

LUTHER'S WORKS

VOLUME 26

LECTURES ON GALATIANS
1535

Chapters 1—4

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General Introduction

THE first editions of Luther's collected works appeared in the sixteenth century, and so did the first efforts to make him "speak English." In America serious attempts in these directions were made for the first time in the nineteenth century. The Saint Louis edition of Luther was the first endeavor on American soil to publish a collected edition of his works, and the Henkel Press in Newmarket, Virginia, was the first to publish some of Luther's writings in an English translation. During the first decade of the twentieth century, J. N. Lenker produced translations of Luther's sermons and commentaries in thirteen volumes. A few years later the first of the six volumes in the Philadelphia (or Holman) edition of the *Works of Martin Luther* appeared. Miscellaneous other works were published at one time or another. But a growing recognition of the need for more of Luther's works in English has resulted in this American edition of Luther's works.

The edition is intended primarily for the reader whose knowledge of late medieval Latin and sixteenth-century German is too small to permit him to work with Luther in the original languages. Those who can, will continue to read Luther in his original words as these have been assembled in the monumental Weimar edition (*D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*; Weimar, 1883 ff.). Its texts and helps have formed a basis for this edition, though in certain places we have felt constrained to depart from its readings and findings. We have tried throughout to translate Luther as he thought translating should be done. That is, we have striven for faithfulness on the basis of the best lexicographical materials available. But where literal accuracy and clarity have conflicted, it is clarity that we have preferred, so that sometimes paraphrase seemed more faithful than literal fidelity. We have proceeded in a similar way in the matter of Bible versions, translating Luther's translations. Where this could be done by the use of an existing English version — King James, Douay, or Revised Standard — we have done so. Where

it could not, we have supplied our own. To indicate this in each specific instance would have been pedantic; to adopt a uniform procedure would have been artificial — especially in view of Luther's own inconsistency in this regard. In each volume the translator will be responsible primarily for matters of text and language, while the responsibility of the editor will extend principally to the historical and theological matters reflected in the introductions and notes.

Although the edition as planned will include fifty-five volumes, Luther's writings are not being translated in their entirety. Nor should they be. As he was the first to insist, much of what he wrote and said was not that important. Thus the edition is a selection of works that have proved their importance for the faith, life, and history of the Christian Church. The first thirty volumes contain Luther's expositions of various Biblical books, while the remaining volumes include what are usually called his "Reformation writings" and other occasional pieces. The final volume of the set will be an index volume; in addition to an index of quotations, proper names, and topics, and a list of corrections and changes, it will contain a glossary of many of the technical terms that recur in Luther's works and that cannot be defined each time they appear. Obviously Luther cannot be forced into any neat set of rubrics. He can provide his reader with bits of autobiography or with political observations as he expounds a psalm, and he can speak tenderly about the meaning of the faith in the midst of polemics against his opponents. It is the hope of publishers, editors, and translators that through this edition the message of Luther's faith will speak more clearly to the modern church.

J. P.
H. L.

Introduction to Volume 26

IF the Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians is, as it has often been called, the Magna Charta of Christian liberty, then Luther's *Lectures on Galatians* of 1531 (1535) deserves to be called a declaration of Christian independence — of independence from the Law and from anything or anyone else except the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Characteristically, Luther described his relation to the epistle in more vivid terms. "The Epistle to the Galatians," he once said at table, "is my epistle, to which I am betrothed. It is my Katie von Bora." This volume contains the first four chapters of the *Lectures on Galatians*, which was originally published in 1535 (Weimar, XL-1; St. Louis, IX, 16-601). Luther's six lectures on the first chapter began on July 3, 1531, and ended on July 18. Between July 24 and August 21 he delivered his five lectures on chapter two. Chapter three required eleven lectures for its exposition; these began on August 22 and were concluded on October 10. Six more lectures were devoted to chapter four, from October 17 to November 14.

