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*“So through Christ and through what He did, we are the adopted children of God. The inheritance comes to us freely, all the blessings about which Abraham dreamed and for which he hoped those many years before; all that is ours who are the sons and daughters of grace.”*

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#### *GALATIANS 4:1-7*

We live in a day and age which is wildly enamored with permissiveness, personal rights and self-indulgence, beyond anything reasonable. Every day we hear about organizations which are dedicated to the proposition that nothing should interfere with the pursuit of what one wants. This occurs no matter how unseemly, or how degenerative the quality of life becomes because of that pursuit. Thus, if someone objects to the new standards in movies, the eroticism and violence in some videos, or thinks the “right” to abortion violates the precious right of life of the unborn, he can count on being engaged instantly by numerous crusading organizations and legal watchdogs in heated debate.

There is a manifest immaturity which attends this point of view. Far from being grown up, it is childishness at its most self-serving. And childishness needs the restraint of supervision. The other side of the coin explains and is more to the point. Adulthood, in order to be adulthood, is marked by a sense of responsibility. And where responsibility gives way to indulgence, as it has in our nation in the past 50 years, the reinstatement of restraints is not only inevitable; it is required.

Paul understood the meaning of maturity. One suspects the whole civilized world in his day understood a great deal better than our day does. Paul sees in it a parallel with the Christian faith. When in the history of God’s people they come of age in the Christian sense, and Paul sees that occur in the fullness

of time with the arrival of Christ, the restraints designed to direct our childish feet give way to freedom from such restraints. They give way to a sense of responsibility. In grown-up Christianity, “responsibility” is a key word. We are mature; then heirs, not slaves; but sons, no longer servants. Then the machine is powered by grace, not law, and we are the people of promise, not works.

Paul is so close here to the heart of the miracle, so nearly in touch with the genius of God that he is inspired to pen a sentence destined to live through the centuries on the lips of those who in every age stand in awe of God’s love. Those of us who grew up “in the church” have indelibly imprinted upon our minds and in our hearts (by way of countless Christmas recitations which we both delivered and heard delivered, and which elicit faint memories of carols, O Holy Night, O Little Town of Bethlehem), the words of the apostle Paul. “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” Actually, that is one of those profound summary statements of Christian truth which the Bible and, more often than not, the pen of Paul provides. But it rings in our hearts not so much like a precise, theological, doctrinal declaration, but as the sweetest kind of poetry. We might challenge each other ever to say it any better, or more completely.

So through Christ and through what He did, we are the adopted children of God. The inheritance comes to us freely, all the blessings about which Abraham dreamed and for which he hoped those many years before; all that is ours who are the sons and daughters of grace.

#### *GALATIANS 4:8-18*

Whatever it was, it hadn’t, evidently, turned off the Galatians when Paul had come through preaching the Gospel of grace, though it is to be presumed from Paul’s bringing it up at all that it might have. People have had a good time across the years speculating about the “bodily ailment,” the “thorn in the flesh,” what Paul calls in Galatians “my condition.” Obviously, Paul felt it carried with it some aspect to revolt people and detract from his message. But it hadn’t worked that way. The interest in his message and the bond created by their mutual compatibility had produced a warm and accepting relationship.

Let’s think for a moment about “the warm and accepting relationship.” Wrapped up in that phrase is the secret not just for abiding the unattractive but for abetting the success of the church and of its message. We talk about “a face only a mother can love.” The point is — a mother can love any face, because her love isn’t in reaction to anything. Its source is a warmth and acceptance within.

Listen sometime to some Christians talk about their fellow Christians or their church. No wonder the message gets nowhere. We spend our energies so often thinking and speaking the worst we possibly can about each other. But “love bears all things.” The negatives, the uglies, these don’t stand in the way of the church’s efforts when the spirit is one of warmth and acceptance. We have precious little of that spirit today. Yet it is that spirit which enables the message of the church to be spoken effectively and the life of the church to go on triumphantly. Look at you, look within you, and look no farther. When you come upon a sentiment which is less than accepting and friendly or geared to overlook the good and underscore the bad, you have found the reason why the communion of saints, at large or right where you worship, limps through history instead of marches, like a mighty army.

