age to come.

In this section we will depart from the plain words of the text and try to get behind the four themes which are (i) the initiative of the Father, (ii) the Son giving himself, (iii) the matter of our sins and (iv) deliverance from the present evil age. All of these relate

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Galatians 2:20; 3:13; Romans 5:8; II Corinthians 5:21; I Thessalonians 5:10; Titus 2:14.

to the work of the Cross. The will of the Father in giving His Son tells of His love for the whole world (John 3:16; I John 2:1–2; I John 3:16; cf. Rom. 5:5–11) but this world is not the evil system of Satan but the world He created. Universally Man has a grim view of God and only the understanding that he has taken the initiative in the Cross and in saving Man will alter that view (I John 4:7–10; Rom. 5:5–11). He did not spare His own Son in order to do that (Rom. 8:32).

Likewise the Son in perfect agreement with, and in obedience to the Father (John 5:17–20; Phil. 2:7–11; John 10:17; 14:31) went to the cross out of his love for the whole world (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2; Rev. 5b). The point is that both Father and Son knew the dreadful condition of humanity in its sins and had ever intended to redeem Man out of his terrible state. In order to delineate this grace in its wonderful magnitude we need to see the nature of Man in sin, in guilt, and in sin's consequences. Of course Paul was not the first to supply this picture of Man's sinfulness. He knew it both from the revelatory teaching of the Old Testament and his meeting with Christ and this revelation of human evil he had delivered to the Galatians. We ourselves need to see something of its awfulness and of humanity's desperate straits<sup>42</sup>.

We find something of its evil in the following passages Paul quoted in Romans 3:10–18 from the Old Testament,

"None is righteous, no, not one;  
no one understands, no one seeks for God.  
All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong;  
no one does good, not even one."  
"Their throat is an open grave,  
they use their tongues to deceive."  
"The venom of asps is under their lips."  
"Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."  
"Their feet are swift to shed blood,  
in their paths are ruin and misery,  
and the way of peace they do not know."  
"There is no fear of God before their eyes."

His own description of Man's sin and the processes by which it came are seen in Romans 1:18, 24–31,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth.  
Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct. They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are

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<sup>42</sup> Whewn, in modern humanistic thinking we seek to understand the inner anguish, emotional turbulence, misery and pain of Man, we resort to a horizontal view of these evident problems. Thus we seek along psychological and associated therapeutic lines to aid and help the person in such suffering. The matter is too deep for simple scientific investigation and healing. Whilst something can be done on the horizontal level, Man's problem lies in his break of relationship with God, and, of course, with his fellow-creatures and creation. If Man's deep problem could be satisfied on the horizontal level then there would be no need for the cross.



gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Jesus too, spoke of the evil of Man in Mark 7:20–23.

What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man.

In the Old Testament we have further examples of depravity than those quoted by Paul. In Genesis 6:5 we read, ‘The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that ever imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually,’ and in 8:20 God adds, ‘the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth’.

Having seen this evil of Man it remains for us to know what impact and destruction comes to him in his being because of sin. Of course the ultimate outcome is ‘the second death’ i.e. eternal death which proceeds whilst the subject is still existing. This is Hell or the lake of fire<sup>43</sup>. The writer of Hebrews tells us that men and women live in dread of death all their lives (2:14–15) and this is the guilt human beings feel every day. It keeps them constantly unsettled. In Romans 1:18–31 Paul speaks of the guilt of Man and God’s wrath being that He gives man up continually to the guilt of sin and it is this burning in his conscience and spirit that never allows human creatures to be totally in love, peace and joy. Then there is the impurity which troubles the same conscience and spirit. Thus Isaiah (57:20) quotes God as saying, ‘The wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot rest, and its waters toss up mire and dirt. There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked’. The writer of Proverbs (25:26) adds, ‘Like a muddied spring or a polluted fountain is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked’.

There is such a thing as ‘the guilt of sin’ and it is spoken of as needing *forgiveness* and *cleansing*. In Psalm 32:5 David said, ‘Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin,’ and in Jeremiah 33:8 God promised, ‘I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me.’

We see then that Man in the guilt of his sins is a person of great mental, moral, emotional and spiritual confusion, anxiety, desolation and even dereliction. It is no wonder we see the churning, restless ocean of human living with its dreadful crimes and sins on the one hand, and its frantic efforts to rationalise the scene of desolation and anguish by religions, philosophies and modern therapies that can only partly relieve its wounds, burdens and misery. When we add to this the mystery of ‘original sin’ then the burden of the human race is a heavy one. By ‘original sin’ we mean that of which Paul speaks in Romans 5:12–21, namely that in Adam all *did* sin, and so every day every human creature carries with him—or her—the burden that death is upon us all for the sin of Adam.

We conclude then that for Jesus ‘to give himself for our sins’ in the way he indicated in Matthew 26:28, that is in regard to the matter of our sins, whether we see them

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<sup>43</sup> There is a view held which states that the being of sinful persons will be annihilated in the lake of fire, and that Gehenna (hell) will itself be destroyed because ‘death and hades’ (*thanatos kai ho hades*) were cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14), but, in fact, it does not say Gehenna (hell) was cast into the lake. The lake was not cast into itself and destroyed! Another view is that all will ultimately be saved. This theory of universalism denies eternal punishment. Sometimes it is rationalised by a form of purgation between death and ultimate salvation. This theory would seem to underestimate the human violation of the holiness of God, and intransigent will of sinful Man, and the fact that stubborn human spirits carry their guilt of sin because of their rejection of the Cross. It is a sort of universal predestination. Hell is the lot only of finally impenitent sinners.

suffered by Christ as substitutionary, representational and/or identificatory manner is not the main point. The end result is that giving himself for (*huper*) our sins ‘rescues us up out of this present evil age’. We are no longer part of that system. We are ‘transferred from the powers of darkness into the Kingdom of the Son of His love’ (Col. 1:13–14), and this by the bearing and consequent forgiveness of sins.

## 2:11–21

But when Cephas came to Antioch I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And with him the rest of the Jews acted insincerely, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their insincerity. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?" We ourselves, who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, yet who know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified. But if, in our endeavour to be justified in Christ, we ourselves were found to be sinners, is Christ then an agent of sin? Certainly not! But if I build up again those things which I tore down, then I prove myself a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose.

In this case we have presented the full context of the work of the cross set out in verses 19–21, otherwise what we now write would not be fully intelligible. The situation is this: Peter, Barnabas and other Christians of Jewish origin had fellowshipped with Christians who were of Gentiles origin. Jews were forbidden to eat with Gentiles, but the truth of the gospel—as Paul later points out (3:28)—is that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, so that all Christians were one in Christ and fellowshipped mutually, eating together the same meals. When the Judaisers—Jewish Christians who desired all Christians to be under the Jewish law—came to Antioch from Jerusalem, Peter, Barnabas and all others of Jewish origin withdrew from general table fellowship and ate with the Judaisers. This, to Paul, was a public scandal so he publicly denounced Peter and the others.

The text of his message was, ‘Did you not eat with our brethren who were once Gentiles, and now do you withdraw yourselves, as though eating with them defiles you? You know what this means! It means you are saying that there is no Christian faith that includes both Jew and Gentile together, but these others must become as Jews. Where is the gospel in all this? We all know that no person can be justified by works of the law but only by faith in Christ’s work of the cross. When we wish to be justified by faith we find that we are sinners as also are the Gentiles. Does it mean that Christ makes us sinners? No, it is the law which shows us this. If having been justified by faith and not by law, we turn again to law as a justifying medium, then we break down the whole gospel. Let me tell you that I through the law, died to the law. I, myself, had to die to it as the medium by which I could be justified, and then I had to die the death that was due to me as a transgressor of that law. Through the law’s penalty I died, and in dying died to the law. I was crucified with Christ, but this did not destroy me for ever. Indeed I am now alive because of that co-crucifixion for I also rose to new life by virtue of his

resurrection. Now He lives in me, so that I am not as I was—a man under law, seeking to be justified by doing its works, but I am living by faith, my faith in him and his for me. So then, if I go back to being justified by works of the law then Christ’s death was of no avail: I deny its indispensability and its justifying power. The charge that Christ was ‘an agent of sin’ is far from the truth. The opposite is the case: Christ has destroyed sin in giving himself up for sinner. This giving himself up is the evidence that he has loved me (Paul) and all for whom he died.’

Having come to the sense of the passage how do we understand verses 19 and 20, together? We first understand that Paul’s dying to law as a way of self-justification must also be Paul’s being slain by the law<sup>44</sup> in the death of Christ, Christ, so to speak, bearing the brunt of the sinner’s breaking of the law. Secondly we face the fact that sinners were crucified with Christ. In II Corinthians 5:14 Paul said, ‘we are convinced that one had died for all; therefore all have died’. Thus each was crucified in Christ’s crucifixion as all were corporately crucified. What this means in the action of the death of Christ we cannot directly discover from the verse, anymore than we can discover it from II Corinthians 5:14, but when II Corinthians 5:21 tells us that God ‘for our sakes made him to be sin who knew no so, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God’, we are close to the mark. Peter’s two sayings<sup>45</sup>—‘He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree’, and ‘For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God . . .’—help us to understand that when Christ took the guilt of our sins he really entered into the suffering of them, and by such suffering both expended the guilt and purified us from it<sup>46</sup>. This must mean that Christ actually entered into the matter of the guilt of sin and bore all the horrific elements of guilt, such as fear, heaviness, loneliness, alienation, pollution, shame, confusion—and so on. This was his real suffering. This would mean that he finished our sins as entities. In the language of Hebrews 9:14 he ‘purified our consciences from dead works’. All of this work was done objectively by Christ as ‘he gave himself up for me (*paradontos heauton uper emou*)’<sup>47</sup>.

What we need to see is Christ’s identification of love with each person crucified with him. It was not to say that he had a ‘production line’ operation. His death was for all, but he dealt *personally* with each one co-crucified within that death. In Romans 6:6–7 Paul says, ‘We know that our old self (‘old man’, ‘old humanity’, *anthropos*) was crucified with him so that the sinful body<sup>48</sup> (‘the body of sin’; *to soma tes hamartias*) might be destroyed, that we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed (lit. justified) from sin.’ The passage indicates Christ’s identification with the person co-crucified so that by it sin ceases to have power over that one.

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<sup>44</sup> Not in Galatians 6:14 that Paul is crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to him. A double action takes place. We cannot say however that the law is crucified to Paul for the law is holy, just, good and spiritual, as Paul tells us in Romans chapter 7. Even so, in some way the law is making its death demands upon Paul in the death of Christ.

<sup>45</sup> I Peter 2:24; 3:18. These should be taken with our soteriological passages in the same Epistle.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Psalm 32:5 and Jeremiah 33:8 where the term ‘guilt of sin’ is used in the RSV. To bear sins is necessarily to bear their guilt.