For the transcription of these lectures and for their expansion into printed form we are indebted to the tireless devotion of George Röser, one of the first and certainly one of the best of Luther's editors. Veit Dietrich and Caspar Cruciger also helped to prepare the *Lectures*, but the principal effort was Röser's. His notes have been preserved; they appear in the Weimar edition on the upper half of the page containing the printed version of the same material. Thus we are in the happy position of being able to compare the lectures (i. e., Röser's *Kollegienheft*) and the book. (We have no such basis of comparison for many of the other commentaries but must rely on bits and pieces of manuscript evidence.) By consulting the notes we have been able to determine in several obscure passages what the intent of the printed text probably is. There are occasional editorial liberties and mollifications of the original language (cf. p. 228, note 42, for example); and Röser makes complete sentences of individual phrases and even words. But any editor or translator of the *Lectures* who has also

worked through the notes will have to agree with the judgment of Karl Drescher, the Weimar editor: "With each new examination, the work of Rörer, who has been so belittled and suspected, must appear ever purer and more selfless in relation to Luther and in the preservation of his intellectual substance." As Luther said in the comments he added to the *Lectures* (which will appear at the end of the *Lectures* in our edition), "I recognize that all the thoughts set down by the brethren with such care in this book are my own."

The *Lectures on Galatians* was one of the works of Luther to be translated into English during the sixteenth century, appearing in 1575 and again in 1578. This translation has been reissued in various printings, revisions, bowdlerizations, and modernizations, perhaps thirty in all; the most recent and the most satisfying was prepared by Philip Watson in 1953. But for the present edition we have executed a new translation, one that is couched in the language of the twentieth century, even though we have felt free to take over felicitous renderings of earlier translators; and we have added the identification of hundreds of citations from the Bible, the fathers, the classics, and medieval thought (although in this last case we have sometimes referred to texts that are readily available rather than to the ones that Luther had presumably consulted). Our translation is based on the first edition of Luther, that of 1535, while the others were based on the revised edition of 1538. The last two chapters of the *Lectures*, Luther's accompanying note, and the entire text of his earlier *Lectures* appear in Volume 27 of *Luther's Works*.
J. P.

LECTURES ON
GALATIANS
1535

Chapters 1–4

Translated by
JAROSLAV PELIKAN

WE have taken it upon ourselves in the Lord's name to lecture on this Epistle of Paul to the Galatians once more. This is not because we want to teach something new or unknown, for by the grace of God Paul is now very well known to you. But it is because, as I often warn you, there is a clear and present danger that the devil may take away from us the pure doctrine of faith and may substitute for it the doctrines of works and of human traditions. It is very necessary, therefore, that this doctrine of faith be continually read and heard in public. No matter how well known it may be or how carefully learned, the devil, our adversary, who prowls around and seeks to devour us (1 Peter 5:8), is not dead. Our flesh also goes on living. Besides, temptations of every sort attack and oppress us on every side. Therefore this doctrine can never be discussed and taught enough. If it is lost and perishes, the whole knowledge of truth, life, and salvation is lost and perishes at the same time. But if it flourishes, everything good flourishes – religion, true worship, the glory of God, and the right knowledge of all things and of all social conditions. To keep from doing nothing, we shall begin again where we broke off, according to the saying (Ecclus. 18:7): “When a man has finished, he is just beginning.”

THE ARGUMENT OF ST. PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS

FIRST of all, we must speak of the argument, that is, of the issue with which Paul deals in this epistle. The argument is this: Paul wants to establish the doctrine of faith, grace, the forgiveness of sins or Christian righteousness, so that we may have a perfect knowledge and know the difference between Christian righteousness and all other kinds of righteousness. For righteousness is of many kinds. There is a political righteousness, which the emperor, the princes of the world, philosophers, and lawyers consider. There is also a ceremonial righteousness, which human traditions teach, as, for example, the traditions of the pope and other traditions. Parents and teachers may teach this righteousness without danger, because they do not attribute to it any power to make satisfaction for sin, to placate God, and to earn grace; but they teach that these ceremonies are necessary only for moral discipline and for certain observances. There is, in addition to these, yet another righteousness, the righteousness of the Law or of the Decalog, which Moses teaches. We, too, teach this, but after the doctrine of faith.

