

A Study of the book of

GALATIANS

By Les Wheeldon

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Chapter 1

The Apostle's burden

Can you think of a book or a sermon that has changed your life? I do not mean influenced your life, I really mean changed you. These 6 little chapters have that power, to transform you and your whole approach to Christ and christian life. This little book can open up a world of love, joy and peace in the power of the Holy Spirit.

That is a great claim and perhaps you are a little sceptical. After all, we live in a day in which there are dozens of christian movements and churches, many of which disagree in their interpretation of the bible. This has a fatal effect on many believers. Firstly it makes us self centred christians. I mean by this that we listen to preaching and take what we like and feel no obligation to take the rest. Secondly it makes us forget that the author of this little book - the apostle Paul - did not have 2 possible interpretations in mind. This is true of the apostle and much more true of the Holy Spirit who worked in his life and also inspired the writing of this document. God Himself was speaking to the christians in Galatia, and beyond them to christians everywhere.

Galatians was not written as an evangelistic tract for unbelievers, though it contains many truths that can be applied to all men. No - this document is a declaration of the foundation of all christian living. It's message must be understood by christians.

What is the central message?

Before going into detail, what was Paul's burden? His message can be summed up by four key statements:

1. We are accepted by God through faith in His son. This acceptance is total and cannot be improved upon by any human effort.
2. The christian life is a life of abandonment to the spirit of God.
3. The Holy Spirit then produces in us the kind of life that God requires of us.
4. All self effort, even the smallest amount, undermines the activity of the spirit and causes the life to descend into empty religion defiled by sinful behaviour.

The structure of the epistle:

- A. His purpose in writing: Gal 1:6-12 To combat the corruption of the Galatian believers from the simplicity of the gospel
- B. Paul's testimony: Gal 1:13-24 Salvation from the emptiness of man centred religion
- C. Paul's authority: Gal 2 The gospel he preached and his relationship with the other apostles
- D. Blessing and curse: Gal 3 The cursed emptiness of self effort compared with the blessedness of a life of faith in the power of the spirit.
- E. Man's infancy: Gal 4 Life under the law, compared with the glory of the new covenant that makes us sons of God.
- F. The choice: Gal 5 Spirit or flesh, a life of love or a life of sin.
- G. The freedom to serve: Gal 6 Free indeed at last, and truly free.
- H. Paul's passionate appeal: Gal 6:11-18 Paul is consumed with the cross and its effect on his life.

There is only one gospel!

How hard it is today to imagine a time when there were not at least 2 churches in each village, not to speak of the dozens of churches in each town. Moreover, within the four walls of each church there can be found more than one interpretation of scripture, on such foundational doctrines as evidence of the spirit's indwelling, not to mention views about the second coming. On the first day of the church's existence there was joy and gladness, and unity of faith in the apostle's teaching. They were all of one heart, and rejoiced in that unity. The preaching of the apostles was not based on opinion polls, or surveys to find out what the flock felt should be preached, no more than Jesus leaned on men for guidance. There was heavenly clarity about the person of Jesus, His divine nature, the centrality of His cross, the reality of His resurrection, the wonder of His gift of grace in the person of the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is these truths that breathe through all the writings of the new testament, and these truths are declared with such artless simplicity that should disarm argumentative souls, and shed light in confused minds.

Yet within a short period of time we read in Acts 15:5 of doctrinal division:

But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command [them] to keep the law of Moses. (Acts 15:5)

That the church had avoided division till this point was itself remarkable, since the church had doubtless celebrated its 20th. birthday at least. Moreover the church found the resources in the person of the Holy Spirit to heal this doctrinal division, and to reaffirm central truths. Peter declared that salvation for Jew and Gentile alike lay in the purifying of hearts through faith, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter in a few words summed up the specific foundation for apostolic teaching which was being threatened by this new party. Peter spoke with the authority of experience and was backed up forcefully by the testimony of Paul and Barnabas. The words of these great men were then confirmed by the sober James, expounding the scriptures in those vital words:

And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, (Acts 15:15)

This is a defining moment in church history. The new testament church declared that there is but one gospel by which we can be saved. If this gospel is lost sight of then there is no message of eternal salvation among God's people any more than in a gardening club, or a political party. But Paul in Galatians chapter one is not cursing the humanists in their worldly pursuits or their man centred politics. He is declaring the enmity of God against people who preach another gospel than that which the apostles preached. This is of great importance, since it reveals the truth that there is no greater evil in the world than preachers who do not declare the truth of God as it is in Christ. There is no greater power for evil than unconverted men in the ministry, there is no greater power for evil than men who have moved in their hearts from the truths by which they were once saved. Paul says they are to be cursed whoever they are, and even

includes himself in this, thereby taking the matter away from conflict of personalities onto the greater ground of eternal truth by which we will all be judged one day. He obviously believed that the gospel was not his own invention, nor was it something to be tampered with or adjusted. It was a message from God, to be held in great reverence and godly fear, most of all by those who preach it.

This puts all other matters into context. It is so common to hear of christians lamenting the actions and opinions of the humanists. In Paul's day there was fierce persecution from pagan governments and godless societies, yet Paul does not waste time bewailing the waywardness of the world. He returns to the great centre of all things. The gospel of salvation is the special gift of God to His people. Only as the church abides in the full gift of the grace of God, does it have relevance and power in the society in which it lives. The church has no business to seek to be modern by adapting the message. The church must abide in the power of God in the wonder of the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit. Truly, spiritual decline in a nation must not be traced back to the door of the humanists, it can only be traced back to the door of churches where dead orthodoxy has replaced spiritual power and dynamism.

Paul was not simply using strong language when he said that men who preach another gospel should be cursed. He was declaring the inevitable results of such a condition. What form would this curse take? God alone can know how he deals with each individual, but the curse must be at the very least the withdrawal of the healing, life giving presence of God. Spiritual darkness and heaviness would clothe such men, making all their efforts both fruitless and destroying all hope and joy in their own hearts. To preach another gospel is the path of greatest folly, for it is to make an enemy of God.

This persuasion must grip each heart, that the message of the apostle is true. This is necessary in order for boldness to rise to lay hold of the great things that God wants to do. This is not a weak gospel. It is full of the promise of the powerful intervention of God in lives to change and to fill, and to keep on filling. No one can lay hold of these things unless deeply persuaded that they are real and intended for all of God's children. The victorious christian life is not a myth like the pot of Gold at the end of the rainbow. There is power in the Holy Spirit to overcome sin and self, and cause the life to be centred on Christ. There are keys to life, which if whole heartedly embraced will introduce the soul to a dynamic of christian living that will grow and develop, taking the life into the wonder of a life filled with the love of God.

This must of course involve a renunciation of false things that have blighted so many lives. There are so many strange mixtures of doctrine preached today, and they must be abandoned as false. There is pollution of christian doctrine through humanist philosophy. This looks on the positive side of human nature, and seeks to highlight the good things that God sees in us, and that we can contribute to His kingdom. Thus natural gift is exalted, as being of special value, with the result that singers and music groups become ever more important in drawing new people. Side issues become central, such as good causes, or political considerations. Money becomes important as a means of

doing God's work, and slowly and subtly the power of the gospel is lost, as the emphasis shifts from God to man. The longing for revival continues, but the answer is said to lie with man. If we will only put more effort in, pray more, have bigger prayer rallies, then God will be pleased to pour out upon us.