“What then has become of your blessedness [joy]”? Obviously, some good feeling which had attended the relationship of the Galatians with Paul had degenerated. Has that happened to you, something like that? Is there some utter happiness with the church, some good feeling about the fellowship, some pride in the communion which once was yours to enjoy, which is not there anymore? Yes? Where did it go? Why? Somebody turned out to be uglier than you thought? Someone was less attractive than you expected? Maybe what has changed is you. Maybe you’re not so accepting anymore of the foibles and frailties of your fellow Christians. Maybe the warmth inside has cooled.

It’s a surprise the church can survive the kind of negative treatment it receives from some who comprise its membership. What would happen, do you suppose, if we would determine, at least for a time, to overlook half the infirmities we espy among our fellow saints or to give absolutely everyone in the fellowship the benefit of the doubt and put the very best construction we can come up with on the actions and motives of those with whom we live and move and have our being in Christendom? What would happen would startle the world. What would happen would renew the fellowship. What would happen would fulfill the will of God for His people and make His Kingdom come.

## REVIEW

### *OUTLINE WORKSHEET*

Refer to the outline you received in Lesson 1. You have already noted that chapters 3 and 4 (roughly) comprise the second section of Paul’s letter, the doctrinal section.

In the small rectangles below the words doctrinal section, write chapters 3 and 4.

In chapter 3, Paul spends a great deal of time and effort to promote faith, not works. That phrase serves as a title to chapter 3. In the larger rectangle under the words chapter 3 which you have inserted, write “faith, not works.” This is the faith, not works chapter.

In chapter 4, Paul’s emphasis can be summarized by the phrase “sons, not slaves.” In the rectangle under the words chapter 4, write those words. Chapter 4 is the sons, not slaves chapter.

In the large section under these chapter titles and above the key verse write the summary of section 2: Salvation Independent of man’s work, dependent on faith.

## PERSONAL APPLICATION – GALATIANS 4:19-5:6

*Make for Yourself a place in my heart, dear Savior, and fashion of my life a testimony to Your grace and power. Amen.*

## 1. Galatians 4:19

a. Read 1 Corinthians 4:14, 16, 17; Philemon 10. In what sense does Paul think of the Galatians as “my little children”?

b. What name would you give to someone who is engaged in the activity described in 2 Corinthians 11:28?

c. Which role in a. and b. above do you think Paul regards the deeper and more exclusive, at least the one which he covets for himself? (1 Corinthians 4:15)

d. Review the names of those pastors who have served you during your life in the church.

e. Through the work of which pastor, if it was through a pastor, did you come to know Christ?

## 2. Galatians 4:20-31

Read Genesis 16:1-4, 15. Name the son of Abraham born “according to the flesh,” in the ordinary run of events.

Name the son of Abraham born by promise and the intervention of God. (Genesis 21:1-5)

Which of the following go together? Flesh. Promise. Hagar. Isaac. Ishmael. Freedom. Sarah. Jerusalem. Bondage. Sinai.

## 3. What is the attitude of the law path over against the Gospel path? (Galatians 4:29; Genesis 21:9)

## 4. What is the implication of verse 30 to the Galatians with reference to the Judaizers?

## 5. Galatians 5:1-2

a. “I, Paul.” To what does Paul refer? Review Galatians 1:1.

b. Why is that important?

c. "If you accept circumcision" (should get yourself circumcised). Read Galatians 4:21. Why would the Galatians consider it?

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d. What advice has Paul for those already circumcised? (1 Corinthians 7:17-20)

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6. Why does Paul counsel the Galatians not to be circumcised according to Galatians 5:3-4?

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7. Review Galatians 3:11-12. Explain why Paul says, "fallen from grace."

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8. Read Romans 5:18; 1 John 1:7; Acts 2:21. Which of these statements is accurate? (1) "Jesus has saved us." (2) "Jesus saves." (3) "Jesus will save us."

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9. a. In Galatians 5:5, who gets the credit for bringing us back to spiritual life?

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b. How does the Holy Spirit come? (Acts 10:44)

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c. Where does the Holy Spirit make His home? (1 Corinthians 3:16)

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d. What does the Holy Spirit teach? (John 14:26)

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e. What is "truth?" (John 14:6)

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f. What does the Holy Spirit provide? (Acts 1:8; Ephesians 3:16)

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10. Galatians 5:6

a. Read 1 Corinthians 8:8; Romans 14:17. Insisting on no circumcision could be just as wrong as insisting on circumcision. Explain.

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b. According to 1 John 4:19 and Romans 13:10, what is the mark of the works which are compelled by faith in Jesus?

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c. What do you think is the unique essence of "love"?

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