Over and above all these there is the righteousness of faith or Christian righteousness, which is to be distinguished most carefully from all the others. For they are all contrary to this righteousness, both because they proceed from the laws of emperors, the traditions of the pope, and the commandments of God, and because they consist in our works and can be achieved by us with "purely natural endowments," as the scholastics teach, or from a gift of God.¹ For these kinds of the righteousness of works, too, are gifts of God, as are all the things we have. But this most excellent righteousness, the righteousness of faith, which God imputes to us through Christ without works, is neither political nor ceremonial nor legal nor work-righteousness but is quite the opposite; it is a merely passive righteousness, while all the others, listed above,

¹ The Latin phrase is *ex puris naturalibus*; cf. *Luther's Works*, 2, p. 121, note 37. On the meaning of the phrase in high scholasticism cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I—II, Q. 109, Art. 4.

CHAPTER ONE

1. *Paul an apostle – not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead –*
2. *and all the brethren who are with me.*

Now that we have set forth the argument and have shown the summary of this Epistle to the Galatians, it seems appropriate, before we come to the content itself, to indicate the occasion for Paul's composition of this epistle. He had planted the pure doctrine of the Gospel and the righteousness of faith among the Galatians. But immediately after his departure false teachers crept in; they subverted everything that he had planted and taught so well. For the devil cannot do otherwise than attack this doctrine vehemently, with might and with craft; nor does he rest as long as he sees even a spark of it remaining. We, too, merely because we preach the Gospel purely, suffer all sorts of evils both on the right hand and on the left from the world, the devil, and his apostles.

For the Gospel is a doctrine that teaches something far more sublime than the wisdom, righteousness, and religion of the world. It leaves these things at their proper level and commends them as good creatures of God. But the world prefers these creatures to the Creator. Finally, through them it wants to abolish sin, to be delivered from death, and to merit eternal life. This the Gospel condemns. But the world cannot bear the condemnation of that which it regards as best. Therefore it charges the Gospel with being a seditious and erroneous doctrine that subverts commonwealths, principalities, kingdoms, empires, and religions; it accuses the Gospel of sinning against God and Caesar, of abrogating the laws, of subverting morality, and of granting men the license to do with impunity whatever they please. With righteous zeal, therefore, and with the appearance of high service to God (John 16:2), the world persecutes this doctrine and despises its teachers and followers as the greatest plague there can be on earth.

By the proclamation of this doctrine, moreover, the devil is overthrown, and his kingdom is cast down. From his hands are torn the Law, sin, and death; through these powerful and invincible tyrants he has subjugated the whole human race. In short, his prisoners are transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light and liberty (Col. 1:13). Is the devil supposed to stand for this? Is it not to be expected that the father of lies (John 8:44) will use all his wiles and power to obscure, corrupt, and eradicate this doctrine of salvation and eternal life? In fact, St. Paul complains in this and in all his other epistles that even in his day Satan was displaying his skill at this business through his apostles.

In our day, too, we complain and lament that Satan has done more damage to our Gospel by his servants, the fanatical spirits, than by all the tyrants, kings, princes, and bishops who have ever persecuted it and who go on persecuting it by force. If we had not been on our guard here in Wittenberg and worked so diligently to plant and teach this doctrine of faith, we would not have remained in harmony for so long; but sects would have arisen even in our midst long ago. But because we continue in this doctrine and never stop stressing it, it preserves us in the most complete unity and peace. Others, however, who either neglect it or seek to teach what they suppose is something more sublime, fall into various vicious errors and endless sects, and so they perish. It seemed good to us to show here in passing why the devil and the world are so spiteful against the Gospel, even though it is the Word of life and eternal salvation.