<sup>47</sup> Some translations or paraphrases add ‘up to death’. The use of *paradidomi* in Romans 8:32 likewise does not say what Christ was surrendered or abandoned up to. We take it that it was to the judgement of the law and the various powers or tyrants to which the person was subjected by his guilt. The outcome of this abandonment to these enemies was that they were defeated (Heb. 2:14–15; Col. 2:14–15; cf. I Peter 2:24; 3:18; II Cor. 5:21; John 14:30–31).

<sup>48</sup> This has been variously understood as ‘the body in which sin is committed’ (cf. Rom. 7:24), ‘the body as given over to sin’s power’, and ‘the mass or *corpus* of all sins’. The death of the cross means that this ‘body of sin’ has lost its power to force the person to sin.

There is a number of things we need to note about verse 20 of Galatians 2. (i) the law has done its worst and cannot henceforth touch the person crucified with Christ, (ii) the ego has been crucified, and in such a manner that it changes from an anti-God one and 'anti-law' one (cf. Rom. 8:5–8) and now is alive in the best sense of that term. It is alive in Christ, meaning that its roots are in Christ and not in sin, in the selfish ego, and in self-justifying action. (iii) Being 'in Christ'<sup>49</sup> is not only a new environment but a new way of life and of practical living. (iv) The law could only ever have been obeyed by faith (cf. Exod. 20:2; Deut. 30:16, 1–14) and so Paul's view of the law was changed. His faith in Christ for justification was based on the cross. (v) the source of his life was now Christ, and it was in faith he rested upon him. He knew that to go back on the work of the cross was to destroy what he had built by faith (cf. verses, 18, 21).

We conclude that the work of the cross is indispensable to the matter of dealing with the sinful ego and transforming it into a new or renewed ego, but of course not into a different ego. It is the same person, but the person having been liberated from the guilt of sin, purged of its pollution, put into the environment of Christ and forever freed from the domination of law.

### 3:1, 10–14

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so many things in vain? -- if it really is in vain. Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Thus Abraham "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith. For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be every one who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them." Now it is evident that no man is justified before God by the law; for "He who through faith is righteous shall live"; but the law does not rest on faith, for "He who does them shall live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us -- for it is written, "Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree" -- that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Again, we have put in the full text of 3:1–14 to give adequate context to the two mentions of the cross, i.e. in verse 1, and in verses 13–14. Paul is amazed at the Galatians so quickly departing from the gospel of grace and faith, and returning to law (cf. 1:6–9) that he suggests they have been virtually bewitched. What interests us is verse 1 and his statement, 'before whose eyes Jesus was publicly portrayed as crucified'. Technically it should be translated as 'having been crucified' and so this must have referred to the event of the crucifixion as well as to its significance. To this point in the Epistle Paul has really been saying the cross cancels the matter of the law and lifts the believer into another sphere of living. His main point in the passage quoted above is that of faith. He has spoken in 2:20 of faith in Christ, or 'the faith of Christ;' and now he is contrasting 'the works of the law' with 'the hearing of faith'. IN verses 6–

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<sup>49</sup> The term 'in Christ' was counted by Adolf Deissman 164 times in Paul's letters, including the Pauline Pastoral Epistles. See *Word Biblical Commentary, Galatians* by R.N. Longnecker (Word Books, Dallas, 1990).

10 he shows that Abraham believed and was justified, and was also given the promise of blessing to all the nations.

Paul then tells the Galatians who are ‘bewitched’ by law that their fascination is ill-placed. If they take up ‘law-way’ as their mode of life they must realise that to be under the law is to be under the curse, and he quotes Deuteronomy 27:29 in particular, ‘Cursed be very one who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law and do them’.. That meant that all blessings were really cancelled by the curse if anyone did not do every thing demanded by the law. In the Book of Deuteronomy both God’s blessings and cursings are treated. So then, Paul is saying that blessing comes through faith only, and cursing through the law. For the principle of faith he quotes both Genesis 15:6 and Habakkuk 2:4. Both speak of righteousness by faith, and not righteousness by law.

The verses we now look at are 13 and 14 for here it is said that ‘Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree,” ‘, the quote being from Deuteronomy 21:23 where it says of a person who is guilty of a capital offence,

his body shall remain all day upon the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is accursed by God; you shall not defile your land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance.

In order to understand fully what the curse is we should look at Romans 4:13 which says ‘For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, there is no transgression’. To be under the law is to be under wrath which is the same as being under the curse. In Galatians 3:19 Paul asks, ‘Why then the law?’ and answers, ‘It was added because of transgressions’. This seems to indicate the same point as in Romans 4:13, and if we read Romans 7:5 we see that ‘While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death’. Paul shows further in this passage that sin uses the law to work more sin, and in Romans 1:18ff. he shows that the wrath of God is on those who in their sinfulness ‘suppress the truth by their wickedness’. Thus the curse of the law is the wrath of God, and Christ was made to be the curse by being hanged on a tree. A man was not cursed because he was hanged on a tree but he was hanged on a tree because he was cursed.

So Paul has shown us a very valuable part of truth: he became the curse in order that the blessing of Abraham should not be prevented by the law, and blessing—the blessing promised to Abraham—should come not only to Jews who were the natural children of Abraham but upon all who were people of faith.

As to the nature of the curse, we should refer back to what we have written on 1:4 on Christ giving himself for our sins, and on 2:20 where Christ became as us, giving himself up to the guilt of our sin and the judgement of the law. It is something of great depth which we can never really plumb, but of which we have a consciousness that tells us of the horror of being the curse. The glorious outcome then is justification by grace, blessing to all who are children, and the wonderful gift of the Spirit<sup>50</sup>.

#### 4:4–6

But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because

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<sup>50</sup> For the gift of the Spirit see the Essay ‘The Spirit in Galatians’.



you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.

We give the context of the statement 'born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law'. This really takes us back to 3:13 where is written, 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us, and so in 4:5 there is a reference to the cross where Christ became '[a] curse for us' that is 'on our behalf' (*huper hemon katara*). This repetition of the principle is with a view to us seeing that Christ's act of redemption had our adoption (sonship: *ten huiiothesian*) in view. That is, the cross leads to the 'adoption of sons'. Like justification—and with it—the gift of sonship is one of the fruits of the cross. In this respect Hebrews 2:9–10 speak of the cross 'bringing many sons into glory'.

The next explicit reference is Galatians 5:14, and we shall seek to put it into context, quoting from 5:16 to 24,

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Paul's argument here is, briefly, that if we are under the law we are in the flesh and will produce the works of the flesh. If we are under the Spirit, that is if we are led by him, then we will produce the fruit or harvest of the Spirit. In verse 24 he is really saying all of the flesh, all of being under the law is finished because 'those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires'. Whilst 'have crucified' seems to indicate a perfect tense, and this idea may well be present, the verb is really an aorist. Something happened in the past as a definite act, and so the believer in Christ 'did crucify the flesh'. It is not something which is reckoned into being so, but which is reckoned upon as having happened<sup>51</sup>.

At first sight the verse seems to say that the believer is the one who has crucified the flesh, but the reference is evidently to the cross so that this cannot be the act of the person. It must be of Christ. Christ in crucifying the person to the law, to sin and to the world has thus crucified the person to the flesh, and in this sense—assenting in faith—the believer has thus crucified the flesh. That is, he—or she—has bid farewell to the life of 'law-way' and has espoused the life of 'grace-way' or 'faith-way' and so is finished with the flesh. Of course all of this is in the context of the life and power of the Holy Spirit. A passage that somewhat tallies with our present one is Romans 8:9–13. We must remember that Paul is saying that those who do the works of the flesh are outside the Kingdom, and those who bear the fruit of the Spirit are in the Kingdom. The power of the Kingdom spells doom to the flesh, and gives life to the obedience of faith.

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<sup>51</sup> G.G. Findlay in his *The Epistle to the Galatians* in the Expositor's Bible (A.C. Armstrong, New York, 1889, p.358) comments, "Thy that are Christ's rose with Him; while "the flesh of sin" stays in his grace. Faith sees it there, and leaves it there."



## 6:12–15

It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that would compel you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For even those who receive circumcision do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh. But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

Having read the whole Epistle it is not difficult for us to understand Paul's reasoning in this passage. The Judaisers want to escape the 'scandal of the cross' (I Cor. 1:23), that is, the stumbling block of the way of grace and faith as against the way of law. If the Galatians will allow themselves to be circumcised then the Judaisers will be greatly thought of in Jerusalem, and they will be looked upon as law-keepers. Since the works of the flesh spring from being under the law (5:16–21) the Judaisers do not really keep the law themselves. Those trouble makers from Jerusalem glory in the circumcised flesh of the Galatians coming under law. Paul glories in none of this. His only glory (boast) is in the cross. Boasting in a cross—a gallows, so to speak—was an incredible and seemingly foolish matter, but for Paul it was boasting in the marvel of God's act of love in Christ. He knew that sin, the law, the wrath of God, death and Satan were all defeated by this work of the cross effected by Christ. Being free from these 'tyrants' he saw no other object in which to glory. He was dead to the world as a stimulative for living, a motive for being something. He cared not for its so called wisdom, and he knew its horrific danger, to say nothing of its seductive powers. He was crucified to the world. At the same time it was crucified to him in that it lay dead, inert, lacking power in the face of what Christ had done to it on the cross. He had made void its power for the believer because flesh, law, sin, death and Satan had been made powerless by the cross. When Christ became sin, and took the guilt of the human race he thus made an open show of Satan and the evil powers of the *kosmos* or *aeon* (cf. I Cor. 1:20) by taking their weapon from them by which they held humanity in bondage (Col. 2:14–15; Heb. 2:14–15). That weapon was simply human guilt of sin.

So in his last reference to the cross Paul is catching up all the elements he has nominated in the other cross passages. Sins, the ego and the flesh, the curse and the world are all defeated by the cross. Nothing is left which needs to be defeated. The believer is wholly free. If the Judaisers come forward with their circumcised person who is now under law Paul will better them with the person who is a new creation. That was what he had become through grace and faith and from that he will not depart.

There is nothing left for us who believe to glory or boast in anything other than the cross, for it tells the full story of God. That is why we are forced to say that it is primarily at the cross that we see God and come to understand Him as a sinful human being needs to do.

# Faith, Promise and Fulfilment in Galatians

## PAUL AND FAITH IN CHRIST

What can easily be missed in this Epistle is the richness of Paul's experience of Christ, his discovery of faith, and the stability of life that came to him through the promise which was initially given to Abraham and then became the foundation of his own new life of faith. It was something he had not easily come to: in fact, he had been so gripped by law that the promise must have been inundated in and by it. The revelation of Christ to him and in him must have blown apart—so to speak—the system of religion and life which he had developed. For example, we know that he claimed in Philippians 3:6 that he was 'as to righteousness under the law blameless'. Perhaps this is much the same as his claim in Romans 7:9, 'I was once alive apart from the law', that is, the law had never really 'come' to him, for when it did he was slain by it, doubtless shocked by its death-dealing operation and its use by sin to incite and exacerbate sin.

