

# THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS

## INTRODUCTORY LECTURES ON THE EPISTLES OF PAUL

*by William Kelly*

### Galatians 1

We saw the second of Corinthians characterized by the most rapid transitions of feeling, by a deep and fervent sense of God's consolations, by a revulsion so much the more powerful in a heart that entered into things as few hearts have ever done since the world began. For as the first epistle had put down man in every form, and more particularly man as an expression of the world in its pride, so the second epistle breathes the comfort of God's restoring grace, and is characterized therefore by the strongest emotions of the heart; for he ardently loved these saints. He had felt their wrong, but at the same time had been lifted marvellously above what might be called personal feeling, and so much the more, therefore, could have the grief of love unmingled with that which really impairs its strength, and leaves its sensibilities incomparably less acute. So much the more, then, we find the working of spiritual feeling as expressed by him in the second epistle, where he speaks of God lifting up those that were cast down, as He had delivered himself from the imminent danger to which he had been exposed even as to life.

In the epistle to the Galatians we have another tone and style, a serious and grieved spirit, with feelings not less deep — it may be, even more profoundly moved — than in writing to the Corinthians; and for this reason, that the foundations were still more deeply affected by that which was working among the assemblies of Galatia. It was not the worldly presumption of man, nor the slight which this would inevitably cast on apostolic authority, as well as on the order of the church, on morality even, at least on Christian morality, on the comely ways of brethren one with another in private as well as in their public assemblies. In the epistle to the Galatians a deeper question was raised — nothing less than the fountain of grace itself. Hence in this epistle it is not so much the laying bare the need of man — of the sinner, as the vindication of that same grace of God for the saint, with the exhibition of the ruinous results to him who is drawn aside from the deep and broad groundwork that God has laid for souls in Christ. Here particularly the Christian is guarded against the inroads of legalism. If the world were the great enemy at Corinth, the law perverted is that against which the Spirit of God raises up the apostle in writing to the Galatians. Flesh alas! has an affinity for both. This epistle, as those to the Corinthians, opens with an assertion of his apostolic place. At the outset here (not there) he sets aside human intervention. Men were not his source, nor was man even a medium to him. He strikes accordingly at the root of all successional or derived authority. "Paul, an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ and," — in order to make it still more evident, — "by God the Father, who raised him from the dead." This is peculiar to our epistle. In the epistle to the Ephesians we shall find that the apostle claims a still higher character for all ministry. There it is not traced to God the Father, that raised Christ from the dead; but it descends from Christ ascended to heaven (which, we shall soon see, perfectly fits in with that epistle). Here it is the total judgment of flesh in its religious pretensions, and more particularly a blow to that which is an essential principle of law. The whole legal institution depended on a people lineally

descended from Abraham, as their priests on a similar succession from Aaron. Being, of course, dying men, whether it be the general privileges of Israel, or the special place of the priest, all was transmitted from father to son. In its own proper sphere and blessings Christianity knows nothing of the sort, but denies it in principle. So here Paul is "an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, that raised him from the dead."

To have been with the Messiah, the hearer of His words and the witness of His work, up to His departure, was ever a condition to those who were accustomed to the twelve apostles. The apostle himself meets that difficulty in the face, and in effect concedes to his detractors that he was not made an apostle by Christ here below. But if not called to have his place among the twelve, it was the Lord's sovereign dealing to give him a better one. There is no approach to a vaunt about his dignity. He does not even deign to fill up the sketch. He leaves it to spiritual wisdom to gather what was the evident impression of the truth.

For his own special call was an indisputable fact; and it is a great joy to the heart to think how Christianity (while it leaves the deepest and the highest space in all directions, so to speak, for the working of the Holy Ghost, while there is more room in it than anywhere else for the play both of the renewed mind and the affections that the Spirit of God gives, while, consequently, it admits of the richest possible exercises of both mind and heart), nevertheless, in its grand truths rests on the most patent and certain facts. For God considers the poor; He has regard to the simple; He has children in His eye. And facts tell on their mind. Indeed, there is no soul really above them. Whoever despises the facts of Christianity, as if nothing in Scripture were worthy of meditation, or of ministering to others but exercises and speculative deductions, will be found, if he do not find himself often, on the verge of dangerous delusions, both for the mind and for the walk.

But the apostle here does not reason about the matter. He simply states, as I have said, that his apostolic character was not only from Jesus, but from God the Father that raised Him from the dead. It had a resurrection-source, instead of being from Christ on earth, and in relation to the work God was doing when He sent His Son here below. Along with himself he takes care expressly to couple others: "and all the brethren which are with me." Paul did not stand alone. He had the faith that could by grace cleave to God if he had not a companion; but God blesses that faith, and acts by it on the conscience of others, even on those that, alas! Too often might be ready to turn aside. In this case, happily, the brethren near at hand went along with him in heart. After wishing those addressed grace and peace, as usual, he speaks of the Lord in a manner singularly in unison with the object of the epistle: "Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us" — not from judgment, not from the wrath to come, but — "from this present evil world." The evil that was gaining ground among the Galatian believers — legalism — links the soul with the world, and indeed proves it to be evil by giving present credit to the flesh, and association with all the system that is around us now. But in truth the Lord "gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: to whom be glory for ever and ever."

At once the apostle launches into the troubled sea. There is no recounting what God had done for them. There is no mention here of grace, nor even of any special powers conferred by the Spirit of God. We shall find he does not forget this elsewhere: he reasons on it in another part

of the epistle. But his heart was too agitated not to betake himself at once to the point of their danger. Consequently, without further preamble, and with an ominous silence as to their state (for, indeed, it could not be spoken of), he at once breaks the ground. "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you in the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another."

Mark how nicely every word was suited to deal with their souls. He speaks of "the grace of Christ." He warns against "another gospel," *i.e.*, a different one, which was really none at all. It was not another, as he says. "But there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ." And then he, indignant at such a thought, makes his most solemn appeals. "But though we" — Paul himself, or any that were associated with him — "though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." Nor this only. "As we have said before, so I say now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received." The apostle stands to the truth preached and received. What he preached was the truth as to this matter. He does not deny that others preached it; but if so, they preached the same truth. The apostle was given to preach the truth more fully than any other. To depart from this was fatal. Nor this only. If he had preached the full truth of the gospel, he insists that they had received it. He will not hear of any pretended misunderstanding. He refuses all cover for different thoughts. In either case "let him be accursed."

And he justifies this strength of warning: "For do I now persuade men or God? Do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be a servant of Christ." Impossible to serve two masters! Christ never mingles with flesh or law any more than with the world. Bondage is there; and He is a deliverer, but it is to God's glory, and for His own service in the liberty of grace.

And now the apostle enters on another part of his subject. His account proves how independent he was of the very persons whom they would have desired to have seen associated with him. It was an offence in the eyes of the Jewish Christians, and perhaps specially of the Christians that Judaize, that the apostle had been so little at Jerusalem — that his intercourse was so scanty with the twelve. The apostle accepts the fact in all its strength. Far from wishing to gain credit, either for the gospel or for his own apostolic place, in consequence of being linked with those that had been apostles before him, he insists on that very independence which they counted a reproach. His is an apostleship to itself, as real as that of the twelve, but of another order, not at the same time, nor in the same manner. All sprang, no doubt, from the same God, from the same Lord Jesus Christ; but even so from God and from the Lord in other relationships. Very particularly was it marked by the manner of his call, that his apostleship had no connection with either the world or the flesh. It had nothing whatever to do even with the Lord Himself, in the days of His flesh, when acting as minister of the circumcision in the land of Judea. Invariably, where man seeks to bring in a successional apostleship, the twelve become the great model.