I have referred earlier in this epistle to the occasion for St. Paul's discussion of Christian righteousness, namely, that right after he had gone away false teachers among the Galatians had destroyed what he had built up so painstakingly. These false apostles, adherents of Judaism and of Pharisaism at that, were men of great prestige and authority. Among the people they boasted that they belonged to the holy and elect race of the Jews, that they were Israelites of the seed of Abraham, that the promises and the patriarchs belonged to them, finally that they were ministers of Christ and pupils of the apostles, whom they had known personally and whose miracles they had witnessed. They may even have performed some signs or miracles themselves, for Christ declares (Matt. 7:22) that the wicked also perform miracles. When men with such authority come into any country or city, the people immediately develop great admiration

CHAPTER THREE

1. *O foolish Galatians!*

PAUL is aflame with a solicitude that is both apostolic and very spiritual in its zeal and emotion. Into his debate and refutation he inserts exhortations and reproofs, on the basis of his rule in 2 Tim. 4:2: "Preach the Word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort." This deceives an unwary reader. As a result, he supposes that Paul does not observe any method or order at all in his teaching. But although he does not observe any method according to the style of orators, he is following a splendid order in the Spirit.

After debating and substantiating with two powerful arguments that Christian righteousness does not come from the Law but comes from faith in Christ, and at the same time refuting the teaching of the false apostles, now, in the middle of the proceeding, he shifts the address to the Galatians and chides them: "O foolish [or insane] Galatians!" It is as though he were saying: "Alas, to what level have you fallen, you miserable Galatians? I taught you the truth of the Gospel diligently, and you also accepted it from me with great zeal and diligence. Then how does it happen that you have defected from it so quickly? Who has bewitched you?"

Paul seems to be chiding the Galatians very harshly when he calls them fools, bewitched, and disobedient to the truth. I will not argue here whether he did this out of zeal or out of pity; both may be true. An unspiritual man would interpret this as abuse rather than as pious chiding. Then was Paul giving a bad example, or was he abusive toward the churches of Galatia when he called them foolish and bewitched? No. For it is legitimate for an apostle, a pastor, or a preacher to reprove those under him sharply in Christian zeal; and such scolding is both fatherly and holy. Thus parents, in fatherly or motherly feeling, will call their son a foolish or worthless fellow, or their daughter a slattern — something they would not stand for if someone else did it. Sometimes a teacher

[W, XL, 309, 310]

will scold a pupil bitterly, call him a jackass, and beat him with sticks — which the pupil accepts with equanimity, though he would not accept it from a peer or a fellow student. Thus also a magistrate will scold, be angry, and punish. Without severe discipline nothing can be done properly in peace or in war. Therefore unless a magistrate, a clergyman, a public official, or a head of a household is angry and scolds when the situation demands, he is lazy and useless and will never administer his office properly.

Therefore denunciation and anger are as necessary in every kind of life as any other virtue is. Nevertheless, this anger must be moderated and must not proceed from envy; it must proceed only from fatherly concern and Christian zeal. That is, it must not be a childish or womanly show of temper that is out for revenge; its only desire should be to correct the fault, as a father disciplines his son, not to set his own mind at rest with a desire for revenge¹ but to improve the son by such discipline. These forms of anger are good and are called “zeal” in the Scriptures.² For when I discipline a brother or a subject in this way, I am not seeking his destruction; I am seeking his welfare. Therefore this anger is necessary and good; without it nothing constructive could exist either in the realm of the world or in that of the church.

It is possible, therefore, that Paul is denouncing the Galatians here out of sheer zeal, not in order to destroy them but by this means to call them back to the right way and rescue them. Or he may be acting out of pity and a feeling of sympathy, behaving like someone who complains out of disappointment that the Galatians have been so miserably seduced. It is as though he were saying: “I am saddened by your unfortunate lot.” We scold miserable people in the same way, not in order to insult them or reproach them for their misery but to sympathize with them and to try to take care of them. I am saying this to prevent anyone from accusing Paul of having reviled the churches of God, in violation of the rule of the Gospel.³

¹ Luther’s Latin phrase, *animum expleat libidine vindictae*, may be an allusion to the words of Vergil:

. . . *animumque explesse iuvabit*
Ultricis flammae. Aeneid, II, 586—7.