Lest we think the idea of living by faith, as against the idea of living by law is a minimal one in the Epistle, we see that the word 'faith' is used 19 times, and 'the faith' once, along with 3 uses of the verb 'to believe'. Faith is linked with the person of Christ, but goes back to Abraham as the father of the children of faith, and is linked with 8 nounal uses of 'promise' in the singular, one in the plural, and two uses of the verb 'to promise'. Faith and promise are not essentially opposites to law for law has its own rightful place. They are opposites to false views of law, and they are contrasts to the action of the law, since the action which comes by, through and in faith is opposed to trust in works of the law as a way of justification.

There can be no doubting the fact that Paul was enormously enlivened by the principle of faith. This was the very drive of his life once he had met Christ on the road to Damascus and received the gospel by revelation from him. Paul does not attempt a deliberate rationale or system of the gospel in Galatians, although such can be derived from the whole Epistle. It is in Romans 1:15–17 that he states his belief in the gospel of Christ and God, and then proceeds to fill out completely what that gospel is essentially.

*I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish: so I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live."*

In Galatians 1: 23 it was reported of him by the Judean Christians, 'He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy'. Here 'the faith' is a synonym for 'the gospel'. In 3:23–25 it is almost the same for the statements, 'faith came', 'faith should be revealed', 'faith has come' are so used as to make faith to be almost a personal entity. Apart from these uses of it as gospel and an element in itself, faith is the personal trust of sinners in God, Christ and their grace. Living by faith is the whole of true living. We need to examine the uses of 'faith' and 'believing' in the Epistle in order to verify this claim.

## PAUL'S EXPERIENCE OF FAITH

When we put together the biographical details of Paul's life as found in the Acts and his Epistles the picture emerges of a person who 'had a zeal for God but not according to knowledge'. Rom. 10:2–4 is a fair picture of the apostle before his conversion from Judaism to the gospel of Christ,

I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified.

What Paul spoke of the Jew who opposed the gospel could have been said of him in his former state. His biography tells us of a man who was in states of fury against believers of the gospel, and of course that fury was directed at the gospel itself for it seemed that the so called 'good news' was bad news, and heretical news. Paul had persecuted people even to death, seeking to make them blaspheme the name of Christ<sup>52</sup>. Paul says all of this happened through ignorance. 'I acted ignorantly in unbelief' (I Tim. 1:13) is his admission that his faith in Judaism was really unbelief, and that he had not understood the Jewish covenant although he had 'advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers' (Gal. 1:14).

All of this gives us the key to Paul's faith in the God of his fathers as a God of law, and in the law as a system of justification when one obeyed its commandments and did its works. As a result of Christ's confronting him on the road to Damascus Paul had a revolution in his thinking. It was not that his knowledge of the Scriptures was rendered useless but that it was properly enlightened. He had undoubtedly believed in the coming Messiah but his 'zeal without enlightenment' had blinded his eyes to Jesus as the true Christ. He certainly would have known the gospel as the Christian formulated it, but it would have appeared to him as utter blasphemy.

So then, Paul's conversion was not primarily to the gospel by reasoning such as Stephen might have presented (Acts 6:7—10), but it was to and through and by faith in Christ<sup>53</sup>, that is faith in Christ as a person, as Lord, as the Son of God, as the one risen from the dead, and so as one through whom, God justified the ungodly<sup>54</sup>. When we speak of Paul's faith in Christ we must recognise that faith was not something Paul evinced of himself or from himself. It was the result of grace. In Galatians 1:23–24 Paul shows this, 'they only heard it said, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy."' And they glorified God because of me'. Paul himself had

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<sup>52</sup> See Acts 8:1; 9: 1–2; 26:9–11; Philippians 3:6; I Timothy 1:13.

<sup>53</sup> When we ask what faith is we have Luther's answer, Faith directs itself towards the things which are invisible. Indeed, only when that which is believed on is hidden, can it pride an opportunity for faith. And moreover, those things are most deeply hidden which most clearly contradict the obvious experiences of the senses. Therefore when God makes alive, He kills; when He justifies, he imposes guilt; when he leads us to heaven He thrusts us down to hell'. Karl Barth quotes this in first commentary on Romans (*The Epistle to the Romans*, Oxford, London, 1933, p.39). Then he adds to this quotation his own view of faith, 'Faith is awe in the presence of the divine incognito; it is the love of God that is aware of the qualitative distinction between God and man and man and the world: it is the affirmation of the resurrection at the turning point of the word; and therefore it is the divine affirmation of the Divine "No" in Christ, of the shattering halt in the presence of God . . . The believer is the man who puts his trust in God, in God Himself, and in God alone: that is to say, the man who, perceiving the faithfulness of God in the very fact that he has set us within the realm of that which contradicts the course of this world, meets the faithfulness of God with a corresponding fidelity, and with God says "Nevertheless" and "In spite of this".'

<sup>54</sup> See Acts 9:5–6; 26:12–18; Acts 9:9:20; Romans 10:9; Romans 1:4; Galatians 1:4–5.

a doctrine of grace preceding and evoking faith, so that we have in this Epistle such statements as ‘who called you in the grace of Christ’, ‘called me through his grace’, ‘when they perceived the grace that was given to me’, and ‘I do not nullify the grace of God’, that is, by my going back on the gospel. Most telling perhaps is the passage of I Corinthians 15:10, ‘But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me was not in vain.’

Having said this, we must see that faith is the manward response to the Godward act, always holding in mind that faith is a gift for it is given to us to be believe (cf. Phil. 1:29), and faith comes by hearing the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17). The mystery of hearing is one linked with the sovereignty of God, but faith must not be seen as a work of Man, but as that which comes by the inspiration of God.

## FAITH IN THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS

### 2:14–21

Having noted that ‘the faith’ in 1:23 is a term for the gospel and the life of the church we now come to the first major use of the term or principle of grace in 2:16–20 and we will look at it in the context of 11–21<sup>55</sup>.

But when Cephas came to Antioch I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And with him the rest of the Jews acted insincerely, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their insincerity. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?" We ourselves, who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, yet who know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified. But if, in our endeavour to be justified in Christ, we ourselves were found to be sinners, is Christ then an agent of sin? Certainly not! But if I build up again those things which I tore down, then I prove myself a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose.

In verses 14 to 16 Paul is saying that those of his readers who were Jews, who had come to faith in Christ, well knew that justification could not come by the law or by their doing the works of the law but only by faith in Christ. Whilst scholars may debate whether the ‘faith in Christ’ is a subjective genitive, that is, ‘through Jesus Christ’s faith(fullness)’ or an objective genitive, that is, ‘through faith in Jesus Christ’ it is clear that the subject has faith in Christ. So this is the means by which one is justified. That the law cannot justify is supported by the implied quotation of Psalms 143:2, ‘Enter not into judgement with thy servant; for no man living is righteous [justified] before thee’. In Job 9:1 Job asks the question, ‘But how can a man be just before God?’ and Bildad later asks the same question (25:4). The weakness in both Job’s and Bildad’s statements

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<sup>55</sup> It would help to take this same passage in our Essay on ‘The Cross in Galatians’ and get its general meaning.

is that God does justify a human being, even a sinner, but then not because of his or her works but because of His grace.

The verb ‘to justify’ (*dikaioo*) means ‘to put in the right’, ‘to declare right before the law’, and so on. The key to justification lies in faith in Christ<sup>56</sup>. When we ask what such faith means Paul does not tell us. He doubtless has in mind his own switch from Judaism to the very person of Christ as Messiah and Lord. But then this is not simply a matter of the person, but of the work<sup>57</sup>, the propitiating work Christ has done which he states in Romans 3:24–25, and without that specific form of description in other passages such as II Corinthians 5:14, 21; Galatians 1:4; 2:20; 3:13, 5:24; 6:10; Ephesians 1:7 and Colossians 1:13–14. Paul then cannot have faith in the law to justify him since it does the opposite—it unmasks him as a sinner!— so he must look elsewhere and as in 3:21–25 he is shut up to faith, that faith having to be in Christ.

The fact of being justified by faith in Christ (verse 16) is then followed by the statement in verse 20 that ‘the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me’. It has been argued that in this verse that it is not simply faith in Christ (objective genitive) but the faithfulness) of Christ (subjective genitive), and this may well be the case, but faith in Christ still has to continue. To use a modern term Paul—and with him all believers—must always live in ‘faith-mode’.

### 3:1–29

This passages has Paul discussing aspects of faith. In verses 1–5 he is saying that the Christian life began by ‘hearing with faith’, that is, hearing the gospel of Christ crucified, and believing it, doubtless repenting, receiving the forgiveness of sins, and being justified. He asserts that by the principle of faith they began their Christian life, law certainly not being an object of faith for justification. In verses 6–9 he is saying that this was the same kind of faith that Abraham exercised and by which he was justified. Abraham had heard the gospel, believed and so was promised the blessing, the blessing which comes to all who exercise the same faith as did Abraham. In verses 10–14 Paul shows that to withdraw from the faith-mode and to go into law-mode means a terrifying reversal. Faith brings the blessing of grace, and law brings the curse. Both justification and the Spirit are blessings faith alone can receive. In verses 15–20 the apostle brings in the whole matter of promise, and argues that the law cannot annul the promise given to Abraham in God’s covenant with him. He goes on in verses 21–26 to show the law could give the promises of bringing to life, but by the law men and women were all ‘consigned to sin’ so that the promise of God might come to them by the principle of faith. In effect the law shut them up to faith, acted to bring them to Christ and so men and women could come to faith, exercise it with Jesus Christ as their object and become sons of God, and thus, also, children of Abraham.

We note that none of this can take place apart from faith.

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<sup>56</sup> Here refer to the Essay ‘The Doctrine of Justification in Galatians’.

<sup>57</sup> Of course the person and the work of Christ cannot be separated, but our point is that many people simply believe in a person because they have a need to have someone as leader, hero, comforter or whatever, and they image the person in those roles, irrespective of what that person does.,

*Faith and the Promise*

The matter of the promise and promises of God is a vast subject in the Scriptures. Perhaps Hebrews chapter 11 is the best exposition of the theme, but then it would not make much sense unless we had followed through God's various covenants with Man such as the Noahic, the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, the Davidic and the New. Someone has said that we really have nothing but God's promises. This may seem inadequate until we realise that there is nothing in life, death, resurrection, glorification and the new heavens and the new earth which is not included in these promises. It is worth noting that Paul in II Corinthians 1:20 says that God's promises find their Yes in Christ, that is, they are fulfilled in him.