Hence it is that Rome, which most decidedly in principle rests on human succession (as all worldly religion must, to a certain extent, embrace the same principle) — Rome, I say, seeks to derive her authority, as all know, from Peter. No person can intelligently read the New

Testament without perceiving the utter fallacy of such a system; for Peter was expressly, as the next chapter of this epistle tells us, apostle of the circumcision. So were the others that seemed to be the chief. If any apostleship would have served for the Gentiles, it ought to have been Paul's then; for Paul was the apostle of the uncircumcision. What a condemnation of themselves, that no system which ever seeks for an earthly succession can in the least make Paul answer its purpose! In his case the breach with man was evident; the association with heaven, and not Jerusalem, was too plain to be disputed or evaded. Successor to Paul there is none; if so, who and where? In the case of the twelve, we do find an apostle chosen to supply the gap of Judas — chosen, I admit, of God, though after a Jewish sort, as Chrysostom justly remarks, for the Holy Ghost was not yet given. I admit that this was all in place and season then for Jerusalem.

But at the same time it is plain that the apostle Paul here starts with the instructive fact, that the very thing for which some Judaizers then blamed him was the distinctive glory of that to which the Lord had called him. "I certify you, brethren," says he, "that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. For ye have heard of my conversation in times past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: and profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus."

Now, it is evident — and to this I call your particular attention — that the apostle here binds together his gospel with his apostolic place. This was the serious move of the enemy. You cannot attack such a servant without attacking his testimony. You cannot weaken his apostleship without endangering the very gospel that you have received yourselves. And this is always true in its measure, and shows the exceeding gravity of opposition where God raises up for His own special work in this world; but more particularly where, as in the apostle's case, the mere manner of his conversion, the special form of his separation unto God, bears the impress of the truth he was to preach. To impugn the one is to imperil the other. The Galatians did not think of this; people that are thus blinded by the enemy never do. To them, no doubt, it appeared as if they were zealous and sincere champions of unity. They were grieved to think that the Jewish church, with its twelve apostles and its elders, with its manifold links with antiquity and God's past testimony on earth, should seem separated in any measure from the apostle and his work. No doubt there was a difference of tone. Had a man come down from the teaching of the twelve, albeit inspired of God to write, as we know some of them were, and all of them having a most truly apostolic place, he might have been startled by the teaching of St. Paul. Can it be doubted that the special form of spiritual thought and feeling formed, for instance, by James's or Peter's teaching, yea, even by that of John, while harmonizing, where the heart was open, with the instruction of Paul, nevertheless would appear at first very different? We know how feeble and slow the heart is, and how apt disciples in general are to narrow the riches of the grace and truth of God. Even in Christianity how much need there is to remember what the Lord warns us of in Luke 5 — that no man accustomed to old wine straightway desires new, but says, The old is better. This was at work even in those early days. It had tainted among others the Galatians; for although, in point of fact, what had converted them was the heavenly testimony of the apostle

Paul, nevertheless they had in time become acquainted with Christians who had not been so favoured, perhaps from the churches in Judea. Saints they may have been; and such, we know, moved about from Jerusalem. At any rate, the Galatians, naturally fickle, were quick to take up prejudices. They had somehow become uneasy. Those that were used of Satan, both to oppose the apostle in person, and also to distrust that testimony which they had not spirituality enough to appreciate, busily insinuated doubts into the minds of these Gentile brethren, and found too ready an ear among them.

Thus the apostle had to link together the gospel of grace with his own apostolic dignity; and we do well to take heed to this remarkable fact. With the utmost simplicity he shows that his own separation from man was a part of God's ways for the purpose of making more strikingly felt the great truth that he was afterwards to proclaim. He had been himself (could they deny it?) at least as zealous for the Jews' religion as any Jew of the strictest sect. He had made as much proficiency as any of his day — it may be, more. Who of his nation had advanced in Judaism beyond him? Who more zealous of the doctrines of his fathers? Therefore, it came to pass that there was nothing the apostle had not learned of which they boasted. He had been trained up under the most distinguished teacher — the great Rabbin Gamaliel; but "when it pleased him, who had separated him from his mother's womb, and called him by his grace, to reveal his Son in him." Mark, again, the strength of the expression. It is not simply that he was brought to follow Jesus, to believe and confess His name; but God revealed His Son in him. And we can all see how exactly the phrase falls in with the words of our Lord given in the Acts of the Apostles; for the wonderful truth burst upon the apostle's ear from the beginning, in the Saviour's call to him from heaven. The oneness of the saints with Christ Himself is, as we all familiarly know, clearly intimated. So here it is said that God was pleased to reveal His Son in him, that he might preach the good news of Him among the heathen.

Immediately, then, as it is added, he conferred not with flesh and blood; neither went up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before him; but went into Arabia, and returned again, not to Jerusalem, but to Damascus, the place near which he had been called at first. "Then after three years," he says, "I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter." Surely now there was some link with the twelve! Not so. He went simply to make the acquaintance of Peter, and abode with him — how long? Fifteen days. Far too short a time, if it were a question of due initiation into the testimony of the twelve. But, in point of fact, he did not see the twelve. He saw Peter; but "other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother." To this he gives the most solemn asseveration: "The things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not." Thus he accepts the challenge that was given by unbelief. He heartily avows what they counted a defect; and not only so, but with the greatest solemnity assures them that he had not seen the apostles, save only Peter, and James the brother of the Lord, and these but for a short space.

The apostleship of Paul, therefore, was entirely independent of Jerusalem and the twelve. He had derived the gospel that he preached from the Lord, and not from any of his fellow-servants who had been engaged in the work before him. Nor had he conferred even then with flesh and blood; his mission as well as conversion and call were alike independent of it. He had been called, as none could deny, in a way which not even any other apostle had ever known. Of none else could it be so said that "it pleased God to reveal his Son in him." It was not thus that Peter or the rest were drawn to follow their Master. The language would not have been applicable when

the other apostles were called. There was no question of revealing His Son in them then. The very utmost that could be said was, that God had been pleased to reveal His Son *to* Peter and the others. But there was no sense of union then. There was no consciousness of the identification of the saint with Christ. Accordingly, the language would have been premature and entirely beyond the conscious experience of the saints, or the real truth of the matter in the sight of God. But God took care that the call of Paul should be delayed till the whole order of the Jewish apostleship should be complete. He took care also that the twelfth apostleship should be filled up; for it is a profound mistake to suppose that Peter and the other apostles had been hasty in numbering Matthias with them, and that Paul was really the twelfth apostle according to the mind of the Lord. The truth is, that they had their relationship to the twelve tribes of Israel. This seems to have been the reason of their being twelve; and it is to me clear that our Lord establishes this as the true reference and key when He declares that, in the regeneration, the Son of Man shall sit upon the throne of his glory, and they shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. One of them fell from his place, but the vacancy was filled up directly.

Thus all had been duly prepared of God, with a far-reaching wisdom, to make the call of Paul an evidently and entirely separate thing, to make his apostleship as distinct in fact as in form; to give him fresh communications, even as to the Lord's supper, and to convey anew the very gospel that he preached as the revelation of the Son in him. The Lord did stamp the testimony of Peter as being truly the revelation of His Father. Flesh and blood had not revealed it. It was not a question of man's wit. His *Father* had made a revelation to Peter. What had been revealed? He revealed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. But, I repeat, this simply was revealed *to* him. You cannot go farther. Jesus, the rejected Messiah, was the Son of the living God, the giver of life, the quickening Son of God. In Paul's case the Holy Ghost could go a step farther, and that step He seems to me to take. The apostle states it with perfect calmness, and without comparing others. There is no depreciating of any soul, but the plain statement of the positive truth, which after all is the best and the humblest way, that most of all magnifies God, and edifies His children. So it was, then, that the apostle presents his own wonderful relation to Christ. It was not merely that Paul was lowered by the carping Judaizers — God's grace was being sacrificed. It was not merely that his apostleship was doubted — God's magnifying of His own Son was set at naught. It was the ungrateful heart of man that, in its avidity after something that would bring an appearance of strength and unity, would sacrifice that, which was of heaven for what was after all connected with the earth and the flesh.