The doctrine of circumcision in the new testament symbolises this trust in man and in his ability. It was such a small ceremony, and yet it came to symbolise trust in man's ability to do something for God, to earn acceptance with God. The corruption that Paul saw in all of this was that it all rested on man. Man the great initiator, man the decider of his own fate in the light of what God has done. The subtlety of it lies in that it is always appealing to us do more, to go to greater lengths, and greater sacrifice. There is no such appeal in the preaching of Christ, nor was there a hint in His devotion to the Father that He was straining to do more for the Father as His life unfolded. The life of Christ was at rest. It is that centre of rest into which we are to be introduced.

The light of the cross brings forth a great cry of horror at the realisation that all my efforts have bolstered my pride and my sense of achievement, and have taken my soul further from God, rather than into the nearness of fellowship that I so ardently longed for. God does not build on man. God in Christ has crucified man. He has crucified his self life, along with all the affections and lusts, and all his worldly ambitions. In the place of this carnal life, he has placed Christ, from whom we are to live, in whose presence we are to rest. This is the exchanged life that Paul saw as the great key to the human condition. Christ had done this for him and could do it for anyone who would be persuaded and enter in by simple faith. This is not a gospel that appeals to the capable, the rich, the strong or the clever. It appeals to all men, declaring that in Christ they can live a life for God without guilt, strain or self effort. This does not produce a sense of failure, it produces the same poise and calm that can be seen in Christ. The gospel is Christ Himself living in us. It is not a mixture of Christ and human effort, it is I in Christ and Christ in me.

The Apostle's conversion - the foundation of all ministry.

Recently I was traveling in Romania, and was introduced to a family in the small town of Ocna Mures. There were 3 generations in that little house, and such warmth and love from son Mihail, mama, and grandma. Grandma, 90 years old, gripped my hand and fixed me with her eye and asked: "Are you a christian?" Mama interrupted: "He's a pastor Mama, he's a pastor!" "Yes, yes, but is he a christian?" persisted Grandma.

Even pastors and apostles must have a personal testimony of salvation and of life with God! It is easy to forget that Judas entered into ministry as an apostle with power and miraculous signs, while not being truly repentant, (he continued stealing from the common purse) and not having received life from God. Truly that fact alone should cause us to ponder what men preach. Signs and wonders should not lead us astray from the foundations which must be preached, which are the truths declared in Galatians.

Most testimonies begin with words like "I was a drug addict" or "I was a criminal" or even "I was a terrorist!". The church loves these dramatic testimonies, and sometimes uses them as star attractions. Yet testimony should not be about a former life alone, it should be about a new life entered into. While always ready to give his testimony to those who did not know Christ, the great bulk of Paul's preaching and teaching concerned the life he had entered into, not the life he had left. Nevertheless, there is something so heart warming when someone who was deeply plunged in sin, declares how they were saved from their personal life of hell. God's power is glorified and we are moved by the love and the mercy of God.

But Paul was not a drug addict, a criminal or a terrorist, not even an adulterer or a drunkard. Paul had been brought up in a strict religious environment, and had even attended the best Bible school of the day. He had embarked upon a religious career - serving God with all the zeal he could muster. But Saul was unconverted, he did not know what God was like, and when Christ met him on the Damascus road, He exposed Saul's spiritual blindness with that searching question:

Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? (Acts 9:4)

Yet Jesus did not expose Saul in a flood of anger, rather His voice was heavy with compassion for Saul's state of conflict:

I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. (Acts 9:5)

The Lord looked on this deeply religious man, and summed up his existence with this one phrase: "It is hard for you to fight my love!" He could have said: "How empty - how meaningless is your life!" Saul's sinful state was deeply religious, and yet no less sinful because of that. Saul was doing his best and getting nowhere. It was this background that later so fired the apostle to resist the drift back into that very state from which he had been saved.

In this moment of encounter with Christ, all his religious striving became vain and foolish. Why? - because he had seen Jesus. A brief glimpse of Jesus can change your life forever. What did he see? There was brightness sufficient to blind him physically, there was compassion in those tender words of pity. There was no anger, bitterness or frustration, rather there was majestic authority that caused Saul to cry out "Lord!" for the first time. This is of the essence of conversion - we must meet with Jesus.

The impact of this meeting will convince the deepest sceptic. For Saul had rejected the deity of Christ until this moment, and yet now accepted Him as Lord and master without a word of argument. This is why Paul declares in ch.1:12 that he had not been taught the gospel. He had not imbibed it in a lecture hall. He had understood it in a moment of revelation. This fact should humble the most powerful minds, for God is declaring that understanding does not depend on the power of intellect but on the attitude of the heart. When the heart is wrong the mind never seems to fathom spiritual matters, but when the heart is right, understanding floods in.

The proud man is excluded and always will be, while the humble broken hearted pass straight in. God does not communicate solely through the reasoning faculties. If He did, then the best christians would be the cleverest, which is far from the truth. God communicates through the revelation given to the heart by the Holy Spirit. This does not deny the importance of intellect, it merely declares that there is a deeper realm. Understanding is a matter of the heart as much as of the brain!

This encounter exposed the emptiness of all Saul's striving, and in that moment he let go of his career, his striving to please God through self effort, in short he let go of that which made up his whole life. Look at Jesus - look long and hard. Search the gospels, read about Him, then direct your heart to Him in prayer. Paul had to be led by the hand, and so must you. All human searching for truth through philosophy is ultimately worthless - we must be helped by God to find the truth. Philosophy has only value in expressing the human condition, but it has no value in answering the quest of the soul for God. Philosophy differs fundamentally from christianity in that each philosopher sets out to invent and define God, while christianity is the personal discovery of the God who reveals Himself. If you hid a coin in a field 20 km away, and then told a blind man to find that coin on his own, then you have an idea of the powerlessness of the human mind to find God. If the invisible God did not want us to find Him we would seek in vain. But He does want us to find Him and He will lead the seeking soul. When Saul met with Jesus, he began to pray, reaching out in his spirit for God.

Paul had been turned around by a glimpse of Jesus. Christ had been revealed to him just as when a camera shutter opens and the image is imprinted in a flash on the film inside. Paul prayed in wonder for three days, like Jesus in the tomb awaiting the resurrection. What did he see as he waited? In a word, he saw that he was justified - he could not have explained it to anyone, but he knew in a flash that Jesus had accepted him totally as His own. Later generations of christians have dwelt on the explanation of justification and trusted in the understanding rather than in the encounter with the Lord Christ. No part of the christian life can be separated from Jesus. All is in and through that wonderful person. Paul could see that something had satisfied God more fully and totally than all the religious struggles to please God of all men that have ever lived. There was warmth, tenderness, and forgiveness in the face of Jesus. Paul sums up his testimony in 2 Cor. 4:6

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

So he did not wait in despondency, though he had good reason to be depressed, after all he was blind! He had been struck a death blow, but this was not a cruel death, rather it satisfied deep longings to be free from guilt, to be right with God - he had come home.