The promise that concerns us is the one discussed in 3:6–22 since 'the blessing of Abraham' as the promised blessing for all who have faith. Thus it was—and is—not be just for the natural seed of Abraham, but also for the Gentiles since the promise was to faith, and had nothing to do with law. In Abraham were all the nations of the earth to be blessed. Of course this would only apply to people of faith. In Romans 4:13–14 Paul explains this promise and blessing.

The promise to Abraham and his descendants, that they should inherit the world, did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.

The covenantal promise was that Abraham's children would inherit the earth, but is obvious that the blessing that came to Abraham of justification by faith (Gen. 15:6) is part of that blessing. This is clear from Galatians 3:10–14 where Christ redeems from the curse of the law in order to make way for the blessing of justification. In 3:14 the promised Spirit is also the blessing to be poured upon persons of faith and to be received by faith. This is verified by 3:1–5 where the Spirit comes to the believer as a gift, by faith. We need to see that Spirit is 'the promise of the Father' (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:33; Eph. 1:13–14).

In Galatians 3:15–22 Paul is saying that the promise is primarily justification through redemption from the law and appropriation by faith. We need only pause to consider the matter of promise to realise how significant it is. If there had not been the promise of justification it would never have happened. The law could not possibly annul what God Himself had promised, for His promise is incapable of non-fulfilment. Luther once said, 'For God does not deal, nor has He ever dealt, with man otherwise than through a Word of promise, as I have said. We cannot in turn deal with God otherwise than through faith in the Word of His promises'<sup>58</sup>.

So then, the law cannot annul the promise, and since Christ is the promised Messiah then all must come through his being the seed, through whom the blessing must come—and has come—to the world. The law, in fact, has helped this to be so, for it was added because of transgressions, it consigned all things to sin<sup>59</sup>, it kept all under restraint until the time of fulfilment, and it acted as a pedagogue to bring men and women to faith. In this sense the law was the servant of the promise.

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<sup>58</sup> (W 6, 516. 30ff.). Quoted by J.R. Loeschgen in *Wrestling with Luther* (Concordia, St. Lois, 1976, p. 88).

<sup>59</sup> Paul does not say the law 'consigns all things to sin' but that the scripture does. Here 'the scripture' is really the word of God, and in fact, God himself, for in Romans 11:32 it is said, 'For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all'. In practical fact God uses the law to include all under sin and Romans 3:19 confirms this, 'Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world be accountable to [guilty before] God'.



In 3:23–26 being shut up to faith, and being led to Christ brings the promise of sonship (adoption) and this, too, is received by faith, and so those distinctions which were once an impediment to justification now dissolve, and all—Jew and Greek, male and female, slave and free—become the children of Abraham because they are the children of faith, that is, the children of the promise.

### *Faith and the Fulfilment of the Promise*

The promise as set out in Romans and Galatians is surely justification and the gift of the Spirit, but then these are linked with the inheritance. Romans 4:13 says this is that the true children of Abraham would inherit the world. Jesus said that the meek in heart would inherit the earth, and these two statements surely coincide<sup>60</sup>. Both Romans and Galatians make much of the inheritance and the heirs. In Romans 8:16–17 the children of God are ‘heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ’. In Galatians 4:4–7 those man sons of God by faith in Christ (3:26), who have received the gift of the Spirit of sonship are those who are slaves, but sons, and if sons then heirs. In Galatians 5:16–23 those who are under law do not inherit the Kingdom of God, but those who have received the Spirit produce the fruit of the Spirit, and do inherit the Kingdom. Sonship is not merely an emotional and relational matter, but is linked with the sons of God working with their Father and ultimately being conformed to the image of the Son so that together with, and within the fellowship of the Triune God they may know ‘the liberty of the glory of the children of God’.

On these grounds, then, we can say that those who have received Christ and the Spirit by faith are those who have been justified, and in whom the promise is being fulfilled. Christ is the Fulfiller; those justified are the ones who share the fulfilment.

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<sup>60</sup> This is not the place for us to discuss Israel as the people of inheritance and that Israel was really to inherit the nations in that they would come to her and be part of the Kingdom of which God had made them the priest nation, but certainly this is a concept in the Old Testament, and it appears from Acts 1:3–8 that Christ saw the Kingdom as not being confined to Israel, although including Israel. It was to cover Samaria and ‘the ends of the earth’ in conformity with the promise of Psalm 2:7–9, a promise which is taken up in various New testament passages.

# **The Work of the Triune God in Galatians**

## **INTRODUCTION: THE TRIUNE GOD AT WORK IN GALATIANS**

It may seem almost superfluous to seek to trace the Triune work of the Godhead in this Letter, yet it should be helpful since we often think of the Three Persons, almost as though they work apart. The church today needs to teach more deeply that doctrine which we call Trinitarian, a doctrine which is not only implicit in the Scriptures, but which is indispensable to our understand the nature of God, and the purpose and work of the Persons set forth in those Scriptures. Down through church history there have been those periods when the doctrine of the Trinity has greatly gripped not only theologians and scholars but the commonality of the whole church. Church history shows us that where the doctrine of the Trinity has weakened or been lost that churches weaken and even dissolve or go back to unitarianism, the doctrine which denies the deity of the Son and the Spirit.

In choosing this title and theme we have the problem of a discursive approach which may prejudice the living warmth and wonder of the works of the Persons. Since the Epistle does not set out to state Trinitarian doctrine and practice as such, then we should be free to use the materials available in a warm and personal way as they present themselves, yet always in that awe and devotion which they evoke when we are not simply reasoning their value or working from a primarily critical point of view.

## **THE FATHER, THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT**

If we were to limit our Study to the Epistle to the Galatians then we would be missing much that is not spoken explicitly in this Letter concerning the Triune God. Doubtless the apostolic preaching comprehended the relationship between the Three Person, and had an understanding of each Person but the dogma of the Trinity is not present as such in the New Testament. Even now we are still working that through, but the person and work of the Father is clear enough, as also the person and work of the Son and the Spirit.

### **THE FATHER IN GALATIANS**

Perhaps we should commence from Galatians 4:4–7 where Paul shows that redemption from the law was with a view to the sonship of believers known also as ‘the adoption’ or the ‘adoption as sons’. It is at this point that those justified by faith know themselves to be sons of the Father, since the ‘Spirit of His Son’ is sent into every heart crying ‘Abba! Father!’. It is at this point we come to know by revelation that God is our Father, and this so relationally, vocationally and in regard to His promised inheritance.

The Son has preceded us in the knowledge of God as Father. As the Son and the Word he was always in relationship with the Father. That is why in the Epistles He is often called ‘the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’ as well as ‘the Son of God’. He is uniquely the Son of the Father because as the Creeds say he is ‘of the same substance as the Father’, that is, he is substantially one in Deity. The true Son of God the Father must be God the Son, just as the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son

must be substantially one with those Two Persons. We find in the New Testament that the Three are relationally One.

If, then, we have come to know God as our Father Paul's salutation makes sense when he writes twice 'God the Father', and once 'our God and Father' (1:1, 3, 4). In 1:6 Paul speaks of the Father as '*him* who called you in the grace of Christ'. From that point onwards all references to 'God' are primarily to the Father and, as such, not to the Son (Christ Jesus) or the Holy Spirit. We thus have the following statements referring to the Father<sup>61</sup>,

'him who called you in the grace of Christ' (1:6), 'seeking the favour of God' (1:10), 'the church of God' (1:13), 'before God I do not lie' (1:20), 'that I might live to God' (2:19), 'the Son of God' (2:20), 'the grace of God' (2:21), 'Abraham believed God' (3:6), 'God would justify the Gentiles by faith' (3:8), 'no man is justified before God' (3:11), 'a covenant previous ratified by God' (3:17), 'God gave it to Abraham by a promise' (3:18), 'God is one', (3:20), 'the promises of God' (3:21), 'God sent forth his Son' (4:4), 'God sent the Spirit of his Son' (4:6), 'through God you are a son. . . an heir' (4:7), 'you did not know God . . . have come to know God . . . to be known of God' (4:8-9), 'shall not inherit the kingdom of God' (5:21), 'God is not mocked' (6:7), 'the Israel of God' (6:16).

When we expand the components of this bird's eye view of the Epistle into their full action and significance then we really see the following things (i) the Father and the Son: their relationships and works together, (ii) the Father and the Holy Spirit: their relationships and works together, and (iii) the Father and His people: their relationships and works together. Thus we can translate the above quotes into this fuller bodied action of the Father as I seek to paraphrase it as succinctly as possible in order that reading, we will not fail to see the wood for the trees and, for that matter, the trees for the wood.

(i) '*him who called you in the grace of Christ*' (1:6); speaks of God's election, and of this being through His grace in the act of Christ's saving death. Calling is a well-known theme of Paul eg. Romans 8:30; 9:11; I Corinthians 1:9. In Galatians 5:13 he speaks of them being 'called to freedom', and the point of our present reference is that it is the Father who initiates this calling which is effectual.

(ii) '*seeking the favour of God*' (1:10); speaks of Paul's persecution which he suffers for the gospel of God. It is clear that he is seeking not Man's but God's favour (cf. John 12:43; Phil. 3:18-19). That God does have favour towards those who please him is a wonder in itself, 'Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter into the joy of your master'. The Father was pleased in His Son (Matt. 17:5); so shall it be with the sons.

(iii) '*the church of God*' (1:13); in I Thessalonians 1:1 and II Thessalonians 1:1 it is 'the church which is in the Father'. 8 times in his letters Paul refers to it as 'the church of God', and once 'the household of God'. Paul recognises the awfulness of his sin in persecuting this church initiated by God, but also realises the wonder of the people of the Father, the intimate 'holy temple in the Lord', 'a dwelling place of God in the Spirit'. We are the abode of the Father!

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<sup>61</sup> These are minimally given in order to present a bird's eye view of the Father's work in the Epistle. We need to understand the continuity of Paul's whole argument for the grace that saves, the place of faith and promise in the light of the law, the new life of sonship, and of living in Christ and the Spirit, and when we understand that whole presentation we come to a rich knowledge of the Father and His works.

(iii) *'before God I do not lie'* (1:20); Paul takes a sort of oath, that what he is saying about his apostleship as not needing the authentication of other apostles is true. He did not see Peter in order to be certified as an apostle. The only other leader he saw was James the Elder. The saying of Paul tells us of his relationship with God, and refusing the charge that his gospel was inferior to that of the Judaizers. It is a solemn and dreadful thing to lie before the living God as the high priest said to Jesus (Matt. 26:63).