Another thing, too, let me just point out in passing. If ever there was a man who more than another contended for the oneness of the saints in every sense, — above all, for the one body of Christ, for the unity of the Spirit, — it was the apostle Paul. Nevertheless, there never was one that had a deeper sense of the importance of walking, if need were, alone with God. Be assured that it is the same simplicity of faith which enters into both these things now. On the other hand, where unity becomes an object, it is never understood; and at the same time the walk of faith cannot be maintained. In short, the man who, occupied with Christ above, enters for that very reason most into the blessedness of the body of Christ here below by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, is the very one that will know in fit season what it is not to confer with flesh and blood. No doubt this might be provoking to human importance sometimes. It might seem entirely despising his brethren. "Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood."

No doubt also his line of procedure did not at all consort with their desires, who were sticklers for earthly order, and a line that looks safe and respectable to natural eyes. What! an apostle, or at any rate one that says he is an apostle, setting aside what God inaugurated in Jerusalem, not even conferring with those whom the Lord Himself called by His personal summons here below? Here they might flatter themselves were plain tangible facts; here the amplest testimony on the Lord's part that the twelve are really His chosen apostles. But as for the apostle Paul, *he* says he was called, and this by his master from heaven; but by his own showing nobody heard the call of Christ but himself. One can readily conceive men of strong prejudice and of weak faith thus hesitating, especially in presence of the apostle's strong assertion of entire liberty from the law for the Gentiles. Consequently it is plain from the beginning, that the apostleship of Paul made a demand upon faith which the other apostolate did not. He was an enemy stopped in sovereign grace. He was not converted first, and then gradually led into that highest degree, but called at once to be an apostle as well as saint in a way that belonged to no one but himself. It was from and in connection with Christ in heaven. He acts on this in faith; he understands it with an energy and a brightness that increased even in his Roman prison.

But it was true from the first. "Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood." Had Paul gone up to present his credentials to the others, he would have lowered, obscured, and done as far as in him lay to destroy the special blessedness and peculiar glory of his apostleship. But he was not thus disobedient to the heavenly vision. And God held the reins that the truth might be kept unsullied and pure; and he goes south and north as the Lord guided His servant, but not to Jerusalem to those that were apostles before him. He visits Arabia and Damascus once more. Then after a certain lapse of time he does see Jerusalem, but no more than Peter and James, — not the apostolic college officially. And you will observe the immense importance attached to this simple account; for all here is plain matter of fact, but pregnant with the weightiest consequences as long as the church and the gospel last here below.

"The things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not. Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and was unknown by face unto the churches of Judea which were in Christ." Was this then a reproach? Be it so: such was true. It was really part of God's wondrous ways with him, as indicating the true character of Christianity and of its ministry as contrasted with Judaism. It was therefore not only for him, but for the instruction of the Galatians, and of us all. If understood, it completely cut all the earthly swaddling-clothes of the heavenly church, and of the Christian. Those who lived in Jerusalem were too prone to preserve the clothes and the cradle which had their place and use at first, but had no claim to be kept up among the Gentiles. Whatever might be the apostle's tenderness toward his nation elsewhere, not an earthly link but must be snapped. Accordingly the apostle lays stress on the fact that he was "unknown by face unto the churches of Judea which were in Christ: but they had heard only, that he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me."

This, be it observed, was part of God's way with him beyond all others. There was no such thing as a gradual training. The other apostles enjoyed this more. They had followed Jesus in His earthly path of presentation to Israel. They had been by degrees instructed according to the testimony which the Lord Jesus was pleased to give; and most suited it was, of course, to the time, people, and circumstances. Anything else would have been imperfect; but still it had

essentially a transitional character. It was partly directed to the hearts and consciences of the Jews, partly in view of the approaching rupture of all ties with Israel.

In Paul's case there was nothing of the sort. His testimony was characteristically though not of course exclusively heavenly, as it was also the witness of grace to the fullest. How could it be otherwise with one persecuting at the moment that he was arrested, in hot deadly opposition to God's church up to his most unexpected call from heaven? Thus is seen sovereign grace, and nothing else, as well as a heavenly link instantly formed between the Lord in glory and His servant on earth. No wonder that the apostle attached the greatest moment to the facts of his conversion and call, and that, instead of hiding his lack of familiarity both with the apostles and with the churches in Judea, he glories in it. It was through no such channel that he had his apostleship. Christ on high had called him. Such was the will of God the Father that had raised Christ from the dead.

## **Galatians 2**

But we have a good deal more. He tells us that fourteen years after he again went up to Jerusalem. He went up with Barnabas, taking Titus with him. It was by revelation, not by summons from Jerusalem, or to acquire a title thereby. And "Titus," as he says here, "who was with me, being a Greek," etc. So far from this being the smallest allowance of Jewish prejudice, it was itself a powerful blow against it. Thus, going up with Barnabas, he took Titus, a Gentile, along with him; and even so by revelation. It was rather to have Gentile liberty secured by the twelve apostles, and that the Judaizers should be condemned by the church at Jerusalem. It was the very reverse of deriving his authority from either. He went up by revelation for the purpose of getting a condemnation in Jerusalem itself of those who would force Jewish principles on the church of God at large. The legal mischief had emanated from Jerusalem: the remedy of grace must be applied by the apostles, elders, and brethren there. It was a misuse of the respect naturally accorded to some who came from Jerusalem; and so God took care to correct the evil by a formal, public, authoritative sentence of the body there, instead of a pure and simple rejection of the error among the Gentile churches, which might have looked like a schism, or at least a divergence of feeling between them and the apostle Paul. It might have been inferred that Paul was to do what he could with the Gentile churches, but that the twelve exclusively cared for the churches in Judea, he consequently having nothing to do with them. But it is not so. The apostle goes up to Jerusalem, not only with Barnabas, who had come from thence, but taking with him Titus, who seems not to have been there before — Titus, his own valued companion in labour, but a Gentile. In fact, what Jerusalem had done, as far as this was concerned, was to let slip men that would impose circumcision — evil workers, as he in a later epistle contemptuously calls such like of the concision; for they were corrupting the Gentile churches by Judaism, instead of helping them in Christ.

Thus, then, God directed and ruled that the apostle should go up and have the evil condemned on the spot, and at the centre from which it had emanated. And when he went there, was it a question of receiving aught from the twelve? Nay; he communicated unto them the gospel which he preached among the Gentiles. It was not that *they* communicated *to him* the gospel they had learned from Jesus here below, but *he* communicated *to them* that gospel he was in the habit of preaching among the Gentiles. But it was in no vain glory, in no tone of



superiority, though, no doubt, it was a far fuller and higher testimony than theirs; for he adds, "privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run or had run in vain." He granted that persons might indulge in some such thoughts about him. It was for the chiefs at Jerusalem to judge for themselves, and they did judge to the confusion of the apostle's adversaries. "But neither Titus [he takes occasion to say parenthetically], being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised." And what was the result of all this? Why, that though there were "false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage," Paul did not give place by subjection even for an hour, "that the truth of the gospel might continue with them." For the foundation was at stake. "But of these who seemed to be somewhat." Here he takes up, not the mischievous troublers of the Gentiles, whom he does not hesitate to call "false brethren," but the highest in office he found there. "Of these who seemed to be somewhat (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me)." It is interesting to note the earnestness and strength with which the apostle speaks, now the question had been fairly raised. Pungent, abrupt, indignant, he none the less was led of God. "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; but contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter," etc. A different issue ensued from their settling down in the mutual independence of the Gentile churches and the Jewish. "They gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision." They thus acted and pronounced according to the evident intention of God conveyed in the character of their apostolates respectively.