Saul prayed in calm wonder for 3 days, and on the 3rd. day Ananias entered his room declaring

Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. (Acts 9:17)

The words were new, "filled with the Holy Ghost", and Saul scarcely had time to think about this word that came from God in the quietness of the tomb. Ambition and selfish striving had been slain 3 days earlier, and his mind had never been clearer. He was ready. He felt the hands of Ananias, and heard his voice as he began to pray, and suddenly light was pouring in from all directions. His physical eyes were opened, and inwardly the Holy Spirit was flooding him, and there to his amazement was God's wondrous plan of salvation:

It pleased God to reveal His Son IN ME! (Gal.1:16)

I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, Christ liveth IN ME! (Gal 2:20)

The glorious One who had been revealed on the road, was now being revealed in Saul's heart. Paul looked in the depths of his own being, and there shining forth was the wonderful person that he had met with and seen 3 days earlier. The effect was indescribable. Truth about God and salvation poured through his mind faster than he could assimilate it. The whole experience was mind blowing, to the point that Paul realised that this was a whole new order of life. Few people have ever seen how radical salvation is. Many even explain it in terms that make it sound as if we humans had a hand in it. Paul's testimony is that the whole thing is greater than the human personality to either comprehend or to lay hold of. It is an act of God. Paul was specially chosen to receive the revelation of all that salvation is and so he was led out into the Arabian desert, to spend long months in fellowship with God, as God revealed the wonder of what had happened. Paul unlike the other apostles was led to pass right out of the form of religion, into the power of the relationship that he had now with God. Paul and the other apostles had the identical experience but Paul had followed the spirit into solitude and communion to receive the full understanding of God's plan of salvation. God had his man, who was to stand in the gap and prevent the corruption of the gospel in the first century. Without this man, the whole of the new testament church would have been swept away by the force of the Jewish religion. The battle lines were forming and sooner or later the war would begin.

Chapter 2

At Jerusalem - confirmation from the apostles.

In the second chapter of Galatians, Paul is describing his relationship with the original apostles, especially with Peter and John, but also with the leader of the church in Jerusalem: James the brother of the Lord. It is in these 3 men that everyone sensed that great authority lay. This was doubtless true, and yet even in this lay the danger that men might transfer the authority of the message to the human flesh and blood in whom the treasure had been laid. This danger continues in every generation, and men are raised above what is healthy either for the flock or for those men themselves. Man is not infallible - there are no popes to which we can look for infallibility. The protestant churches have often attacked the popes, while forgetting that the danger does not only lie in the Roman Catholic institution, it lies in the human heart. As one protestant said to a Catholic:

"It is easy for you - you only have one pope while we have hundreds!"

But sooner or later, Paul had to meet with the apostles, and he had to learn from them, in order to confirm the truth of the things that had been revealed to him. Here is a key: Paul had received tremendous revelation, and yet he says:

And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain. (Galatians 2:2)

There is tremendous humility in this statement, a profound realisation that as wonderful as revelation may be, it must be confirmed in fellowship with other men of God, and doubtless in fellowship with the writings of the original apostles. Paul went privately to meet the apostles in order to submit the things he was preaching to them. His words are filled with suggestion:

But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me: (Galatians 2:6)

In attempting to imagine that meeting, we can picture the initial hesitation, and then the warmth that quickly flowed as Paul told of revelations received and miracles wrought. He in his turn would have basked in the wonder of first hand accounts of the wondrous person of Jesus - all confirming that this was the very same person he had since met through the spirit. As they shared, Paul would have shared things about the church, and the apostles would have looked at each other in wonder, realising that this man had gone on further in the things of God than they had. Yet all that he was saying was in line with the things that they too had received. What joy there must have been that day, in the realisation that the work of the Lord would not decline with the passing of the original apostles. God was demonstrating that He could raise up witnesses to the gospel in any age. The apostles then gave to Paul and Barnabas the

right hand of fellowship, thus conferring their confirmation and seal on the life and teachings of Paul. He himself was grateful, and yet as his words suggest, he had not been overawed by the meeting, rather there was a slight hint of disappointment that they had not had more to say to him. He seems to have felt that apostles should have gone a whole lot deeper than these men had. He seems even at that early stage to have sensed that they were not as liberated from the power of man centred religion as they should have been.

How humbling it is that God often has to raise up a man who is not in the centre of things in the churches, and yet who is much more in the centre of things that God is doing. Luther, Wesley, Fox, Spurgeon, to name but a few, who had to plough a very lonely furrow in order to fight for the truths that they had discovered in their simple reading of the scripture. So many are outcasts, and it is to be wondered whether in Jerusalem Paul ever had the total acceptance as a minister that was due to him. He might have been considered a little threatening. At any rate, we are left to wonder why they considered it right that Paul go to the Gentiles and they to the Jews. After all, Jesus had given to Peter and John the divine commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel, which later on they were to fulfill. But at this moment they were still wrestling with their Jewishness, and the demands of the law.

This harmony was soon to face it's greatest test. Perhaps the conflict was postponed in Jerusalem by the fact that they agreed to work in different areas, Paul among the Gentiles and the others among the Jews. Of course this could only postpone the conflict since these two worlds could not be kept apart, except artificially. Peter, James and John had obviously been fighting shy of some of the issues doubtless through the pressure of the large numbers of believers in Jerusalem who were still zealous for the law (Acts 21:20). Was it needful to keep the law to be saved? If not then why should even Jews continue to keep it? The answer is of course that they do not need to keep the law to be saved. If a converted Jew does continue to keep the law, it is only in order not to offend his Jewish friends and relatives. It is for love's sake, so as not to offend.

At this point, it must be made clear that the issue at stake was the ritual law, not the moral law of the old covenant. The 2 can easily be confused, and there are areas where they overlap. The moral law is contained in the 10 commandments, which contain no ritual, and which is perfectly fulfilled through the power of the spirit in the new covenant. The ritual law is contained in all the ordinances of the old covenant, including animal sacrifices, and all the feasts. These are all now obsolete by the fact that they were prophetic and temporary, awaiting only their fulfilment in the Messiah - the Christ. Since the cross, both Jew and Gentile are to look on the cross as the fulfilment of prophecy. The communion replaces the passover, the coming of the spirit and the creation of the church make the day of atonement obsolete, since God's people now have permanent unlimited access to God, whose house is His people not the temple in Jerusalem!

Where then do the moral and ritual law overlap? The most obvious area is in the observance of the sabbath day. This by its very nature involves action of some kind. "Thou shalt not kill" is fulfilled by non action, containing not a shred of ritual. But observance of a day of rest contains positive action - obedience. This can easily spill over into ritual, observance of the letter without realising the spiritual significance. Similarly to spiritualise everything can result in neglect of God's command resulting in disobedience.

What then is the christian to do with the sabbath under the new covenant? First he is to realise that it has spiritual meaning above all else. He must enter into rest. Through faith and the cleansing power of the blood, each individual must enter into peace with God, and thereby find a dimension to life which is totally free of stress. Without this, all else is meaningless.