(iv) *'that I might live to God'* (2:19); from being a person under the law, and so virtually dead to God, now, through the death he has shared with Christ, he is live from the dead. The outcome of the co-crucifixion is that *he lives to God!* This is no small saying, no ordinary matter. In the fall man died to god, relationally: through the Christ he lives to God (cf. II Cor. 5:15). This is life under and with the Father. There is nothing else—No One else before whom and to whom one should live.

(v) *'the Son of God'* (2:20); in Colossians 1:13 Jesus is called 'the Son of his love'. Immediately following his conversion this was the message Paul preached (Acts 9:20), 'immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, "He is the Son of God".' Paul rarely uses the term, as such, but he speaks much of 'the Son'. To call Jesus the Son of God 'the Son of the Most High' is to say everything about him, and to say all about Sonship and Fatherhood.

(vi) (2:21) *'the grace of God'* ; as in 1:6 this grace is the saving grace of the gospel. There it is the grace of Christ, and in 1:3 grace is from both the Father and the Son. In 2:9 it is the grace of ministry which was given by the Father. Here it is the act of the Father which has initiated the cross and is the means of justification and 'living unto God'. To go against that act by works of self-justification is to go against all that is God Who is not God apart from His grace.

(vii) (3:5) *'he who supplies the Spirit it to you'*; this is primarily the Father fulfilling His promise of sending the Spirit (Luke 24:9; Acts 1:4; cf. Gal. 3:14; Eph. 1:13–14; John 14:26; 15:26). In Galatians 3:14—as here—this promise is received by faith. In 4:4–6 he is the 'Spirit of his Son'. In this passage the works of the law cannot defeat the promise and sending of the Father. The Father is insistant on us having the gift of the Spirit, beginning in him and going on to be completed or perfected in him.

(viii) (3:6) *'Abraham believed God'*; this statement is a tremendous one. When we think of it much of history—important history—hinges on this matter of Abraham's faith. Stephen told the Sanhedrin that 'the God of glory appeared unto Abraham' (Acts 7:1–2), and if we try to single out one occasion we will be baffled. All His appearances were theophanies, as we call them. Indeed all of them make a broad revelation of the nature of God. Not least was the occasion when Abraham came to know the heart of God as father, as—Abraham—offered up his only true son. Was this when 'he rejoiced that he was to see my [the Son's] day' and 'he saw it and was glad'?

(ix) (3:8); *'God would justify the Gentiles by faith'*; so here he is speaking about the God who justifies, and not just Jews but Gentiles—the 'no-god' or 'idol-worshipping' people. As Paul said in Romans 3:29 that he was not [is not] the God of Jews only but of Gentiles because He is 'the one God' (cf. Gal. 20), over all. So His love for His world is shown. It is his ministry to the Gentiles that Paul so covets as grace given to him (cf. 1:16; 2:7–9).

(x) (3:11; cf. 2:21), '*no man is justified before God*' by the law; the obverse is true: a man is justified not by law but by grace. As we saw above, God justifies the Gentiles, and as we see elsewhere He justifies 'sinners' and 'the ungodly'. His law is inexorable, but His grace is that of the loving Father.

(xi) (3:17), '*a covenant previously ratified by God*'; here, then, is a further revelation of His grace, and the law cannot negate it. All God's relationship with Israel is caught up in covenant, and now all God's relationship with His elect is at stake if God has not ratified that covenant of promise.

(xii) (3:18), '*God gave it to Abraham by a promise*'; the great principle of promise such as 'the promise of the Father' seen regarding the Spirit in 3:14 and other places. God's promises are also without recall, and believers have nothing but promises yet need nothing more. Hebrews 6:13–20 is a powerful commentary on the God of promise and the promise of God.

(xiii) (3:20), '*God is one*'; as we have seen above. Deuteronomy 6:4 had said, 'The LORD our God is one LORD', and His unity is the guarantee against His people's disunity. Here, in this context Paul is saying that the law was given through an angel (cf. Acts 7:38)—probably the Angel of the Lord—and says that the covenant promise was given directly from God Himself. This speaks not only of intimacy but also of faithfulness, and a faithfulness which does not allow the law to cheat His people of true justification by grace.

(xiv) (4:4), '*God sent forth his Son*'; now we are seeing His Fatherhood as He sends His Son 'out of Himself' (cf. John 1:18, 'in the bosom of the Father'). His intention is to redeem His people under law, and this cannot be done without His Son becoming incarnate, truly human, for ever. What Fatherly love and generosity, not withholding His only Son!

(xv) (4:4), '*God sent the Spirit of his Son*'; and this is a statement that is depthless. He did not only send the Spirit as the Holy Spirit but as the Spirit by whom the Son had His incarnate Sonship in this world. This Spirit is also sent out of the Father (*exapostello*) to bring to believing men and women the very Sonship of the Son to be internalised in them, so that they would know themselves to be sons (Rom. 8:14–17). Here there can be no adoption of sons which is merely formal.

(xvi) (4:6), '*through God you are a son. . . an heir*'; so that the remarkable, the marvellous has happened. Men and women of human flesh now become sons of the living God. Such sonship joins them with Father Abraham in being inheritors of the world. Their inheritance is first God Himself and then the entire creation, the new heavens and the new earth.

(xvii) (4:8–9), '*you did not know God . . . have come to know God . . . to be known of God*'; here Paul is speaking of the mystery of revelation. As the Psalmist first said, and Paul after him 'No one seeks after God,' and this is true but the Father is Self-revealing, and primarily and supremely in His Son, so that who has seen the Son has seen the Father. When God knows a person then—and then only—that person knows God. To

know Him is eternal life: His knowing us is the joyous essence of the life we live—the relational life that is all life.

(xviii) (5:21), *'shall not inherit the kingdom of God'*; whilst flesh and blood cannot inherit that Kingdom, glorified flesh can. The solemn adjuration is that if we depart from that holiness which is necessary for us to have—here seen as *'the fruit of the Spirit'*—then we who have sowed to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption' (6:8).

(xix) (6:7), *'God is not mocked'*; God's promise of cursing is no less than that of blessing. In 5:21 Paul had warned them against indulging in the works of the flesh. I Corinthians 6:9 and Ephesians 5:5–6 emphasise the same. Here the outcome is horrible: the one sowing his flesh shall reap corruption. God is holy: outside of grace no evil escapes judgement: inside of grace it has already been judged.

(xx) *'the Israel of God'* (6:16); keeps alive the truth of the elect of God. All in this Israel are those who have been justified by grace. Outside are *'the crooked generation'* of Peter's warning in Acts 2:40. They constitute the *'false brethren'* of Galatians 2:4, the *'false apostles'* of II Corinthians 11:14, and those *'who do not know good'* and *'who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus'* of II Thessalonians 1:8. The Israel of God is not said to be the church, but then those are truly of Israel are in the church, and those who are Christ's are in the true Israel.

#### CONCLUSION TO THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE FATHER IN GALATIANS

It is a difficult task to gather up the work of the Father in this Letter for as we have seen it is so much one with the work of the Son and the Holy Spirit that its separation into one segment is nigh on impossible. Even so if we keep in mind that He is *'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and 'God our Father', Christ is His Son and the Spirit is 'the Spirit of His Son' as well as 'the Spirit of the Father', then we see our exercise above is warranted, to use every mention of 'God' as being of the Father Himself. So vast it is that our flimsy comments are far from doing Him justice.*

#### THE SON IN GALATIANS

In speaking of *'the Son of God'* (2:20) we are at the same time speaking of the one called *'his Son', 'Christ', 'Jesus Christ', 'Christ Jesus', and 'the Lord'*. The Letter opens with him being one with the Father, as the Son, so that Paul's calling in 1:1 comes from the Father through the Son, even though Paul's calling was personally by Christ on the road to to Damascus. 1:15–16 shows his calling was planned by the Father, who brought this into Paul's experience by Himself revealing His Son in Paul. In 1:3 the Son is coupled with the Father in bringing grace and peace to the church in Galatia. With this setting and background we are launched—so to speak—into the ministry of Christ in this Letter in relation to the matters which have arisen in the Galatian church because of the Judaisers. Paul is out not only to warn against these heretics, but also to renew his readers in their understanding of the Cross and the new life in Christ and the Spirit.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> In this section of our Essay we will take through the whole of the work of Christ in the Epistle without the wider commentary we developed in the work of the Father, for the reason that the Epistle is explicitly stating the work of Christ. Unless wholly necessary we will not make extended textual references.



In 1:4 we have the powerful statement that Jesus gave himself for our sins to deliver us up out of this present evil age, the age that is under its god, lord, ruler who is Satan. ‘To give himself for our sins’ we have dealt with in other places.

In 1:6 we have the mention of the grace of Christ, which is another term for the power of the gospel. In 1:15 Paul was called *in* this grace, and in 2:9 Paul’s ministry is seen to be a *gift* of grace.

In 1:7 the gospel is ‘the gospel of Christ’, though elsewhere it is also called ‘the gospel of God’. There is no gospel without Christ who at the outset of his ministry called on his hearers to ‘believe the gospel’ and who, prior to his ascension, commissioned the apostles to preach this gospel. The gospel *is* Christ.

In 1:10 Paul sees himself as the *slave* (*doulos*) of Christ. Christ has his servants. The terms *servant* (*diakonos*) is used of All those who minister (Eph. 4:12) and of all God’s people in the book of the Revelation. In the Old Testament it is used largely of the prophets and in the Revelation all are prophets.

In 1:12 Paul speaks about ‘a revelation of Jesus Christ’. Christ is only known by revelation since the facts of his history need to be seen through revelation. This revelation was of the gospel. In 1:16 Christ was revealed in (*en*) Paul, a most dynamic event imprinting all of Christ within him for ever. See, in this respect, 4:19.

In 1:22 the church is locatively called ‘the churches of Christ in Judea’. This accords with the NT. teaching that Christ is Lord of the church. The church is also called ‘the church of God’ i.e. of the father.

In 2:4 Paul speaks of ‘the freedom which we have in Christ Jesus’. This refers to the teaching of Christ as the Liberator—a vast subject. Jesus’ own promise of John 8:31–36 shows him as the liberator from sin, and other passages describe his power to liberate from sin, Satan, the world powers, death, the law, the wrath of God. Here Paul is speaking of a factual objective freedom which came to the Galatians. 5:1 exhorts a standing in this freedom.

In 2:16 the Apostle is teaching us that it must be through faith in Christ that we become justified. In the Letter there are some nine references to being ‘*in* Christ’ (prepositions *eis*, *en* and genitive), and we need to look at our textual commentary to see the differences, but in this verse and verse 17 it is in Christ that justification is obtained.

In 2:17 Paul asks whether Christ is the agent of sin since Jews first discovered they were sinners when seeking to be justified. No, sin does not use Christ, though we may accuse him thus of being sin’s agent. Law might be unwillingly the agent of sin, but not Christ since he comes with the gospel.