Thus, it is seen, the truth was established. The apostle Paul interferes in no way with the work which God had given the others to do. He owned and valued, in its own place, the difficult, weighty, and momentous work which God had assigned to Peter, James, and the rest; but at the same time he stood firmly — humbly, of course, and lovingly, but firmly — for that which the Lord had assigned to himself and his colleagues among the Gentiles; and, so far from Christ's liberty having been in the least weakened, the apostolic conclave put their seal, with the whole church at Jerusalem, upon it most heartily. (Acts 15) As it is said here, "They gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the heathen and they unto the circumcision. Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do." But this was not all. He mentions another fact, and of the greatest gravity, closing this part of his argument — that when Peter subsequently came down into the Gentile quarters, he had been himself affected by the subtle spirit of Judaism, *i.e.*, the chief of the twelve! How little is man to be accounted of! And Paul, far from deriving his apostleship or aught else from Peter, was obliged to rebuke him, and this publicly. "When Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed: for before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles; but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" I call your attention particularly to this, brethren, that an act apparently so simple as Peter's ceasing to eat with the Gentiles had such a solemn

character in the eye of the apostle Paul, that he considered it a question of the truth of the gospel. Are you prepared for this searching judgment of what looked a small and indifferent matter? Do your souls go along with Paul's decision? Or are you inclined toward the easy-going yieldingness of Peter? Can you seize the gravity of this?

Remember what it must have been to one like Paul to censure the most honoured of the twelve. For Peter is not said to have withdrawn from the Lord's table where the uncircumcised met, but from the simple matter of eating with the Gentiles. The truth of the gospel, to the apostle Paul's mind, was at stake. Need it be added that he was right and Peter wrong? The gospel had brought in before God this double conclusion, founded on the first Adam and the last. It supposed, and went forth to every creature on the ground of the total ruin of Jew and Gentile. There was no difference: all had sinned. And it proclaimed the full and equally blessed standing of those who received Christ. There was no difference in the blessing of Christ: man's guilt and God's grace were alike indiscriminate. There was no difference either way. (Rom. 3, Rom. 10) But the act of Peter went to maintain a difference. The truth of the gospel, therefore, was compromised. And there were reasons why Peter was grievously in fault, particularly as he did no longer adhere to the law, but lived as one conscious of the freedom from it which the gospel gives those who believe in a risen Christ. Why then did he want he Gentiles to live as did the Jews?

The apostle accordingly now turns to the great argument of his epistle, and the discussion of those grand principles that are characteristic to Christianity, and in full agreement with the facts that have already been brought before you. "We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we may be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." But then he goes farther. He says, "If, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore the minister of sin?" This would have flowed from Peter's conduct. Had Peter been right, it was evident that the gospel had put Peter in the wrong. The gospel had led Peter to treat the Jews and Gentiles all alike. The gospel had given him to sanction in his ways and words the overthrow of the partition wall. If Peter was acting rightly now, this had all been a mistake, and consequently the gospel — nay, solemn to say, Christ Himself — would be thus a minister of sin. Such was the serious but necessary import of Peter's act. Peter would have been horrified at such a conclusion. This shows us the exceeding seriousness of a step apparently so trifling as his abstaining from further intercourse with the Gentiles in mere ordinary life. The apostle's discerning eye at once judged by Christ and by that gospel which he had learned from Him. He habitually measured things not so much by their bearing on Jews or Gentiles as by their effect on Christ's glory. In point of fact, to bring in Christ is also best of all to secure the blessing, the privileges, the glory that God has in His grace for every one that believes. Paul was pleading for the real interests of the Jew just as much as of the Gentile; but he presses this most clenching argument — that Peter's conduct involved the making Christ Himself the minister of sin; "for if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor."

Then the apostle at once explains, as annexed to this, the real state of the case. "I through the law am dead to the law." As you know, he had been under law as a Jew. And what was the effect of God's giving him to have an application of law in his own conscience? Why, to feel himself a

dead man. As it is reasoned out in Romans 7, the law came, and he died. "I through law am dead to law, that I might live unto God." The law in itself never produces such a result. All that the law can do, even when yielded by the might of the Spirit of God, is to force on a soul the consciousness of being dead before God. The law is never life to the dead, but kills morally those who seem alive. "I through law am dead to law." It is thus, then, that grace uses it to give me death in my conscience before God. Thus I am dead through the law. The Spirit of God can employ it to make a man feel that all is over with him; but He goes farther in grace, and by that very law brings the man in dead to the law, and not merely condemned. He through law died to law, that he might live to God! Here he comes to the positive blessing; for the Spirit cannot rest in what is but negative. But it is life after death to law, and consequently in another sphere.

He next announces the true secret of it all: "I am crucified with Christ." It is not merely that I have found in Christ a Saviour, but I am crucified with Christ. My very nature is dealt with. All that I have as a living man in the world is gone, — not, of course, as a mere matter of fact, but, what is far more important, as a matter of faith. The history of the flesh — its sad and humbling history — is soon over; but the history that faith opens into never closes. "I am crucified with Christ." This terminates all for me as a living man here below. "Nevertheless" — astonishing to say, for it could not be natural life — "nevertheless, I live." And what sort of life can this be? "Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." How precious to have done with one's sinful self and to begin a life so perfect as Christ's! "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."

I have nothing to do with the law any more, even if I had been once under it as a Jew. For the law was used with killing power; and, slain as it were in my conscience, I found in that very place Christ Himself by the grace of God, — Christ that died for me; and not merely this, but Christ in whom I died. I am crucified with Christ: consequently all that remains for me is living this new life which Christ is in me. And this life is sustained by the very same person who is its source. "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me," etc. It is not a question of my loving Him, though this is and must be true of the saints; but this would tend to throw the soul on self, and it is not the reckoning of grace. What comforts the soul, what strengthens and keeps it up, is that He "loved me, and gave Himself for me."

Thus, as he says most emphatically, "I do not frustrate the grace of God;" they did, every one who substituted aught but Christ and His cross. Every one who went back from such a gospel as this was, as far as it went, frustrating the grace of God. "If righteousness come by the law," (he does not merely say, "come of the law," but come by it,) "then Christ is dead [died] in vain." Not so; it is exclusively of grace by Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. It is wholly apart from works of law.

### **Galatians 3**

Accordingly, in Galatians 3 he pursues his reasoning. "O foolish Galatians," he now breaks out in an impassioned appeal to them, "who hath bewitched you [that ye should not obey the truth should here vanish], before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified among you?" Observe the place the cross has here, not merely Christ's blood, but His death on the cross. As we saw it in the Corinthians applied to judge the worldliness of the saints there, so

here it judges their legalism. "This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" There are two things in the Christian; he has a life, a new life in Christ, but he has also, the Holy Ghost. The law kills instead of giving life, and puts under condemnation instead of giving that Spirit which is necessarily a spring of sonship and liberty. Having brought in the true character of the Christian's life as flowing simply and solely from Christ, and from Christ crucified too, so here he takes up the Holy Ghost. He was given, whether in power or in person, not by the law, but by the hearing of faith.

"Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain, if it be yet in vain? He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" There could be but one answer. This *immense privilege* had no connection with law whatever. The Holy Ghost is given as the seal of faith in Christ on the accomplishment of redemption, not before nor otherwise.

Then he takes up Abraham; for this is always the stock argument of those who would bring in circumcision and the law, Abraham being emphatically the friend of God and the father of the faithful. And mark how the Holy Ghost turns Abraham into an additional and most unexpected proof of the grace of God and the truth of the gospel. Only we must carefully bear this in mind, that in the epistle to the Galatians we never rise exactly to church ground. It is Christian ground, certainly, but not the church as such. Of course the same persons who are here in present view belonged to the church of God; but then they are not contemplated in their heavenly relationship, but as the children of promise, as we shall see in the end of this very chapter. There are many present privileges and future glories that belong to the Christian; and promise is one of them. We are not to suppose that a higher and more heavenly character blots out the lesser place; of this the apostle takes advantage here. But he proves more when he says that Abraham believed God; it was plainly not a question of law. Abraham never heard of the law. "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith" (not those that cry up the law) "are the children of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith," not by becoming proselytes of the gate, or entering on a legal basis, but "foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed." Later, and in a far fuller way now, the gospel was the blessed answer to this early grace. He does not say that it is the complement of it; but most decidedly it flows from the same divine spring of grace. The gospel, not the law, owns its kindred with the promise. "So then," says he, "they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." The law holds out but never gives blessing. Those that are of faith, not those who pretend to the law and do it not, are blessed with their father.