² Presumably John 2:17 and its source, Ps. 69:9, are the passages Luther has in mind.

³ By “the rule of the Gospel” Luther appears to mean the rule of the apostle in 1 Cor. 11:22.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. *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;*
2. *but he is under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father.*

YOU see how ardently and astutely Paul tries to call the Galatians back, and how he presents his case with powerful arguments based on experience, on the example of Abraham, on the Scriptures, on chronology, and on analogy. He does this so much that often he appears to be repeating a case he has already concluded. Earlier he seemed to have finished the discussion of justification when he concluded that men are justified in the sight of God by faith alone. But because this political illustration about the young heir occurs to him afterwards, he cites it too, in the hope of perhaps convincing the unlettered Galatians by this means. Thus by a kind of divine cunning he lies in wait for them and tries to catch them, as he says elsewhere (2 Cor. 12:16): "I was crafty and got the better of you by guile." For ordinary people are caught more easily by analogies and illustrations than by difficult and subtle discussions; they would rather look at a well-drawn picture than a well-written book. Therefore after the analogy of the human testament and about the prison and the custodian he also cites this very familiar one about the heir, in order to convince them. For teaching it is useful to be able to produce many analogies and illustrations; not only Paul but also the prophets and Christ used them. Later, toward the very end of the epistle, he will become rhetorical.

"You see," he says, "even in civil law, that although the heir is the owner of the entire estate of his father, he is still a slave. Of course, he has the promise and the blessing of his inheritance. Nevertheless, before the time of emancipation,¹ as the lawyers call it,

¹ "*Emancipatio* is the release of a *filius* or *filia familias* from family ties and the *patria potestas* by a voluntary renunciation of the *pater familias*. The *emancipatus* became hereby a person *sui iuris* and, if male, a *pater familias* even though he had not yet a family of his own." Adolf Berger, "Emancipatio," in M. Cary et al. (edd.), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford, 1949), p. 313.

has arrived, he is held and subjected to guardians and trustees, just as a pupil is to a custodian. They do not entrust the administration or control of his goods to him, but they force him to serve. He lives and eats on his own property as though he were a slave. Therefore he is no different from a slave so long as the time of his imprisonment and captivity lasts, that is, so long as he is under his taskmasters and superintendents. This subjection and captivity is actually for his own good; otherwise he would dissipate his goods foolishly. Still his captivity is not permanent; but it is finished at a definite date, which his father has set."

3. *So with us; when we were children, we were slaves to the elements of this world.*

So it was with us when we were children. We were indeed heirs, having the promise of a future inheritance to be granted through Abraham's Offspring, Christ, who was to bless all nations. But because the time had not yet fully come, Moses, our guardian, manager, and custodian, came and held us confined and captive, to prevent us from taking the upper hand and gaining control and possession of our inheritance. Meanwhile, however, just as an heir is nourished by the hope of his coming freedom, so Moses nourished us with hope in the promise to be revealed in due time, namely, when Christ came. Before His coming it was the time of the Law; when He came, this was finished, and the time of grace is at hand.

Now the time of the Law is finished in two ways: first, through the coming of Christ into the flesh at a time set by the Father. For Christ became man in time just once, "born of the virgin, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law" (Gal. 4:4-5). "He entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12). Secondly, that same Christ who once came in time comes to us in spirit every day and every hour. With His own blood, to be sure, He redeemed and sanctified all men just once. But because we are not yet perfectly pure but remnants of sin still cling to our flesh and the flesh wars against the spirit, therefore He comes spiritually every day; day by day He completes the time set by the Father more and more, abrogating and abolishing the Law.

Thus He came in spirit to the patriarchs every day before He came once and for all at a specified time. They had Christ in spirit; they believed in Him as One who was to be revealed, as we believe

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