Verse 20 is a famous one, encapsulating the whole doctrine of Christ identifying himself with us and identifying us with himself. Taking up his people into his death (cf. II Cor. 5:14) he identifies them with himself in his death and resurrection and in making us new sets the basis for a life of faith in him, or, perhaps, one within his faithfulness (*en pistei tou huiou tou Theou*).

2:21 shows that if justification could be by the law there was no point at all to Christ’s death.

In 3:1 Christ is set forth as ‘Christ crucified’ (cf. I Cor. 1:22; 2:2; Gal. 2:20; 6:14), and obviously to Paul this is the heart of the gospel. The coming of the Spirit to persons is dependent upon their seeing and receiving Christ crucified<sup>63</sup>.

3:13 opens up elements of the death of Christ, the ‘Christ crucified’ in that on the cross he came curse<sup>64</sup> for us, that is, the curse of the law (cf. Deut. ch. 27). Thus his

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<sup>63</sup> Here refer to the Essay ‘The Cross in Galatians’.

liberation of us from law is here contained in the death (cf. 4:5). Thus he has liberated from all guilt (cf. Rom. 8:1–3).

In 3:16 the promise to Abraham is that through his offspring (singular) the fulfilment of the prophecy will come. That offspring is Jesus according to Paul. Since the promise transcends the law that offspring brings the grace of promise to fulfilment—another powerful element of true Christology.

3:22–24 teaches us that ‘faith in Christ Jesus’ enables believers to receive the promise given to Abraham, and that the law acted as a custodian ‘until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith’. Paul never tires of making Christ the only one who is the object of faith and through whom justification by faith can come.

3:26 and context shows us that ‘in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through (*dia*) faith’. Paul is saying that although they are sons of God via Abraham (3:6–9, 29) that they are not that via law, but they are that via Christ. Since he talking to those who were once Gentiles he is by-passing the law, and saying the way to sonship is *through* or *in* Christ Jesus. Since all the blessing God gives is through Christ, then to be in Christ will bring the blessing of true sonship. Perhaps 4:4–7 is a commentary on all this for there sonship follows being redeemed from the law. In John’s Gospel believers become sons or children of God by receiving Christ (1:12–13, and coming *through* him to the Father (cf. Heb. 2:10ff.).

3:27 shows that when they were baptised they put on Christ. It could be said they put on the Son, and so their individual or personal sonship was really because they became participants in his Sonship. Their sonship is always contingent upon the Son, upon his Sonship.

3:28 surely means that once baptised into him nothing mars or impedes the basic and ontological unity Christ has, in grace, restored to the fallen human race. The question raised by some—that of equality—is not raised here, but it is one of unity. Christ has liberated all into one unity—‘you are all one’—and in thus unity race, social standing and gender are no impediment. Christ is the great Unifier (cf. Eph. 1:10; 4:1–6, 15–16; Col. 1:19–21; 3:14) and—as in Colossians 3:9–10—growth into the image of the Creator brings the unity of Him, true humanity being in that image.

4:4–6 is the passage which speaks of becoming sons of God by adoption through being redeemed from the law by the incarnation and the cross of the Son. Adoption may be called an advance on justification, though it—as Galatians 3 shows us—is one with justification. The Spirit who comes with the knowledge of Christ crucified (cf. 3:1–5) is ‘the Spirit of his Son’ who naturally expresses Christ’s relationship with the Father so powerfully presented in the Gospels, e.g. Matthew 11:27 *et al*; Mark 14:36; John chapter 17.

In 4:19 we have an unusual statement of Paul, ‘until Christ be formed in you’. We could go into convolutions with the imagery that arises in our minds but surely the *sense* of the passage is that Paul was as a mother in parturition, bringing forth God’s children as he proclaimed the gospel, but since they in danger of departing from Christ’s grace, he must go through similar pangs again. ‘Christ formed in you’ seems to mean they are in parturition but here is not merely a play on words but on ideas. He will have the travail: they will have Christ formed in them without pain because of Paul’s pain. If we go back to 2:20 then ‘Christ . . . in you’ is quite intelligible. We ought not to miss the centrality of Christ in this matter of re-formation.

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<sup>64</sup> As the Greek has no indefinite article and since he did not become *any* curse but *the* curse it is fair enough to translate it as we have.

5:1 says it clearly, ‘For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery’. This accords with 4:31, ‘So, brethren, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman’. The thought is exhilarating, but Paul is not so much concerned with the emotion of freedom as with its objective reality, for now the distinction has been made between law and grace and the two must never again be confused. Our Christological point is that Christ is the Liberator.

5:2–6 carries on the exhortation. Circumcision binds to the law and to ‘law-way’. Refusal of circumcision is the affirmation of justification-freedom. The severing the flesh will be the severing of themselves from Christ. In Christ the matter of previous circumcision or uncircumcision does not figure at all. As against law-way the new life is ‘faith [in Christ] working through love’<sup>65</sup>. Faith in Christ can never be without love (Rom. 5:5–11) for 2:20 speaks of his love being prior to ours.

In 5:24 the faith that Christ has defeated the flesh at the cross enables the believer to see it. Whilst the verse seems to be cast in a way that seems to make the believer himself to have crucified the flesh, yet this is not the case. The believer gladly assents to the crucifixion of his flesh which, given rein, always rebels against the law of God for flesh is a human being going his or her own way (cf. %;16–21).

6:2 speaks of bearing one another’s burdens and thus fulfilling the law of Christ. It is fascinating and intriguing to know that Christ has a law. What this is we can see in the textual commentary, but it means that law—the law which Christ fulfilled—had not been abrogated. The law comes to us in the light of Christ which is very much like 5:6 above—‘faith that works through love’.

6:14 states the work of the cross has killed Paul to the world and the world to Paul. It is a double crucifixion: Paul is freed from all that held him to the world (*kosmos*) and this *kosmos* is really the aeon, that is, the ‘present evil age’ of 1:4 has been killed to Paul, that is, rendered useless. This world has its own wisdom—non-faith in God but faith in itself. Previously Paul was caught in the flesh which is, in turn, the way of the self, so that the flesh is the way of the world, of humanity without God. Not only has Paul been liberated from it, but the world cannot get at him for it has been put out of action by the cross. Paul does not explain the *how* at this point, but states the glorious, objective fact..

In 6:18 we are finally brought back to that which came to us in the commencement of the Epistle, namely ‘the grace of Christ. It means Christ always doing us good no matter what our state, and the doing good issuing from love. How the Galatians needed it, and how no less today, where grace is not understood is it desperately needed!

## CONCLUSION TO THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST IN GALATIANS

It is not left alone to the Letter to the Galatians to supply us with a full Christology. We have so many other materials to enlighten what we read in this Letter as it, in turn, enlightens us in what we read in other material regarding the apostle Paul. We see how the Son is related to the Father, and to the Holy Spirit, and how, with them, he carries out the magnificent work of redeeming Man from the law and bring him into sonship with God. At the same since he was ‘born of a woman, born under the law’ he relates to humanity, and indeed is of one flesh with us all. The deliverance from sins, from the

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<sup>65</sup> Burton (ad. loc.) comments, ‘Anticipating the objection that freedom from law leaves the life without moral dynamic, he answers in a brief phrase that faith begets love and through it becomes operative in conduct’. It is the Johannine principle of John 14:14, ‘If you love me you will keep my commandments’, but loving Christ presupposes being affected by his love for them (I John 4:19; 5:2–3; cf II Cor. 5:14).

flesh, from the law and the world is a magnificent one for the human spirit. To be set on the road of freedom is simply marvellous. Our adoration of Christ expands as we see what he has done, are one in union with him and share the Sonship which is his and yet ours as the children of God.

The work of the cross is never apart from the Spirit and it leads into the life of the Spirit. Had Paul just freed us from bondage to law's condemnation and abolished the law then all would be chaos, anarchy and most bewildering. To coin a statement, 'Christology (the person and work of Christ) has no point without pneumatology (the person and work of the Spirit)'. The same goes for Pateriology (the person and work of the Father). Each is only understood in the light of the others.

So it we must never read the works of the Persons one apart from the others. Together we come to know the Triune God.

## THE SPIRIT IN GALATIANS

### INTRODUCTION: THE SPIRIT AT THE GALATIAN BEGINNING

Galatians 3:1–5 is a good place to start.

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so many things in vain? -- if it really is in vain. Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?

### THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT RECEIVED THROUGH HEARING WITH FAITH

From this passage it can be seen that the first hearers of Barnabas and Paul in Galatia had had two wonderful things happen. The first was that they saw and understood 'Christ crucified'. The second was that they had received the gift of the Holy Spirit. In terms of this Letter they had been justified and received the Spirit and all this by faith. The situation was that they through Paul and the apostolic band had come in the fullness of the Spirit—in the fulness of the blessing of [the gospel] of Christ<sup>66</sup>—and had proclaimed the fulness of the gospel, and the Galatians had heard and believed.

In this passage above, Paul marvels that this having happened they could put it down to 'works of the law'. The law had never 'gospellised' anyone. It could not. If they could have been justified by the law then there would be no need of the gospel.(v. 21). No: they had been changed by the message of the cross, and had received the gift of the Spirit. Both may have been simultaneous, but in any case they happened through the hearing with faith—with hearing by faith. The law had nothing directly<sup>67</sup> to do with the matter.

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<sup>66</sup> Although this is a quotation from Romans 15:29 yet it could equally be applied to the Galatians for they had had their sins borne away, had been redeemed by the gospel, liberated from the bondage of the law, made sons by the Spirit, been led by the Spirit and enabled to bear the fruit of the Spirit, all of which were elements of 'the fullness of the blessing'.

<sup>67</sup> Of course the law as a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ, and in this sense the law did have a part in their coming to justification.

We could trace similar happenings in the Acts, especially the gift of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost to the 3000 who were baptised, and, later, the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius in Acts 10 and 12. In the first case the simple exhortation was ‘Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’ In the second case no promise seems to have been made of the gift of the Spirit. Peter simply said, ‘To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.’ In both cases the hearers believed and received the gifts of forgiveness of sin and the Holy Spirit. Hence in Galatians 3:13–14 Paul wrote, ‘Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree”—that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit [the promised Spirit] by faith.’ Thus it is clear that the gift of the Spirit came through the hearing of—or with—faith.