But he goes deeply. He tells them that as many as take the ground of law — works are under the curse already. Not that they have actually broken down and failed; but so incapable is man of standing before God on the principle of doing the law, that it is all over with him the moment he pretends to it. "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." The consequence is, that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God; and this he proves, not only from the promise, but from the prophets. When the prophet speaks of any one living, it is by faith "The just shall live by faith." Hence, you see, all exactly suits the gospel as

Paul insisted on it. "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: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ." He does not say, that the Gentiles were under that curse, but that Christ bought off us who were in this position from its curse; for in truth, whatever might be our boast, all we (the Jews) got from the law was a curse, not a blessing; and what Christ did for us was to purchase us from that awful plight in which the law could not but put us because we had transgressed. it. And thus the blessing of Abraham could flow freely towards the Gentiles who never were there.

And this leads to another point, — the relation of the law to the promises. How do they stand related? And how do they affect each other? The apostle turns this into an admirable piece of divine reasoning in defence of the gospel. "Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; though it be but a man's covenant, yet, if it be confirmed, no man annulleth or addeth thereto." Everybody knows this. When once a covenant is "signed, sealed, and delivered," it must not be meddled with. You cannot lawfully add to it, any more than set aside its provisions. "Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds, as to many; but as to one, And to thy *seed*, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant confirmed before by God unto Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, can not annul so that it should make the promise of none effect." Such is the application. "For if the inheritance be of law, it is no more of promise:" otherwise by the condition of law you would annul the promise. That is to say, the covenant that was made between God and Abraham had reference to the seed which was coming, symbolized by Isaac, but really looking onward to Christ. Nothing that God afterwards introduced annulled this. If the law, introduced afterwards, were allowed to exercise control, the effect would be to set aside the promise. It would be first adding to it, and not only so, but annulling it. The inheritance, therefore, depends on the grace of God fulfilling His promise, not on man's accomplishment of the law, even if possible. The promise is therefore entirely distinct from the law, which was not heard of for four hundred and thirty years after. The long lapse of time ought to have guarded men from mixing up the law with the promise, and thus from the appearance of annulling the promise by the law, for this would be most dishonouring to God. We can understand a foolish man making a covenant, and the next day repenting of it, which is never true of the divine purposes. In this case it was God that gave the promise; it was He that confirmed the covenant to Christ, without saying a word about the law till four hundred and thirty years after. How impossible, therefore, to add the law to the promise! Still less is it possible to let the law set its force aside. "To Abraham were the promises made, and to his seed."

This is exceedingly important, and the more as I believe the scope of the allusion to Abraham and to his seed is not often appreciated. The argument is founded upon the *unity* of the seed of promise in this connection. For God does speak elsewhere, and even on this occasion, of a *numerous* seed. One of the encouragements, as we know, which God furnished to Abraham was, that he should have a seed like the sand of the sea, and like the stars of the sky. These were his lineal posterity. But where the Gentiles are mentioned, God only speaks of *seed* without reference to number.

This is best seen by turning to Genesis 22, where both facts are found in the same context. I just refer to it for a moment, because it adds much to the beauty of the reasoning in Galatians. In verse 17 it is written, "In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as

the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore." At first sight it seems most extraordinary, if the apostle referred to such a Scripture for the proof of the importance of *one* seed; because, if there is anything that lies on the surface of the passage, it is the multiplicity of the seed — a seed expressly said to exceed all reckoning. This, then, is not what the apostle Paul has in view, but in contrast with it. And mark the difference. When God speaks of the seed numerous as the sand or the stars, He gives them a Jewish character of blessing. "Thy seed (*i.e.*, the numerous seed) shall possess the gate of his enemies." God promises the final power and glory of Israel in the earth, putting down their foes, and so forth.

But immediately after this it is added, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Here we have the Gentiles expressly named, and to this the apostle refers. Mark it well. When God gives a pledge not of possessing the gate of enemies, when He speaks of the blessing of the nations, instead of the overthrow of Israel's foes, then he speaks simply of "thy seed." There is no comparison of countless seed; there is not an allusion to the sand of the sea, or to the stars of the sky. On this the apostle reasons.

What the Jews would have liked, no doubt, was power (and the Galatians, after all, were in danger of *slipping* into the same snare; for the law suits the world, as grace does not), and in the world present power and honour. This the Jews are destined to have by-and-by; for the promises to Abraham are not exhausted yet. Whereas the Holy Ghost by the apostle draws attention to the contrast of "thy seed" (as one) with the numerous seed, with earthly blessing attached to them; whilst to "thy *seed*" simply, without reference to stars or to sand, no more is annexed than the blessing of Gentiles. This it is to which we are come now under Christianity. By-and-by will be fulfilled the promised earthly blessing, and power, and glory for Israel like the sand and the stars. The Jews will surely be exalted, as well as converted nationally, and they will then put down their enemies, being made the head when other nations become the tail. But meanwhile, under the gospel, there is an express promise of the blessing of the Gentiles when God spoke of the one seed, which is Christ. Already "thy seed," the true Isaac, is given, and in that true seed the Gentiles are being blessed. It is no question now of being subject to the Jews, who shall never possess the gate of their enemies, but be peeled and scattered and few, while the gospel is going forth. The other part remains, and must be accomplished in its own day, when Israel's heart turns to the Lord. Meanwhile another and a better sort of blessing is given, as a better Seed also is given — the true Heir of all the promises of God, even Christ the Lord. And, doubtless, God had all this in view when He pledged Himself with an oath to Abraham. He did not forget His people Israel; but He had always the glory of Christ before Him; and the moment we rise up to this blessed Seed of all blessing (the true Isaac, dead and risen really, as the son of Abraham was then in figure), the blessing of the Gentiles is secured in that one sole person, before the Jews are multiplied in their land under the new covenant, and possess the gate of their enemies.

This then is the apostle's allusion and reasoning; but he proceeds to meet a natural objection. If the promise be the only means of enjoying the inheritance, what is the good of the law? Does not this make very light of it? You say that the promise is everything, and that the law cannot either set aside the promise or add other clauses to it. What then is the end of the law? It is for the purpose of bringing in transgression, answers the apostle. This is all that people's zeal and labour come to. They spring from unbelief — from undue thoughts of self, from ignorance of God, from slight thoughts of Christ. Legal activity is but labouring in the fire for vanity; and if,

alas! the Christian dooms himself to such hard labour instead of resting in the faith of Christ, whom has he to blame? Certainly not God, nor His plain and precious word. He will gain transgression thereby; nothing more, nothing better. "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator." Thus it is evident that the legal system is a parenthesis. Promise was before the law, and flowed out of the grace of God. The law came in meanwhile, serving its own object, which was to bring out what was in the heart of man. For he is a sinner; and the law called out the sin into articulate transgressions, and made it perfectly plain that the heart is only evil continually, and proves it by plain transgressions; that is all. Then comes the seed, and the promise is made Yea and Amen in Him — all the promises of God. As made under the law He was for Israel; but He died and rose, and was thus free to bless a Gentile as much as a Jew. For what has a risen man to do with Israel more than the nations? All question of natural ties drops in death; as the cross is the disproof of any right to Christ in either. For Jew and Gentile were alike guilty of crucifying Him. All therefore becomes a matter of the pure grace of God; and He is pleased to bless the Gentiles in the Seed, even Christ dead and risen.