Secondly, he must take practical steps to maintain this rest, by action. The world is littered with christian ministers who have suffered from burn out. In fact in so many prayer letters, you can almost hear the desire to justify one's ministry by being as busy as possible. Each one must decide what this means in practice, but there is divine wisdom in observing one day a week for rest, quiet, worship and meditation. If this is not observed, then life will crowd God out. There are pressing things that divine wisdom should dictate to be done on another day. There is a physical side to our personality, not just a spiritual one, and this commandment points to the fact that God does not disregard our physical and mental need of simple rest.

The danger is that this become the centre of the christian's understanding, and he then begins to promote one of the ten commandments above the preaching of the gospel. The gospel is the power of God to salvation, and in the preaching of the gospel, the significance of the sabbath has nothing to do with what people have been doing on Sunday. It has rather to do with the fact that men and women have made not room for God in their lives, let alone in their weekly timetable. There are millions who do not work on Sunday, but who get drunk, lie on beaches, play golf, anything but think of God. They have rested their bodies, but they have forgotten God. Being free from law means that each christian is at liberty to understand why and how God commands us to rest, and to obey to the full. I have no doubt that this means much more than observing Sunday as a day of rest but rather has an effect on the way we live as a whole.

At Antioch - conflict with the apostles.

The conclusion of the meeting in Jerusalem was clear. Paul was a bona fide minister of the gospel as much as all the apostles. But this harmony between christians from a Jewish background and those from a Gentile background was soon to face its most important test of all, and in a Gentile city: Antioch.

The setting is perfect. The work at Antioch was fresh and new, and there were christians from both backgrounds. God had apparently made both one, breaking down

the middle wall of partition. And then came the visiting preacher - the apostle Peter. At first Peter seems to have rejoiced and entered into the liberty of the Christians at Antioch. He had already seen the need for liberty when he had preached the gospel at Caesarea to the household of Cornelius. He had entered the house of a Gentile and fellowshiped with them, and this he continued to do while at Antioch.

Then came some brothers from James in Jerusalem. What they said is not recorded and we are left to guess. We know that the effect of their words on Peter and Barnabas was to make them withdraw from eating with the Gentiles. Peter had once more caved into pressure. He had done this on the night in which Jesus was betrayed and had denied the Lord three times. Peter had received special revelation that the Gentiles were to be accepted in Acts ch. 10. and now he was denying the Lord again. By the grace of God the cock was about to crow again in the form of the apostle Paul. This may make us smile, but it should point us to the need for ministries that wake up believers to the dangers of compromise and doctrinal drift that cause us in the end to deny the Lord. The cock crows in the early morning waking up the sleepers. This is the ministry that Peter needed now.

The pressure on Peter to deny the Lord had come from that ancient city Jerusalem, where James was the prominent leader. Surrounded by the symbols of ancient religion, the church there had begun to mix the old with the new. Of course this must lead to confusion and difficulties in the churches, which Peter was now being forced to wrestle with again. This error struck at the heart of the gospel and this is what James in Jerusalem and Peter in Antioch failed to see. Ancient Jerusalem with all its symbols and history was not the fountain of life and truth. New Jerusalem - a new covenant - had been brought in, and the 2 could not be mixed. The child of the bond woman had to be cast out. This meant in practical terms that each individual Christian had to renounce all man-centred effort as useless in the service of God, and much more importantly as useless in the attainment of salvation. Salvation could not be attained by works but by grace alone.

Paul in opposing Peter publicly was setting a mark for the church of the new testament and hence for the church in every generation. Paul was not differing with Peter, he was bringing Peter back to the truth by which both men had been saved, and which both had earlier agreed upon. Paul's statement to Peter was heavy with apostolic authority, which Peter could not oppose.

Paul's declaration to Peter (Gal 2:14 - 21)

Paul's great declaration is not a logical argument, from one point to another, rather it is a summary of five great foundations of salvation. Several of these had respect to the crisis alone, while others rank among the greatest statements of new testament truth.

1. Jews have been relieved of the obligation to keep the ritual law, and may now live freely among the Gentiles with a good conscience, eating formerly forbidden meats and with no need to celebrate the feasts. He says that he and Peter are Jews by nature. He means that through the force of their culture and upbringing, Jewishness had

passed into their subconscious mind, and was part of them as an underlying nature. It was easy for them to live as Jews, not at all easy for the gentiles to adapt to Jewish ways. But Peter and Paul had been led to cast off this nature, and to live as gentiles with the gentiles. The unity of the church does not lie in old testament law. Today a minister to unconverted Jews would doubtless be as sensitive to Jewish tradition as Paul was, when he had Timothy circumcised in Acts. ch. 16. But this would be the wisdom of God for love's sake, not the foundation of salvation.

Pause for a moment, and reflect what this may mean for you. What has become second nature to you, which you find hard to cast off as Peter and James did? Recently I spoke at an evangelistic bible study. Afterwards during the question and answer time, a man asked why I had not made the sign of the cross before praying and opening the meeting! I explained that this was a tradition which was not laid down in scripture, but I also realised that this man had been brought up in the Greek Orthodox religion and that it was almost unthinkable for him to approach God without employing this sign. But then I think of meetings that cannot be started other than by the singing of a hymn. If Christians are to be truly a witness to the world, we must be liberated from trusting in outward forms and live Christ among the men and women of the world.

2. Acceptance with God - by an act of God's own mercy. Justification by faith means that each one is given right standing with God as a gift. This is through the forgiveness of sins, and yet it introduces us to life without any need to try and please God by our own efforts. Not only is my past sinful life forgiven, but I am received as sinless in His sight. This is not only for a moment, so that I might try and be better, rather this acceptance is the foundation of my new life. It liberates me to receive the Holy Spirit. It gives me the grounds for daily fellowship with God. It is the foundation of spiritual life. By this gift all need for religious striving and tension is swept aside. I can breathe a sigh of relief and rest at last.

3. This gift is for the repentant. Repentance is described here as the act of destroying my former way of life. Destruction speaks of the radical removal of sinful habits and ways. Those who believe they can continue in sin because they are justified are deluded. By returning to sin we lose our right standing with God. Repentance is not making myself perfect, nor is it improving myself one bit. Repentance is all to do with the way we look at sin. The unrepentant look at sin as a cherished friend, rather like the miser who has to pay his taxes or go to prison. He loves his money and parts with it unwillingly, as if it were part of himself. He fondles his money before finally handing it over, always waiting till the last moment before parting with it. This is outward but not inward repentance. The truly repentant would build a bonfire with his money and dance at the sound of the flames which signal his deliverance. The truly repentant man sees the money he has loved as a viper, and is amazed and grateful that he has not perished earlier when he held the viper to his breast as a special treasure. Now he casts the viper from him, crushing its head with shouts of joy and relief. Such a man knows that he cannot overcome sin in his own strength and cries for some way of escape.

4. The work of God in my heart is through faith. The remarkable emphasis in Paul's declaration is that it is not my faith that saves me, but the faith of Christ Himself. This is puzzling and bewildering at first, until I suddenly remember how shaky and unreliable my own attempts to believe are. How grateful we must be that my salvation does not rest on my faith but on the faith of the son of God Himself. This can be clearly seen at the resurrection of Lazarus. Jesus raised Lazarus in response to the faith of Martha! But He did not raise Lazarus by Martha's faith!

Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee. (John 11:21-22)

The work of salvation is similar to the tremendous miracles that will take place at the end of time. When Jesus comes back he will raise the dead, and those who are alive will meet Him in the air. All these things take place in OUR LIVES, because we believe in Jesus. Yet none of them will take place by our own faith, but through the faith of the Son of God. He believes that He can raise the dead, and I believe in Him. Similarly Jesus believes that He can present me faultless, sinless, perfect and full of love before the throne of God, and I believe in Him. He believed as He died that His blood could wash me clean and make me fit to receive the Holy Spirit, and as I trust in Him, He through His own faith does the work. The miracle of new birth is far above what we can ask or think, and it is marvellous and right that it should be so. My faith is simply the hand lifted to Jesus, not the strong arm of God that lifts me!

5. Salvation is an experience of the cross. The greatest statement that Paul made is Gal 2:20:

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

This points to the wonder of what is worked in a human heart by the power of the cross through the Holy Spirit. There is an exchange of life for life, my sinful life for His pure life. In the depths of the the human heart there is profound union with God. There is no dependence here on what man can achieve, there is here the root of all righteousness at the disposal of the christian. A man can believe in Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit simply rest in the glory of Christ within. Small wonder that this life is described as joy unspeakable and full of glory.

The wonder of this is that all that Christ accomplished on the cross is bestowed upon me. I can have a direct and real experience of the cross. No man suffers for sin, yet to man is given the power and victory of the cross over sin. This takes place through identification. Christ identified with me in my God forsaken sinful state, now I must be identified with Christ in all that is in Him in the glory and wonder of His being. Christ Himself prophesied this identification:

And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: (Mark 10:39)

Baptism with water is a picture of Christ's death. Jesus was Himself baptised declaring his intention to be identified with sin on the cross. Jesus was prophesying His immersion into death, His rising again, and the Holy Spirit descending in response to His sacrifice. Now I am to identify with His death by faith, exchanging old life for new, receiving the baptism with the Holy Spirit. If this connection of life in the Spirit with the power of the cross be obscured, there is great danger that the source of all power be lost. There is no other place of victory over sin.

Chapter 3

Blessing and curse

In Galatians chapter 3, Paul begins with the remark that Christ had been evidently set forth crucified among the Galatians. Some have speculated on Paul's powers of imagination, and his theatrical abilities to make this possible. Nothing can be further from the truth. Paul did not present Christ through the power of the flesh, but through the revelation of the Holy Spirit:

And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of men's wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and of power. (I Cor. 2:4)

Through the preaching of Paul, the Galatians like the Corinthians had seen the cross with their inward eyes. The result of this had been that Christ had ministered to them the Spirit, and they had had a clear spiritual beginning. Galatians 3:3 refers to their beginning in the spirit. How wonderful it is to have received the truth of God from an experienced minister. They were brought to the beginning of God's work in their heart through a clear baptism in the spirit.

Many people do not have this privilege. Many hear the gospel expounded by men who like Apollos, only know the baptism of John. This is a great tragedy, and by this error, many are forced to try and live new testament christianity without the power of the indwelling Spirit. The result is that many try and explain the scriptures in a way which discounts the powerful moving of the Spirit in our day, some even saying that the age of spiritual gifts is passed. Some explain the power of the spirit as someone who is present, while not being clearly felt. At this point it is right to ask how a man would ever notice the Holy Spirit leaving his life if he never noticed Him come? This is a serious issue, since we are speaking of the blood bought gift of the Saviour Himself, not an optional extra. It is because hearts are comforted into accepting something less than God's will, that many live without power over sin, the world, self and the devil.

A man only begins his christian life at the moment he receives the Holy Spirit. He may begin his journey to this point many days even years before this, and he may be delayed through ignorance (as in the case of the Ephesian disciples in Acts. 19). Nevertheless it is God's clear will that men come to be consciously immersed into the dimension of the Spirit.

But Paul's lament in Galatians 3 is that they had not continued trusting in God's grace to grant them spiritual growth through the working of the spirit as a gift. Rather, they had begun to set aside grace and to trust in their own efforts to take them on. This had one result, they began to experience all the cursedness of man centred religion.

God is simply not asking us to do more and more for Him, He is simply asking us to continue in the same attitude of faith which we knew when we received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The great word in this chapter is "the curse". Few in the west are aware of the demonic curses that plague heathen cultures. Yet even in countries such as England, there are witches and evil men who practise witchcraft by putting a curse on someone. There are families that have lived under ancient curses, causing death and sickness. All these things are familiar to those who live in Africa, where many live in terror of evil. Yet Paul says that there is a universal cursed state that is experienced by those who seek to serve God in their own strength!

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed [is] every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. (Galatians 3:10)

This curse is not some evil power working to cause illness and disaster. Rather it takes the form of heaviness, spiritual dullness, lack of zeal and love. It produces a sense of pride and superiority, and yet at the same time opens the door to shameful lusts that rise up in the heart, contradicting the ideals of the mind that are cherished so dearly. The result is that men study scripture endlessly seeking justification for such a miserable way of life. Romans chapter seven is interpreted in this cursed twilight to mean that a christian will never be free from the struggle against inward sin. Hope grows dim, and the expectation of a long hard road through life settles on the heart. Sadness is the mark of the life, not joy and victory. If not repented of, such a state of heart will become a way of life.

All this obscures the truth that Paul declares in verse 13:

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: (Galatians 3:13)

Christ was identified with this cursed state as He hung on the cross. He crushed it under His foot, He erased it from the heart of man by the power of His own life. He took the curse full onto and into Himself, there destroying it. This is the mystery of the cross. God can destroy sinners and cities and worlds through fire and flood, but to destroy sin in the heart of man required the power of God's own being. This is a mystery, and yet is the centre of all our faith, that Christ was made sin, and a curse as He absorbed the awfulness of the human condition into Himself, there destroying it. This is the miracle of identification, and by this alone can we be ourselves baptised, absorbed, immersed into the holiness and the love of God. As God was identified with me for my redemption, so too I must be identified with Christ. Each must receive the gift of baptismal identification with Christ.