### **THE NATURE OF THE EXPERIENCE**

It is interesting to note that the gifts of forgiveness and the Spirit came together in the Acts. Galatians 3:1–5 reveals that the message of the cross brought the Galatians to saving belief. This must have been a deep and rich revelation of the Spirit of all the meaning of the Cross. We have examples of this in the apostolic preaching, but the key lies in the fact of the Spirit being the Revealer. What no eye had ever seen, no ear had ever heard, nor any mind ever imagined were the things the Spirit revealed to the hearers (cf. I Cor. 2:6–11). We have no hint that receiving the Spirit was something in itself for itself, an experience to be pondered and enlarged before an audience. Forgiveness of sins and justification by grace seem to be the prime matters. Even so Paul could ask whether they received the Spirit by law or by faith, but he did not ask whether they had received the Spirit<sup>68</sup>. There was no doubt in their minds about that fact. It was so palpable, so actual a happening that they knew it to have happened. In it was included the knowledge of the gospel—‘the whole counsel of God’.

We may now proceed to look at the work of the Spirit in the Epistle.

### **THE EPISTLE OF JUSTIFICATION AND THE SPIRIT**

There can be no doubt about the fact that Paul’s primary purpose in the Epistle is to show up the heresy of the Judaisers and bring his readers back to the reality of the gospel. In doing this he shows the secondary place of the law as against the primary one of justification. As we saw above, the Spirit came with justification so that the two are intimately the one in the experience and thinking of the believer.

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<sup>68</sup> IN acts 19:Paul asked some disciples of John, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed,’ and their answer was, ‘No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’ Paul must have sensed the absence of the Spirit as a gift in their lives. This was not the question he asked the Galatians. He had no doubt they had received the Spirit. He simply asked them to consider whether that gift came by the hearing of faith or by works of the law.



**3:1–14: THE GIFT AND BLESSING OF THE SPIRIT**

The placing of the gospel of the cross together with the gift of the Spirit in 3:1–14 shows that Paul's primary reference to the Spirit here is in the light of the Galatians attempts to be justified by law and in their setting up the law above the gospel, even if unwittingly. We notice in verses 2 and 14 that the Spirit is a gift and one which accompanies justification. We see in verse 3 that we begin in the Spirit so that where there is no Spirit, there is no beginning. Hence Paul says in Romans 8:9, 'Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him'.

Understanding of justification and forgiveness *is* the beginning. We began in the Spirit, and so we go on in him. Later Paul will talk about being led by the Spirit and walking in the Spirit. Here in 3:1–5 he is warning against seeking to be perfected by the works of the law which is really an attempt to be made complete by the flesh—a dreadful thought! All Christian life is by the Spirit. If we pursue the ministry and work of the Spirit in the life of the church and the believer then all elements of the person's and church's life are by the Spirit<sup>69</sup>. It is both incredible and wonderful to realise the interior ministry of the Spirit, something of which we discover in this Letter.

In verse 5 Paul speaks of God supplying the Spirit and working miracles among them. His point is that God does all this without the law or works of the law. It is God's direct giving to them, so law is not to be thought of. The *fact* that He supplies the Spirit is important<sup>70</sup>. In verse 14 Paul shows that one of the reasons for the taking of the curse by Christ was that the Spirit promised by God would come to the Gentiles. If we read Acts 10:44–11:18 we see that the giving of the Spirit to the Gentiles was no little thing. In fact Peter had to repeat the significant fact to the church at Jerusalem (Acts 15:6–11). So the Galatians must realise two things, (i) that God had intended to give the Spirit to the Gentiles, and (ii) that the *gift* of the Spirit had nothing whatever to do with the law. In itself verse 14 is interesting since Paul has been emphasising that the blessing Abraham received was by faith (Gen. 15:6), and this blessing was both justification and the promise of the inheritance. These two elements now come to the Gentiles who believe. In addition, but linked with the Abrahamic blessing is the gift of the Spirit. Since Paul does not quote an Old Testament promise in this regard, we have to look at other New Testament references which refer back to the Old Testament prophecies. This is legitimate because Paul here speaks of 'the promise of the Spirit' and Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; and Ephesians 1:14 refer to that promise. In Acts 2:15ff. Peter refers the event of Pentecost to Joel 2:28f. where God promised He would pour out His Spirit upon 'all flesh'. The words of Jesus to his disciples that they would be baptised in the Spirit, and when the Spirit came upon them that they would witness to him in Palestine—to the Jews—and then in Samaria to the Samaritans and the Gentiles—the nations to the end of the earth—suggests the Spirit was to come to Samaria and to the Gentiles, which of course happened and was happening.

So then, all of these references show us that the gift of the Spirit was anticipated, and especially as *the gift of faith*. The crowning factor in the promises, of course, was the ministry of John the Baptist who stated that Messiah would pour out the Holy Spirit,

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<sup>69</sup> Without giving references to these elements of ministry we note that love, unity, fellowship, ministry, gifts, prayer, worship, proclamation, teaching, holiness, the fruit, guidance and other such things are associated with the Holy Spirit/.

<sup>70</sup> From the text we might gather that He supplied the Spirit in the past. It can also carry the idea that He goes on supplying the Spirit and goes on doing miracles amongst them. This may simply be a principle Paul is stating—God giving as a against us earning by means of the law.



that is, baptise those who anticipated the Kingdom and believed in him<sup>71</sup>, and Jesus carried on this teaching. All this is to be included in the idea of ‘the blessing of Abraham’ for the covenant promised to him was to embrace all nations, as we see in Galatians 3:5–18.

#### 4:1–7: THE SPIRIT OF SONSHIP

3:6–29 really covers being sons of Abraham, inheriting the promises and the inheritance promised to the new people in Christ the Son. The passage we now need to discuss relates to sonship of God, the Father and the inheritance which goes with this.

I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no better than a slave, though he is the owner of all the estate; but he is under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father. So with us; when we were children, we were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe. But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.

In 3:21–29 under the pedagogue the covenant child was little more than a slave. The law acted as that pedagogue with the view to shutting the child up to faith, but not to the pedagogue—law—itself. Paul said, ‘Now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian (*paidagogos*); for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. For as many as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ.’ We see that the law shut us up to faith. Christ came and we had faith. We became sons *through faith* because we put on Christ the Son in baptism. Hence we moved out of the child-slave category into the free sons category. And how? The answer is (i) by the redeeming work of Christ, and (ii) by the ministry of the Spirit.

We were taken out from under law and came under Christ. Redemption—that is justification—was with a view to adoption. Adoption (sonship) as a legal category by the propitiatory work of the cross becomes a relational category by the interior dwelling and work of the Spirit. From being ‘no-sons’ we became ‘His sons’, that is the sons of the Father. This was done by putting on the Son in baptism. It was done by the Father sending the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. At that point the incoming Spirit was crying ‘Abba! Father!’ which is what Jesus did as the incarnate Son of the Father (cf. Mark 14:36; cf. Luke 10:21). So the gift of sonship of God (adoption: *huiiothesia*) became a relational reality. Adoption had been given to Israel (Rom. 9:4) and had to do with (i) relationship with God as Father<sup>72</sup>, (ii) working with the Father as sons (Exod. 4:22; Deut. 14:1; cf. John 5:19ff; Rev. 21:7) and (iii) finally coming into the inheritance, the inheritance offered to Abraham.

This sonship could not be known apart from the Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:14–21, 29–30). As the Spirit led the Son (Matt. 4:1; Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1–13) so he leads the sons (Rom. 8:14). He is also the Spirit of inheritance as we see in Romans 8:14–17 and Ephesians 1:14; 4:30. All of this is a far call from being child-slaves under the law. A son is a mature person, responsible for life and work, and is an heir.

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<sup>71</sup> In the Old Testament the outpouring of the Spirit was always related to the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel. Acts 1:3–8 confirms this. However the gift of the Spirit was not to be limited to Israel, nor was the kingdom only to be restored to Israel. It was to be for all people of faith.

<sup>72</sup> That is, as Covenant-Father, although this term is never used explicitly, See Exodus 4:22; Deuteronomy 14:1; 32:5–6; Isaiah 63:16; 64:8; Jeremiah 3:14, 19; Hosea 2:10; 11:1; Malachi 2:10. Some commentators take the ‘one Father’ to mean Jacob, but it seems better to take it as God Himself.

#### 4: 21–31: BORN OF THE FLESH: BORN OF THE SPIRIT

The interest for us in this passage is the fact that Ishmael is said to have been born of the flesh, of the union of Abraham with Hagar, and that Isaac was born of the Spirit, the union of Abraham with Sarah. Paul represents Hagar as being allegorically the law and bondage, and Sarah as being allegorically faith and freedom. In our Essay on ‘The Law in Galatians’ we expand this passage further. For us it is sufficient here to see that the Spirit relates to faith and freedom and the flesh to works and bondage.

#### 5:1–6: THE ESCHATOLOGICAL SPIRIT OF JUSTIFICATION

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Now I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he is bound to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love.

In the Letter to the Galatians it is fair to link the Spirit with freedom; that is to say freedom from the law, freedom in justification, freedom in sonship and freedom in sanctification and fruitfulness. This freedom is not confined to this Epistle for the principle is seen in Romans 8:1–5 and II Corinthians 3:17. In Galatians 5:1–26 we see an exposition of both freedom and bondage. In our present passage we see Paul’s thrust at the Judaisers who were seeking to have the Gentile believers circumcised. Paul told that those who would be justified by law have severed their connection with the gospel of grace. Those who are in grace ‘through the Spirit, by faith, wait for the hope of righteousness’. The Spirit is the eschatological Spirit, that is, the Spirit of the end things<sup>73</sup> and this is borne out by such passages as Romans 8:18–30; Ephesians 1:14; 4:30. When we say that through the Spirit we wait for the hope of justification we are saying that the end judgement has already taken place in us, via the work of the cross, and that the Spirit has made this to be so for us *now* in faith. In our present state we wait by faith for it because the reality of acquittal is not apparent to sight. Our assurance of this fact is always being contested by evil powers outside us, and the flesh and indwelling sin<sup>74</sup> He is the Spirit of hope as we see in Romans 5:5 where he floods the heart with love and stimulates it to be assured in hope. By the Spirit believers wait by faith for the outcome. That outcome will be the God-attested verdict of ‘Not guilty!’ or ‘Justified!’ That being the case sonship will be vindicated in the granting to us the filial inheritance.

There are many other ways in which we can show the Spirit to be the Spirit of hope. Those who work hard at being justified by works of the law will be fearfully disappointed in the end. Those justified by faith will persist through faith that is aided by the Spirit to keep looking to the end. The Spirit within gives substance to such a hope.

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<sup>73</sup> A true understanding of eschatology does not project ‘the end things’ to the end time, but recognises the presence and effects *now* of that which is to come. For example, Paul can speak of us being glorified *now* (Rom. 8:30). The judgement which is at the end-time has already happened for us on the cross. eschatology is Christ, and as such, is the guarantee that our judgement has already happened on his cross, since we are *now* in Christ.. Eschatology is now: that is, we have the benefits of what will be declared at the end-time.