The law is of a wholly different nature, and hence was ordained of angels in the hand of a mediator. The creature intervenes here, and the consequence soon appears. For he comes to another and most cogent argument. "Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one." The meaning is that you never can get stability in blessing until you have simply God putting forth His own power according to His own grace. Leave room for God, and for God alone. Such is the only possible way in which blessing can be brought in, in order that such souls as we are should be blessed and maintained in it. And thus it is with the promise. In it there is one party, — even God Himself, who gave it, and accordingly fulfils it in that Seed to whom the covenant was confirmed. But the moment you bring in the law, you have two parties; and, strange to say, instead of the greater party being God, it becomes man, whose responsibility is to God. God asks, and man is called to give, i.e., is called to obedience. Alas! We know too well the result from sinful man. Grace alone in such a case brings glory to God. Thus, clearly, in the law man becomes the prominent and responsible party, not God. This never can bring man to God any more than glory to God. The law, accordingly, never was the truth, either on God's side, or man's. It was, of course, altogether just and right in itself. Man had his duty to God, and he ought to have done his duty; but it was precisely what he could not do, because he was a sinner. To make this evident by transgressions was the object of the law. It was to demonstrate his sinfulness, not to gain the inheritance. But this was only provisional and parenthetical. After all, what God had at heart was the accomplishment of His own promise in grace. When He gave the promise to Abraham, He said, "I will give." And now in Christ He has accomplished it — I mean already. But before He sent the promised Seed, man's self-confidence needed the discipline of the intermediate thing, the law; and after infinite long-suffering on God's part, the people who undertook to obey it had to be swept out of the land for their disobedience.

The law was given them with all pomp and solemnity. It was ordained by angels, who had nothing to do with promise, which God gave direct to His friend. When He had anything unfeeling to do or say, He loved to appear in grace; He said it Himself, and did it for Himself. But when men would have anything fraught with distress to His people, when through their folly confusion must ensue, contrary to all that His heart loved, then it was left to others. Thus the law was ordained by angels in the hands of a mediator. A double intervention comes between God

and man, in contrast with the simplicity of His ways of grace. In grace, God in the person of His Son speaks and accomplishes ALL; and thus He is glorified from first to last. Man is only the receiver; and truly, as we know, "it is more blessed to give than to receive." God reserves to Himself this great blessedness in the gospel; whereas under the law there was nothing of the kind. Then I must repeat that God could only make claims; and man had to take the place, if he could, of giving to God — of rendering his obedience. He was bound to do what he ought; but, in point of fact, all was a failure, and could be nothing else, because man was a sinner.

This then is what the law brought in. Is it against the promise of God? Not at all. Rather, if man had been able to obey the law and so acquire a title, then two systems would have interfered with each other as being to the same end. Some would have received the inheritance because of promise, and others on the ground of law. Thus the two totally opposite roads of grace and law would have been leading to the same result. This must be indeed confusion; as it is, there is none. Under law all is lost; under grace all is saved. The law and the promise are both from God, but the law's use is only negative and condemnatory. It cannot and ought not to spare sinners. The promise has another and most blessed place. It brings in deliverance for man in the accomplishment of God's purpose in Christ. This is what is found under it. Thus the law pulls down what is evil, and the promise gives what is good and builds it up. The law brings man in his nothingness into evidence, it proves that he is only a poor lost sinner. Grace brings out the faithful promise of God, and His goodness to him that deserves nothing. Thus, rightly understood and applied, the law and the promises, while wholly distinct, are in no way inconsistent with each other. Merge them, as unbelief does, and all is confusion and ruin.

Further, it is laid down, if there had been a law capable of giving life, righteousness would be by the law. But this could not be. On the contrary, "the Scripture hath concluded all under sin" — not under righteousness — by law. Thus, whether it be the Gentile without law, or the Jew with it, all are shut up under sin. "The scripture hath concluded all under sin that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."

But, he adds, faith is come (that is, the testimony to be believed by man now, or the gospel). This he means here by "faith." "Before faith came we [Jews] were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God." Instead of being under a slave, with rigorous and humiliating discipline, there is now the place of a child before his Father; the Christian stands by faith of Jesus in direct relationship to God. "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

This is shown still more fully in the allusion to baptism: "As many of us as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." It is of course assumed that every Christian had been baptized. There was no doubt or difficulty on this head in these early days. There was no believer, Jew or Gentile, who had not gladly submitted to that very blessed sign of having part with Christ, and of that which is made good by Christ. "As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." It is not a question of law at all. Christian baptism, contrariwise, supposes man dead; and the only death that can deliver man out of his own death is the death of Christ. Therefore, when a man is baptized, he is not, of course, baptized into his own death; there



is no sense in such a thought. He is baptized into Christ's death, which is the sole means of deliverance out of his state of sin. So here the Christian puts on Christ, not the law or circumcision. He wants to get rid of the first Adam and all its appliances, not to keep it on; and therefore he puts on Christ. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female;" all is Christ and only Christ. It is not an old creation, but a new one. Can anything prove that it is not an old creation better than this — that there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, which last at least is an absolute necessity for the perpetuation of the race? All this vanishes in Christ; we are all one in Him; and if you are Christ's, what need to be circumcised! You do not want to become the children of Abraham in that sense, which would be the revival of the flesh. If Christ's, they were Abraham's seed already, "and heirs according to the promise;" for Christ, he had shown before, was the one true Seed; and if we are Christ's, we belong to that one true Seed, and therefore are the children of Abraham without circumcision at all. Nothing can be more conclusive than this disproof of the fleshly pretensions that were connected with Jerusalem, and were brought in under cover of Abraham, but really to the subversion of the gospel.

#### **Galatians 4**

In Galatians 4 the relation is taken up, not of the law to the promise, but of the Christian now to the condition of the saints of old — a very important point also. Here one may be very brief: "The heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors, until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children," etc. The comparison would take in the Old Testament saints; or the application ("even so we") is to those then alive, who had been under that state of things. "We, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world; but when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." The apostle shows that, so far from bringing in Christians and putting them on the ground of the Old Testament, God is really leading those who were in that connection out of it all by redemption. He fully allows that the Lord was both made of a woman and made under the law; but what was the ultimate object in view! It was not to keep people under the law, still less could it be to put any under the law, but to bring them clean out if they had been under it before. Such was the case with the Old Testament believers, and many Jewish believers then alive. Was it possible, then, that any could desire to put the Gentiles under law, when they had been brought out from it themselves by the will of God, the work of Christ, and the witness of the Holy Spirit? What a gross inconsistency! What a subversion, not only of the truth of God revealed in the gospel, but also of redemption, which is its basis! For Christ bought off those that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons, bringing them by grace into a place of known salvation and intelligent joy in relation with our God and Father, out of that bondage and nonage which the law supposes.

But what about the Gentiles? "Because ye are sons." He does not condescend to reason about their place in the matter, but puts them at once in their due relationship. Because they were sons, God sent that blessed proof and power of their sonship. He gives freely the Holy Ghost on their acceptance of Christ's name; or, as it is here written, "He sent forth the Spirit of his Son in your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." That is, if the Holy Ghost was given as the seal of their redemption, and as the joy of the sonship, wherein they now stood, in the exercise of their

nearness to God and enjoyment of His love, they cry, "Abba, Father," — the very words of Christ himself (but in how different circumstances!) to His Father. "Wherefore, thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."