But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: (Mark 10:38 - 39)

These words of the Lord are a prophecy of the personal application of the cross to each individual by means of baptism with the Holy Spirit. It is by the power of this union with Christ that the Law becomes obsolete. The Law is a mediator says Paul, to grant to man some means of relating to God. But the Law is inappropriate when union with Christ has taken place. It is as if a couple were to get married and employed a solicitor to live with them to make communication between them easier! The need for Law implies a spiritual need in the heart of man. But Christ came to meet this very need through baptismal union with Himself:

For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (Galatians 3:27)

Chapter 4

From slavery to Sonship

Chapter 4 begins with an illustration from the culture and time in which Paul lived. He refers to the custom that a son was brought up in much the manner of a slave, until the day in which he passed from childhood to adulthood. On that day the Son would be taken into a public place and there publicly declared to be His son. Before this day, the son was under tutors and governors, who made sure that the son made good progress in all areas of learning. Paul uses this illustration to explain that humanity was in its spiritual infancy until the coming of Christ. Up until His coming, men were under shadows of spiritual life, and not in the reality. That this was necessary was tragic, and yet was God's mercy to fallen man, to help each man find God in the fog of an unregenerate nature. Until man could be renewed by the spirit unto real spiritual life, he had to be helped by outward forms, including animal sacrifices, the use of special buildings such as the tabernacle and the temple. All these things were full of spiritual meaning, and yet taken together they proved that mankind was still immature in its ability to enter into living real fellowship with God. Moreover just as mankind was in its spiritual infancy, so too each individual is in his or her infancy until they come to spiritual reality. The human heart lives often in religious shadows which cannot satisfy the heart's true longing. This state is declared by Paul to be a state of bondage, from which the heart is longing to be set free. This bondage can be seen in traditional churches where the liberating power of the spirit has not been known. Gloom and sadness colour religion which lacks spiritual reality.

What then is this spiritual reality? The answer is given in this chapter in 2 distinct phases: first the coming of Jesus; second the coming of the Spirit.

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law (Galatians 4:4)

With these words, Paul introduces the end of bondage - "God sent forth His Son". In Christ there were no shadows or forms of truth. He was the express image of the Father's person, the brightness of His glory shining forth in clarity. Jesus is not a stage of revelation. He is God living on earth in flesh and blood. He declares life without bondage. Whatever bondages there may be in the human condition, Christ revealed the wonder of a free life, free from law, sin, religion, guilt, shame, demons etc.. Christ is the declaration of God's will for man, that we might live like Him. The revelation of Jesus created intense longing in men to be like Him. His disciples left all to be with Him. At the same time, He called forth intense anger as He exposed the shallowness of religion in form without power or substance. The Pharisees had embraced the old testament and had fashioned it into a robe of pride and superiority for themselves. Christ exposed them as babes playing with toys, fooling themselves and others, that through their robes, their grand buildings and their titles they had some great standing before God. It can be forgotten that the civil authority did not arrest and try Jesus. It was the chief priests that plotted His arrest, and condemned

Him to death. They used the civil authorities to carry out the death sentence. The sin of Pilate was that he allowed Himself to be used for the greatest injustice ever perpetrated by the human race. But his sin lay in his moral cowardice and indifference. He felt no envy towards Jesus, and would have preferred to have set him free. The greatest enemy of the truth of God is not in the world, but in religious men who have not discovered the realm of spiritual reality in Christ.

The second stage of spiritual reality is the coming of the spirit to be made us sons of God. In verse 5 and 6 Paul says that we receive adoption as sons when the spirit floods our hearts, causing us to cry from deep within "Abba - Father!" He explains this further by the phrase "Now, after that you have known God." Spiritual reality is fellowship with God Himself, not with pictures and symbols that portray God. The spirit comes and fills a heart, setting us as sons in His kingdom, filling us with the intimate awareness of God Himself. Religious practice becomes irrelevant to the heart flooding with the unspeakable joy of the presence of God Himself.

The sadness of this chapter is that Paul is keenly aware that the Galatian Christians have abandoned this liberty to return to the shadowy religious practices of the law. He speaks of blessings that they used to have. How tragic it is that many look back on times when God blessed them, and yet now their portion seems so meagre. Paul is longing for these believers, in an agony of heart and prayer, until Christ be formed in them again (verse 19). Notice here that Christ had been formed in their hearts when they first believed. But they had not gone on in this new life, and now they were back in the condition where they needed the first foundations to be renewed in them, that Christ once more be formed in them. What a promise lies in this prayer, that when the spirit comes, bringing the reality of the knowledge of Christ, at that very moment, a resemblance to Christ Himself is formed in the believer's heart. Truly the baptism with the spirit is deeper and fuller than many have ever suspected.

Paul explains the matter further by reference to the two sons of Abraham, which are pictures of these 2 states of heart. Ishmael is a picture of man in bondage unto outward religious practices, while Isaac is the son of the promise, the one in whom God's promises are fulfilled. Hagar and Ishmael correspond to Jerusalem which now is, which is in bondage with her children. Ishmael was born into the home of Abraham through Abraham's fear that God was not able to fulfill His promise supernaturally. He doubted the power of God, and decided to help God fulfill His great plan. When Ishmael was finally born, there was no joy in the home, since both Abraham and Sarah knew deep down that there was nothing miraculous about this birth. It was the product of their own scheming, and their own strength. Ishmael brought sadness and division, and though God extended mercy to the boy, and blessed him, yet he could never be a symbol of God's true grace, and had to be cast out.

But Isaac was a pure miracle. He was a true demonstration of what God can do in the believing heart. God seeks those who will dare to believe Him and take Him at His word, as impossible as it may seem at first. Like Abraham each one must recognise the feebleness of our own efforts, and acknowledge the need of the power of God to inhabit our souls in the person of the Holy Spirit. We are to step out of playing at

christianity into the realm of likeness to Christ, and of a real vibrant relationship with God.

What are the things that hinder souls from this blessing? The reason cannot lie in the demands of such a life, since the bible promises that it is a life of rest. It is the conflict of the soul that hinders, the drawing of the world, disobedience, pride, bitterness, hurts etc.. All these things entering in choke the word and we become unfruitful. That which exhausts the life above all else is a divided heart. This can arise for many reasons, one of which may be as simple as uncertainty. There must be conviction and inner persuasion of what God has said in order to claim the life He offers as our own. This is why the Hebrew writer exhorts his readers to come boldly to the throne of grace, and to enter the holiest place of all with boldness. God has promised spiritual reality in His Son and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us then boldly enter in.

Chapter 5

The choice: a life of love or a life of sin

It is in this chapter that Paul places before the christian the stark choice between the flesh and the spirit. Many christians like to think of themselves as living on the frontier between these two realms. They are in the spirit from time to time and sometimes make choices in the flesh, which they acknowledge sheepishly as not being quite the best. But Paul is here declaring that all such mixed living is carnal - in the flesh. As soon as we allow mixture we are in the flesh. A foundational principle of all new testament thought is repeated in this chapter:

A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. (Galatians 5:9)

In 1 Cor. 5:6 the leaven is referring to sin. Here it is referring to doctrine. Mix a little carnal practice into the life in the spirit and you have complete corruption.

Paul is quite categorical:

Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. (Galatians 5:2)

Such a state is a fallen one, i.e. fallen from grace. (Gal 5 v4). In this condition no benefit is derived from the person of Christ and the power of His redemption. What then is the cause of this disaster - quite simply: circumcision. This ritual signaled a shift in their doctrinal position, which means the way they thought about God and his power to save them. Circumcision indicated that they no longer believed Christ to be all sufficient to save them. There was need for a radical return to the foundations of christian living. The chapter itself turns on the conflict between life in the flesh and life in the spirit. Both realms are exposed thus enabling the reader to discern where his life is rooted.

Life in the flesh.