<sup>74</sup> Romans 8:18–39 shows the work of the Spirit in supporting us in hope (cf. Rom. 5:5), and verses 31–39 show us that God the Father stands against this accusation and Christ intercedes for us in this continuing circumstance. For this reason nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ: the word of God assures us our judgment has taken place and so we wait for the hope of this to be the reality of future sight.

## 5:13–26: THE POWERFUL SPIRIT OF HOLINESS AND FRUITFULNESS

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another.

In our Essay on Law in Galatians we have have noted that Paul does not speak to his Galatian readers as telling them to keep the law, but shows them that when they love one another they fulfil the law, since to love is to fulfil the law. If, in this chapter, we take the continuity of the work of the Spirit in aiding believers to stand fast in the freedom for which they have been made free, then the mainstay of that will be the love that the Spirit brings. Paul is not saying there is a freedom to be lawless but a freedom to fulfil the law without any idea of self-justification by doing its works. Nor is such loving an option among other legitimate options. If the Galatians think their freedom allows them to 'bite and devour one another' then this deadly antinomianism will destroy them as persons and as churches.

### *Excursus on 'The Flesh'*

To bite and devour one another' does not arise directly from antinomianism, but the drive that is behind antinomianism and every other kind of evil, is 'the flesh'. When we ask 'What is the flesh?' then the answer is that it is Man in his fallenness. It is Man opposed to God, Man setting up his own kingdom, working his own autonomy. It is the contrariness of humanity against its Creator and even God as its Redeemer and Father. Some translators have spoke of it is 'Man's lower nature', but this idea presents problems. Man as created does not have a higher and lower nature, but one nature. In his fallenness he is sinful, and opposed to God. Even his religious exercises are his attempt to reach self-justification by any means, even religious means. So the flesh may take the forms of dreadful depravity or seemingly high religious endeavour as in the case of some of the Pharisees.

Even this description is not enough: Man fallen is in the system called the world system whose prince and ruler is Satan, and he has his hosts of evil, fallen angels, demons and other creatures in this cunningly devised organisation. This world-system is the arena of sin, and so fallen Man has his place in a vast complex of evil. This aeon is always about him, trying to keep him strong in his rebellion against God. So then, the flesh is not simply an aspect of a person, but the way of a vast system in which Man is embedded and enmeshed, and in which he can oppose all that is lawful and true. Galatians 5:24 says, 'Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires,' and—as in all other references to the cross in this Letter—that crucifixion takes place with Christ on the cross. Such crucifixion does not benefit us

willy-nilly, but demands our wills to agree with the work of Christ so that, by faith, we are crucified to the flesh.

### *The Conflict of the Flesh and the Spirit*

At first sight Paul seems to speak of an internal warring that goes on between a person's 'flesh' and that person's spirit. Not so: the conflict goes on between the *system* of flesh and the Holy Spirit. The flesh is not what drives the new creation but the Spirit, but the flesh seeks to overcome the work of the Spirit in the believer. Here we have to correct the RSV translation which says in verse 16, 'But I say, walk by the Spirit and *do not* gratify the desires of the flesh'. It should really be, 'But I say, walk by the Spirit and you *will not* gratify the desires the flesh'. It has been suggested that if we would use a capital for 'flesh'—'Flesh—then there would be no confusion<sup>75</sup>: we would then understand the Flesh system as not being innate to the believer, but now an intruder from outside<sup>76</sup>.

In verses 16–26 Paul shows the war that goes on between the flesh and the Spirit. The believer is not so much 'the meat in the sandwich' as he is the one whose will should always go with the Spirit against the flesh. As in Romans 8:5–8 the flesh and the Spirit represent two different and opposed systems so here in this Galatian passage. Whilst the warfare is internal it is not two elements of the one person warring with each other, but there is a constant battle by two powers—the flesh and the Spirit—for the will of the believer.

In verse 18 Paul says something of immense importance, 'But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law'. Being under the law and doing the works of the flesh is the strange contradiction of seeking virtue. That seeking of virtue is egotistical, fleshly, and not spiritual and the law allows no inroads into itself by such a self-justifying person. Rather it turns the tables on the self-righteous person. All that is innate in fallen humanity has its expression in what are called 'the works of the flesh'. These are dreadful and horrifying, but they are the expression of human autonomy, the loss of created love (*agape*), and the competition that goes on between human beings who seek to have the ascendancy one over the another.

By contrast the person who does not give way to the flesh but gives way to the Spirit is given the high privilege and joy of bearing the fruit of the Spirit. The word 'fruit' (*karpos*) may be translated 'harvest'. Such fruit are the product of the Spirit, and—if we may put it thus—the harvest of the gospel-seed sown. We avoid saying that sanctification or holiness now comes by the Spirit and is beyond justification, but we can say that justification and sanctification are so much the one that justification is the power and basis for sanctification, and justification without sanctification is a contradiction of that reality. Thus at the end of his list of the fruit of the Spirit Paul says that there is no law against such fruit, thereby inferring there is *a* law against the works of the flesh, namely *the* law itself. Fruit-bearing is the natural outcome of being crucified to the flesh.

The closing verses of chapter five sum up Paul's argument regarding true freedom from both the law and the flesh. The Spirit is 'the Lord and giver of life'—a principle found in the Old and New Testaments alike. Therefore since one is dependent upon the

<sup>75</sup> The suggestion is made by F.F. Bruce in his *Commentary on Galatians* (New International Greek Testament Commentary, Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1982) p.243.

<sup>76</sup> Redeemed man is a new creation, but old patterns have been habituated in him, and he needs to work in the Spirit to resist these and even 'unhabituate' himself, but new habituations. Whilst there is indwelling sin there is a resident factor for aiding the flesh in its attempts to affect the believer.

Spirit for life, that one always walks in life by the Spirit. This ever-present Person is the power by which life obtains and continues in the life of love<sup>77</sup>, the very love of verse 13, ‘By love serve one another’.

### 6:7–10 SOWING TO THE SPIRIT

Paul really pursues further the theme begun in 5:13. It should also be read in the light of Romans 8:5–8. One either walks by the Spirit, and is led by the Spirit or one walks by the flesh and is led by the flesh. The first equals ‘sowing to the Spirit’ and the second ‘sowing to the flesh’. Those who were gripped by illicit ‘freedom’, that is, untrammelled license, would feel the fleshly excitement of it all, but such must not deceive themselves they will reap a dreadful harvest. Sowing to the Spirit will bring a glorious harvest of eternal life<sup>78</sup>. Sowing to the flesh will bring a dreadful harvest of corruption and death. Whilst the believer might sometimes grow weary with the incessant struggle involved in holiness of life he—or she—must never give up. This moral struggle will result in a great outcome. Many times the farmer is in despair and would abandon the field, but the rich harvest which is the outcome of the struggle is more than compensation.

### CONCLUSION TO OUR ESSAY ON THE SPIRIT IN GALATIANS

There is so much in this Epistle in regard to the Spirit that we have not fully explored and explicated. Could it ever be otherwise? We need, even so, to add a few observations. The first is in regard to the trifold work and ministry of the Godhead. As we take the Fatherhood of the Son and of us, and the Father’s love in sending His Son to redeem and makes us sons of the same Father, then we see the work of the Spirit along with the Father and the Son. The Son in his work of the cross and resurrection does the bidding of the Father, and that work is applied to the elect by the ministry of the Spirit. Christ sets us free, but the Spirit leads us in the way of freedom. In so many ways the Trinitarian work of the Godhead is presented to us.

Then there is what we might call the intimately personal work of the Spirit. The Father we can recognise in His Fatherhood because He sent His Son to die for our sins and rescue us from the wrath, the world, from the flesh, from death, and now we, with and by the Spirit, can call him ‘Abba! Father!’. The Son we know as a Person because he loved us and gave himself up for us. The Person of the Spirit is a matter on which we do not often dwell, because we have the curious idea that because he is unseen there is something of an insubstantial nature about him. The Father is never seen, except in the Son and today we are dependent upon the Spirit to give us sight of the Son. What then of the Spirit? Well, he is in our hearts. We received him as the Person and for the

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<sup>77</sup> In the New Testament, and especially in the Epistles, love is lived by the presence and power of the Spirit. Romans 5:5 speaks of love being poured into our hearts by the Spirit who becomes resident there. In Romans 15:30 this love of the Spirit is stated. In Colossians 1:8 believers love one another ‘in the Spirit’. Galatians 5:22–23 nominates the fruit of the Spirit, and the other eight fruit are subsumed under the primary one—love (*agape*). We might say that together they constitute eight elements of love.

<sup>78</sup> Perhaps it is surprising that we must sow to the Spirit in order to reap eternal life. Surely the thrust of Paul’s thought is not that one earns eternal life through such sowing, but that one has the opportunity to use every moment of life with a view to an expanded harvest. Peter spoke of ‘an abundant entrance into the Kingdom’ in contradistinction to a drivelling and sterile one. Paul is surely speaking of the present life, as he does in Romans 8:13 where to put to death the deeds of the body by the power of the Spirit *now*, is *now* to have the fruits of that operation. The lack-lustre life of the indifferent believer is a contradiction of the glorious Spirit in his powerful and stimulating presence within the believer.

Person which he is. This is a rich miracle. Within us we hear his voice crying ‘Abba! Father!’ and we follow suit. Is he not *personal*?

How then do we fight the flesh and the world? Is it alone or by the *personal* presence of the Spirit? When we are liable to go the terrible and lonely way of the law, does the Spirit not lead in life, and into further experiences of life? Who else is our Guide, and who else comes with his power to enable us in the battle against the flesh and corruption? The very fruit of the Spirit lead us to the essential nature of this Person. Love! Joy! Peace!—these are the elements which constitute our emotional and affectional life and determine the way of our will. It is good then to see that the Spirit compasses the whole of our life. We begin in him, and we are brought to completion in and by him. If he brings us Divine love then we must learn to love him, and be glad to be led by him through all the perils we face to the ultimate richness of eternal life.

### CONCLUSION TO THE WHOLE ESSAY ON THE WORK OF THE TRIUNE GOD IN GALATIANS

We must read the Epistle as it is. No one is competent to draw together the work of the Persons of the Triune Godhead as it is shown to us in this Epistle. The Letter is as it is, and that is how we must see it, but an Essay such as ours can highlight the magnitude of the work of God, of the grace and power of the gospel, and of the intimate love God has for those whom He has created. Seeing somewhat separately the works of the Three Persons is a useful exercise, and when we go backwards and forwards and across the Letter then we have innumerable facets and aspects opened to us. We can become more and more engrossed in the message of the Epistle, and as its revelations penetrate our spirit we can be alerted to the dangers of replica Judaism today. We can also be alerted wonderfully to the glorious nature of the gospel, to that pristine power which is no less today when men and women live in the grace of Christ, live free from law, and walk by, and live in, the Spirit. This is the way of freedom, of grace, of the Father, the Son and the Spirit.