Thence he advances to another point of his argument. Indeed, we may say that now he thunders on the Galatians that were dragging in the law. Did they know that for a Gentile Christian to take up Judaistic elements is in principle to go back to heathenism? Heathenism! Why they thought they were becoming more truly religious, more reverent in their value for Scripture. They thought that Christianity would be all the better for adopting the ancient forms and beautiful figures of the law. Not at all, says the apostle, you are returning straight into your old heathenism without knowing it yourselves. For he had shown that our purchase by Christ delivers even the Jew from subjection to the law; whilst Gentiles are set at once on the ground of grace without the intervention of any legal apprenticeship whatever, "Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?" What can be conceived more serious or trenchant than such a statement as this? Impossible to find a blast more withering to all that they were aiming at. Born and bred in the abominable idolatries of the heathen, they were strangers to the institutions of Israel. They had been lately brought by the grace of God into Christianity, where they found Jewish brethren, now made one, as it is said, in Christ. Ignorant or false men had made them hanker after circumcision. What were they doing? When a Gentile Christian, mark, takes up such Old Testament elements, according to the Holy Ghost, it is not to him merely Judaism, but a return to his Gentile idols, little as he may think so.

Jewish elements were borne with in a Jew. The apostle Paul himself, in Rom. 14, insists upon the forbearance of a Gentile even towards the Jew that might be still encumbered by his days, meats, and so on. But the moment a Gentile takes the system up, or a Jew presses it on a Gentile, it is nothing but downright heathenism. Who would have ventured to say, without express scripture, that the old Jewish forms thus adopted by a Gentile believer have such an idolatrous character? Yet how true it is, the more we look below the surface; indeed, in our day it becomes more and more palpable to the eye. Ritualism is the present most patent comment on the apostle's statement. The very defence set up, and the meanings which these men put on the forms and ceremonies of which they make Christianity so largely to consist, demonstrate their most barefaced turning back to idolatry. Do not suppose that idolatry has its character saved because Jesus is worshipped. Christianity refuses to be mingled with anything but itself. Tender and comprehensive as Christianity is, it is also the most exclusive thing that can be. Truth must necessarily be exclusive, and all who hold the truth must, in their adhesion to it and Him who is its personal expression, be exclusive too. (I mean by this, of course, exclusive of sin and falsehood.) There can be no compromise; but to be exclusive in any sense save as the expression of the truth in Christ would be in its own way an utter and heartless falsehood. There is nothing that requires more the power of grace; for even the truth itself, if severed from grace, ceases to be the truth. Being found only in Christ, it supposes the manifestation of grace; light does not in the same way that truth does. "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." (Compare John 1: 9 and 17.)

Now the Galatians were unwittingly in danger of giving up the truth. They were only, as they supposed, beginning to cherish a becoming attitude toward the religion of the fathers, and of

all who had before Christ honoured God on earth. Venerable religion! — the only system of earthly worship which had ever possessed God's sanction. Why not adopt what was wanting in Christianity? Where was the harm of taking up what saints of old submitted to? No, rejoins the apostle; you are going back to heathenism. They had been idolaters before they became Christians; and to take up Jewish principles in addition to Christ is to turn back again to their cast-off idols. Next, we are told, wherein this consisted. "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. What! is this all? I have known a divine who had a character for intelligence use these words as a motto and sanction. And no wonder. Christendom is built upon this footing. They think that it is quite right, for the church especially, to appoint days for this and that saint; to have certain seasons to remind one of the Lord's incarnation, ministry, and crucifixion, of His resurrection, ascension, and so on. I choose the best facts; for I have no wish to rake up abuses. All this is counted a great, wise, and sensible help to devotion. Well, "sensible" help in the meaning of an appeal to nature it is; but it is a sensible help to idolatry, not to living faith. This is the very evil which the Spirit of God so earnestly and energetically denounces here by the apostle Paul. He does not charge them with anything of an openly gross or immoral nature; but what a proof that the truth of God, that the grace of Christ, is exclusive of everything but itself! Nor is there a greater evidence of God's tender and considerate care for us than such a fact as this. For He knows our tendency to mingle law with grace in some form or measure, and treats that which was of the fathers and long before Moses, as a foreign ingredient deleterious to Christians. As God has wrought for us on the cross, and delivered us from every atom of sin in Christ, so He will not allow us to mix one earthly or legal element with the revelation of His grace, which He has made ours in redemption, and proclaimed to us by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.

Hereon the apostle puts before them another expostulation: "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain." And this directly follows his censure of their observance of times and seasons. "Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are." They knew very well that he had nothing to do with the law or its ordinances. "Be as I am." By this he plainly means — free from law. "For I am as ye are." They were, after all, Gentiles, and as such ought to have had nothing to do with the law. So he calls on them to be as free of the law as himself. For he, though a Jew, had completely done with the law, and all that pertains to it. "For I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all." That is, the apostle, instead of regarding his despised freedom from the law as a just reproach, glories in it. There was no insult to him, nor injury done, in saying that he did not acknowledge the law for a Christian.

But, further, he refers in a very affecting manner to some personal circumstances — how in his own body he was a witness of having nothing to do with flesh; for what God had been pleased to put upon him as serving Him in the gospel was not great power of nature, but that which made him contemptible in his preaching. It is evident that the thorn in the flesh was something which left him open to a slight, and made it difficult indeed for any one to understand how a man who was called to be an apostle should find it hard to convey plainly his mind in preaching. It is quite obvious that there was a hindrance of some sort. It seems to have been something which affected his speech too, and exposed him to ridicule and to unfavourable comments where men were carnally-minded. But in this he could glory. It was something painful to bear. At first he prayed the Lord to take it from him; but no! though he had prayed thrice, as his Lord had done on another and wondrous occasion, so the apostle was to have communion

with Christ in this way, and learn that there is something better than the taking away of that which makes nothing of the flesh. The power of Christ must rest upon him. Thus it appears that the Galatians as well as the Corinthians had been similarly affected. And this leads him to speak of another trial. When they first knew him, there was no difficulty felt on this score; they heard him as an angel of God. It was they who had changed, not he. They had so completely lost sight of the grace of Christ, the sweetness and the bloom of it, that he travailed again for them: his soul once more passed through that which had exercised him when they were converted.

Then he gives a closing blow to those who doted about the law. He says to those who would be under the law, why do you not listen to the law? Look at Abraham and his house; look at the maid Hagar; look at Isaac and Ishmael. There you have in a figure the two parties that are still found on the earth: the law party symbolized by Ishmael, the child of flesh; and those that cling to the grace of God, who have their pattern in Isaac, the child of promise. Now, what does God say about it? Why this: "Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, and the other by a freewoman." The apostle expressly reasons on Abraham, as they were always anxious to cite Abraham, the father of circumcision. Their main support then, as they thought Abraham, had two sons; but they stood, according to Scripture, on wholly different principles. "The child of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise." How apt the illustration for exposing the Judaizers! The case is hit off exactly to the life. Which son represented them? Under which type did they fall — Ishmael or Isaac? Whom did their principle make them resemble?

There can be no doubt about the matter. "Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?" "Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, which answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us [all?]. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath a husband." The application of this is as plain as it is conclusive, for those who appealed to Abraham and bowed to the word of God. Instead of going up to Jerusalem on earth, instead of endeavouring to effect a junction with the law or anything else here below, the gospel wants no such allies, but repudiates them all. The very reverse of their system is true. The true link is with Jerusalem above, as our prototype is Isaac, the child of the freewoman. Theirs was the slave's son — Ishmael.

Then, bringing in the name of Jerusalem, the Spirit leads him to apply the prophecy of Isaiah, which shows that millennial Israel (in their turn abandoning self-righteousness, and made free by God's grace in Christ) will look back and count as their own those now brought in as Christians, and find far more children begotten by the gospel, in the time of their own desolation, than even when they flourished of old, and had, all that earthly power and glory could give. Thus a decisive blow is struck at the principle of connection with the law; and it was evident that they did not truly "hear the law." Their ears were heavy, and their eyes blinded by their legalism. Nor did they understand the prophets better. To be under law was fatal to Jerusalem. Everything lost then would be gained when promise has its way. Up to the destruction of Jerusalem it was law; but now, under Christianity, Jerusalem, being rebellious and scorning promise like Ishmael, is cast out and has nothing. She is desolate; she is no longer in the condition of the married wife,

but like the fugitive bondwoman. She is as one that has no husband. Yet, wondrous to say, when she desires to be under grace by-and-by, all those that are now brought in by promise will be accounted as children to her. Such is the reasoning in which the apostle uses this very remarkable prophecy. When Jerusalem is humbled by the mercy of God, and betakes herself to her Messiah and the new covenant, *she will* "hear the law," and the prophets will be accomplished in her blessing, and in the largeness of love the present children of promise (even Christians, as being in a certain mystical sense children of Jerusalem) will be her boast. But this will be Jerusalem, under not law but promise and liberty, restored by grace after having lost everything by the law, and reduced to utter desolation. But for us now the apostle carefully adds the principle of our heavenly character. Ours is Jerusalem above, not a city on earth. That is, he links on the heavenly character of Jerusalem for us before touching on the desolate place of Jerusalem after the flesh, or of the predicted change of heart and blessing in grace, when she will be glad to appropriate, as it were, the Christians born now after the Spirit. This closes the course of the apostle's argument.