When Paul speaks of the flesh, he does not mean that which is merely physical. The word flesh is used in the testament in 2 distinct senses that can be clearly seen by quoting 2 scriptures:

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. (Romans 8:9)

John says that the everlasting word became flesh, referring to the miracle of the incarnation. But Paul says of the christians in Rome that they were not in the flesh!

This cannot mean that they had ceased to be flesh and blood, but refers to the fact that they were no longer living under the power of a sinful nature. Paul in Galatians chapter 5 is once more speaking of the sinful nature of man, from which a man is freed when he is indwelt of the Holy Spirit.

When a christian lives in the flesh, he is estranged from the power of redemption, from the wonder of the life of Christ, and all the power of sin is stirring once more in his heart. The full horror of the flesh is revealed in the awful list of sins that are manifest in the life of such a person.

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are [these]; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told [you] in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

Paul is laying before the believer the awful symptoms of carnal living. The first one is in the sexual domain, and does not mean necessarily the practise of sexual sin, but rather that the inner life is dominated by it. But then he proceeds to explain how carnality spawns jealousies and rivalries among christians, leading to bitter, murderous thoughts, and rebellious attitudes. He traces major doctrinal heresies back to the flesh, leading to the obvious conclusion that one can expect doctrinal heresy to be accompanied by gross sins in the heart. Finally he includes lightness, superficiality, self indulgence and pleasure seeking as manifestations of the flesh.

Furthermore in the centre of this chapter, Paul expects that carnal living will have a devastating effect on church life:

But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. (Galatians 5:15)

There will be arguments, destructive exchanges with cruel, spiteful and hurtful words. Such a condition would lead to divisions, splits and the destruction of once living churches. It can be understood from this chapter that many deep problems in churches can be traced back to this source, that men are living in the flesh. It can then be concluded that if only men would be broken and humbled in deep repentance, divisions would be healed and the life giving presence of God restored. Blessed indeed are those who keep their garments spotless and walk with God in love and humility in times of hurt and division in a church. There is a way for each one to walk with God even through the worst circumstances.

The Galatians were in danger of living in the flesh through 2 opposite temptations:

1. Circumcision. This was doctrinal, leading the flock to believe in a physical sign that made them accepted as God's people. All such belief is misplaced. No outward pattern of behaviour can save us. The only salvation is in total and complete trust in

Christ alone. It is for this reason that many experience a mixed kind of life, because they will not forsake their belief that they can and must contribute something to their salvation. This undermines the work of the spirit, who ministers joy and peace as gifts of grace, not as rewards for good effort. The only reward for good effort is carnal smug self satisfaction that blind the heart to true grace.

This is a very subtle danger and yet all the more deadly for that. Baptism, church going, communion, bible reading and prayer - all of these are important and biblical practices. Yet to trust in any of them as the grounds of my acceptance before God dislodges the soul from the place of grace. Each must maintain a walk with God whereby we are reliant on the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. The most experienced intercessor needs as much aid in prayer as the beginner. God's people are granted grace to live - they live by the faith that God supplies.

2. False liberty. In declaring that righteousness does not come through the law, Paul warns the Galatians that this does not liberate them to self indulgent living:

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only [use] not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. (Galatians 5:13)

Liberty from the law does not mean anything goes, rather it means that all is permissible that is rooted in relationship with Christ through the spirit. Thus some christians are eager to point out that Jesus did not forbid alcohol and Himself drank wine. This is true, but it does not mean that He carried a good supply of drink around with Him to help Himself unwind and relax every evening. It means that on occasions when it was socially acceptable He would also partake in moderation. But now christians relax together in pubs with a beer. The danger is that some turn to alcohol to alleviate their distress of soul. Some would also find themselves unable to pray because of the influence of alcohol. That a christian feels the liberty to take alcohol means that he has above all the power to lay it completely aside for the sake of spiritual concentration. The same is equally true of food. Eat drink and be merry is indicative of a shallow kind of living in which pleasure is found in these realms. Many turn to food rather than to God. Many have delicacies at hand to distract them from the profound emptiness of their living. But shallow carnal habits lead to eruptions of anger and inner tensions that stir in the heart of the man who is not centred on Christ. It is time once more that christians made up their mind whom they will serve, whether the body of this flesh or their great King of Heaven who lived a life of self denial, thereby making His body a temple of the Holy Ghost, manifesting heavenly states on earth. Liberty is the freedom at last to do what is right, not to do what I want.

Life in the spirit.

This chapter gives 3 keys to life in the spirit, which are of vital importance to our whole understanding of the christian life. The great danger is to transfer principles of

natural living into the realm of the spirit. For example, each person must earn their daily bread, they must have employment which has its financial rewards. An individual will then build up his reserves, buying a house, etc... But in the realm of the spirit there is to be no work in order to advance spiritually. Rather each individual must ensure that their life is in the right attitude for the grace of God to produce growth. What then are these three keys to spiritual life?

1. The life in the spirit is a life of love.

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, [even] in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. (Galatians 5:14)

This is a definition of a truly spiritual man or woman, i.e. one who truly loves. Love is not an attribute of God, for God is love. Therefore all of God's attributes are attributes of love. He can never be anything else. Similarly, love is not to be an attribute of the christian or a work, love is to be the ceaseless spring from which all of his life flows. Without love a man is not a christian, without love a church is not a church. A christian without love is a monster, a lamb with the heart of a wolf, at best an image in stone, with a vague suggestion of something beautiful but no direct experience of it. Love is without hurt or harm, it produces an inner calm in which other lives are welcome and held in warmth and tenderness. Love dispels fears, reassures doubters, and spreads joy in all it meets. There are kind words to answer harsh ones, there are loving thoughts to refresh the soul. Love is not a work, though countless works flow from it. It colours every action, every deed, and makes everything a manifestation of that most perfect life - Jesus the Son of God.

Some wander from this path and think of life in the spirit as a life of power. The centre of things can easily become what we achieve for God, we become performance orientated, measuring our value to God and others by the statistics - how many meetings held, how many souls won, how much fasting and prayer. All of these things are wonderful but not in themselves the life. The greatest power in the realm of the spirit is the power of love. Men give up, even the most determined, and the most heroic, but love goes on for ever. Love carries within itself the power of self renewal, for it never runs out. As it is poured forth, the greater the flow, the greater the resources seem to be. Love is attractive, seeping into the chinks of the stoutest armour. Love wins hardened cynics, and conquers stubborn rebels. It is in this realm that christians are to live, and it is the cry of all who truly seek the kingdom of God - Lord! make me love as God Himself is love!

2. The life is a fruit.

The great question that then must be answered is:"How can I love?" The answer to this lies in one of the bible's greatest statements:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)

Love is the fruit of the Spirit. The christian life cannot be likened to a factory producing identical cans of baked beans or cars. Man uses methods to produce his goods, he needs machinery, investment, man power etc.. Some churches and movements seem to operate on this kind of principle! But the truth is that all our efforts cannot alter the motivation of the human heart, nor produce a single atom of love. If there is no love in the heart, then all my striving and tears and pleading will not change my state. Love is a fruit, and therefore 2 things are required to produce it. Seed, and the right conditions for growth. If I am to grow in the life of the spirit, then I must receive living seed from God, and keep my heart in the right conditions for that seed to flourish and grow. This is quite consistent with the teaching of Jesus in the parable of the sower and other parables where the power of growth lies in the seed itself, and growth comes of itself, in a way that the receiver does not understand. He cannot hurry it, he can only patiently nourish and cherish that precious seed.

The christian life then is to be likened to a plant that grows. It cannot be transplanted as a ready grown plant. Growth can be imitated, as in intensive bible courses or bible schools. But though these things have their place, they cannot substitute spiritual growth. What then is the seed? The answer lies in Galatians:

Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. (Galatians 3:16)

Christ Himself is the seed, and He must be received into the life and as the life. It is not enough for man to make a decision to follow Christ or to seek to follow His teaching, he must receive Christ deep into his being as his life. "For me to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21), "Christ, [who is] our life" (Colossians 3:4) says the apostle Paul.

It is this union with Christ that is the foundation of the new life. Christ cannot create love in a human heart. For that would not be love. It would be a beautiful decoratio, but not an integrated part of the life. Man alone cannot produce love. His efforts have mixed motives. His love runs out and fades with sustained opposition, revealing that there are stronger powers in the heart such as self and pride. Man must recognise how love is to be formed in him or he will wander fruitless through a wilderness all his life.

Love - the love of God pours into our hearts as we meet Jesus Christ.

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:10)

As we yield to the love of God in Christ and surrender to Him, he floods us with the Spirit:

the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. (Romans 5:5)

Then as we bathe in His love in wonder, gratefulness and delight, we become aware that something new is appearing in our hearts, like a tender shoot from a dry root. It is exquisite.

Chapter 6

Free to serve

Free indeed at last, and truly free. Not only that, but through grace alone. But grace must produce graciousness, or it is only another ideal: lovely, admirable, but quite powerless. Grace must produce real kindness in practical life: for the way we live reveals what we really believe, and how deeply our beliefs have mastered our hearts and become our life.

Paul's starting point in this section is the way we deal with a brother who falls. Nothing can be more real than the way we think, speak and feel about fallen sinners. There is much to test us in this realm: from the failings of new converts, to the more serious matter of sin in the life of pastors and ministers, but it also includes our attitude to politicians and other public figures. There is no doubt how the worldly heart reacts: with fascination and delight. Of course the world loves to see Christians lose their tempers, tell white lies, and indulge in worldly pursuits. All these things confirm them in their view that Christians are not serious. But most of all, worldly people enjoy the embarrassment of a minister of the gospel taken in adultery. When heads of government sin and fail as in the case of President Clinton, the dogs are unleashed and the worst details are repeated endlessly. Hearts that react in these ways know nothing of grace. The world condemns, while the heart that knows grace grieves and prays. The selfish heart reacts with smug satisfaction and a sense of superiority, but the heart touched by grace has looked into the abyss of its own sinful powers, and yet has experienced the unmerited kindness of God to liberate through forgiveness and cleansing. Such a person cannot condemn others, and their lips are kept from sinning against others through gossip and malice. A judgmental heart and repentance are opposites, that cannot exist together in one heart.

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering yourself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ. (Galations 6:1-2)

There is great humility in this attitude, as the apostle expresses the awareness that any one of us can sin, if we are exposed to temptation. The right objective of the spiritual man is the restoration of sinners to fellowship with God. Therefore his approach to sinners is in meekness and lovingkindness. Christians must beware of hardening their attitude into moral arrogance. In such a state a man is far from the nature of Christ, and certainly of no help to any sinner. Paul says that it is in this attitude of love that we fulfil the requirements of Christ from His people. This is the fulfilment of the law: love. When a man is in need, and we go to his aid, it is then that we please Christ. Jim Bakker, the founder of the PTL ministry in America, committed serious fraud, collecting money from Christians and misusing the money. He was sentenced to 40 years in prison, and began his prison term as a broken man. The press and many Christians condemned him, but Billy Graham visited him in prison several times. There can be no doubt who helped him to find hope in Christ again.

For if a man think himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then he shall have rejoicing in himself alone and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden. Gal 6:3-5.

Here is the correct estimation of ourselves: nothing! Yes we are of inestimable value to God, but our importance to Him does not lie in our abilities, or in the things that we contribute to His kingdom. Humility is the true manifestation of the fulness of the Spirit in the life of man. Verse 5 seems to contradict verse 2, but while verse 2 refers to the need to help others, verse 5 refers to our watchfulness to fulfil our own ministry. On that day, when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, there will be no man who can help us - we will have to answer for ourselves. The reward of faithfully living a life of real love and service is both in this life and the next. In this life we have the wonder of rejoicing in ourselves alone. This is the inner poise and joy that fills the hearts of those who live for others. There is a moment in each person's experience, when nothing seems to help us find joy any more. The only answer lies in beginning to love and care for others. We are not saved to be ornaments on God's shelf! We are to be tools which are to be well used in His hands, and to bear the loving marks of His workmanship in our lives.

The joy that we reap in this life is a harvest from sowing to the Spirit. To sow to the Spirit is to flow in the Spirit in love and good works. If we flow in the fulfilment of the desires of the flesh, then we shall reap the corruption of all things spiritual, including our awareness of God, our thirst for His word, our delight in His presence and ability to hear Him speak. No one can separate the practical from the spiritual. We shall reap a rich harvest if we do not grow weary in well doing. Many deep moves of God in churches and in individuals have dried up because there is no channelling of the blessing of God into action. Sowing is the whole man active, not just dreaming but living out in flesh and blood the wonderful life of the Spirit.

The apostle's passion

Paul closes this short letter with one of his most passionate appeals. This begins with the unusual fact that he had written this letter in his own rather clumsy handwriting. He had written rather large letters probably due to his poor eyesight. He had written this letter with personal interest and heart felt passion. He refers to the circumcision who seek to win the Galatian believers in order to glory in the numbers they can win in support of their cause. Such details expose the emptiness of counting numbers in meetings, and trying to assess how many people have been blessed. Such practices reveal man centred religion, detracting from the glory of God, and glorifying man. Paul's passion is the cross of Christ:

God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me and I to the world. Gal 6:14.

Paul is consumed with the cross and its effect on his life. It has liberated him from selfish worldly living, and has renewed him and made into a new creature. It is for this message that he bears the marks of the cross in his body. No, there were no nail prints in his hands and feet, but there were many scars from the beatings, there were doubtless many visible signs of the sufferings and hardships he has gone through. He is not suggesting that his sufferings have any redemptive value, rather he is pointing to the effect of the cross in his life, enabling him to live with such abandon of his own life and well being. Truly Paul was an incarnation of the gospel. He had received God's word deep into his being, and it had taken possession of the whole vessel. Paul was not an incarnation of God. He was still a man, capable of falling, capable of frustrating the grace of God. But by his yieldedness, he had allowed the power of the cross to burn through his whole being, burning out carnality, and making him a blazing witness to the power of the cross. This is his appeal, he is nothing in himself, but in and through the death of Jesus Christ, God had turned his whole life around, filling him with love and good works, flowing in spirit and in reality from the Holy Spirit within him. God can do it for anyone who is bold enough to take him at his word.