### **Galatians 5**

Next he turns to direct exhortation, the chief salient points of which will call for but few words. It is liberty and not law that the Christian stands in. At the same time he insists in the most peremptory manner that our liberty in Christ is to be used for holiness. He shows that the Spirit of God dwelling in the believer gives no license for the action of the flesh. In other words, if the believer simply were one forgiven by grace, without having either life in Christ or the Holy Ghost dwelling in him, he might, perhaps, plead that he could not avoid sinning. He had been brought to a place of blessing outside himself and by another, the Saviour, which in itself gives the soul motives indeed but not power; whereas, for the soul who is brought to God by the gospel, and planted in the liberty wherein Christ makes free before God, it is no more a question of flesh, but of the Holy Ghost who is given to him. And who will venture to say that the indwelling Spirit of God fails to supply power to him who submits to the righteousness of God in Christ? Hence the point is not at all whether we have intrinsic power, but whether He is not now abiding in us as "a Spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." — Undoubtedly such is the assurance of God's word to His children; and thus Galatians 5 is in contrast with Romans 7. In that chapter of Romans we have a man converted indeed, but without liberty, and consequently powerless. He sees the right, feels the good, desires the holy, but never, accomplishes. The reason is, that he has not yet come to own by faith that he has no strength any more than righteousness, and that Christ is all and in all. He is afresh making efforts to improve, yet still in bondage and misery. He is occupied with himself. He feels what he ought to do, but he does it not, and thus is increasingly wretched. Sense of duty is not power. What gives power is the heart surrendering itself in everything, and thus set at liberty by Christ. I am perfectly delivered, and the measure of my deliverance is Christ, and Christ raised from the dead. This is Christianity; and when the soul thankfully accepts from God this blessed liberty, the Holy Ghost is given to and acts in the believer as a Spirit of peace and power; so that if there is the flesh lusting against the Spirit, the Spirit resists this, in order that (for such is the true meaning) they should not do the things that they would.

Accordingly he draws from this a most weighty argument against bringing in the law as the rule of life for the believer. You do not need it, because the Holy Ghost thus working strengthens you unto love. Liberty comes first, mark; power and love afterwards. And how true all this is!

Make a child thoroughly happy, and you will soon see that its duty becomes comparatively light and a joy. But when one is miserable, does not every duty, even where it may be as light as a feather, feel as if it were an iron chain on you? It is no wonder that one who is thus tied and bound feels restive under it. Far otherwise is God's way with souls. He makes one first thoroughly happy in the sense of His grace and the liberty Christ has won, and then the Holy Ghost becomes an indwelling spring of power, though His power is put forth in us only as we have Christ kept before us. Thus, if we walk in the Spirit, we shall not fulfil the desires of the flesh. Such is the secret of true power. The consequence is, "If ye are led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law;" and more than this, if we are producing the fruits of the Spirit, he can easily say, "Against such there is no law." Let others talk as they will of the law, no law can censure the real fruits of the Holy Ghost, or those in whom they are found.

## **Galatians 6**

Then we come to the closing chapter (Gal. 6); and here we find the Spirit of God calling for tenderness in dealing with those who are overtaken in a fault. "Ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." Besides, we have a more daily duty: "Bear ye one another's burdens." It is not merely to seek in love a fallen brother, but to be the succourer of others in their difficulties. Love finds its activity in caring for those that are cast down, "and so fulfils the law of Christ." Do you want a law? Is not this just the law for you! It is the law of Christ. Thus He lived and moved here below. The law of Moses tells a man to do his duty in his own place. The law of Christ makes the going out of love towards another, so to speak, to be his joy. It was exactly what Christ was on earth; and the expression of Christ is the prime call of the Christian.

But there is more for us. He shows that God would give us a deliverance from self-importance; and what a mercy it is to be so blessed, that one can afford to forget one's self! Now, the law always brings fallen man into importance: such it must be in its principle. The law necessarily makes the man, and the man's doings, to be the prominent object. Hence the effect of the law in all its ramifications on man is the same. Thus it wrought among the Galatians. After all their vapouring about the law, they were biting and devouring one another. Was this the love the law claimed? Had they been occupied with Christ, they would have really loved one another, and in other respects too fulfilled the law, without thinking about themselves or it. Such is the effect of Christianity, and such in perfection was Christ Himself. But spite of, or rather because of, their use of law, they were self-important, without holy power, and judged instead of loving each other. How abortive is man in the things of God! "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 shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden." Thus, whatever may be the energy that seeks souls in love, there is nothing after all like Christianity for maintaining individual responsibility intact.

How wholesome is the language here, "Every one shall bear his own burden!" But responsibility is always according to the relation in which one stands, and the measure of knowledge which each possesses, or ought to possess. Let me press this gravely upon those who are here this night. If I am a man, I am responsible as such; being fallen and sinful, this will end in judgment. If I am a Christian, I am responsible according to that position and privilege. My

responsibility is defined by the place in which I am found. If I am a mere man, a sinner, the end of that is (for responsibility is not like power, destroyed by sin) the eternal judgment of God. If I am a Christian, I acquire a new kind of responsibility. My business is to act consistently with the new place in which grace has put me. Let us never confound the two. One of the most dangerous errors in Christendom is that these two things are lumped together. The truth is the distinctive boon and mark of Christendom. There is now much confusion of things that differ; and so, more or less, error runs through the whole of it in all its parts; but I know not anything more ruinous than this. The most difficult thing in Christendom is for people to know what it is to be Christians, and to take this place by the faith of Christ themselves. That is, the most simple and most obvious truth is just the last thing a man thinks about. And no wonder. What Satan aims at is, that people should not count themselves what they are, and that they should be always slipping into what they are not. The result of this is, that neither God has His place, nor they. All is confusion. Christ is forgotten.

But then there is another point of exhortation too; and surely we ought not to forget that there are not only the common links of love, and the willingness to succour one another, as we see, beginning with a most extreme case and ending with a general one; but still further, "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things;" and not only that, but also the general responsibility of the saint and in a solemn manner. It is not only that we are put now where we can be the witness to grace in all its outgoings, but, besides that, we are where flesh might show itself. And this is a universal principle. If I sow to the flesh, I shall of the flesh reap corruption; if I sow to the Spirit, I shall reap life everlasting. Eternal life is beyond doubt the gift of divine grace; but, besides, the eternal life that I have now by pure and simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is what I find at the end of my course as well as at the starting. There is such a thing as, by patient continuance in well doing, to seek for eternal life. Eternal life is spoken of in this double way in scripture (Rom, 6: 22, 23); and I also press this as a truth of no small importance and but too much forgotten.

Then, further, attention is drawn to another topic — his own writing of this letter. It was a very unusual circumstance. The apostle, as far as I know, wrote no other letter to any one of the churches of the saints. To the Galatians there was an exception. If he wrote to the Romans; it was transcribed, or at any rate written, by another. He signed ordinarily, putting his subscription at the end, *i.e.*, his own name, to verify it; but he did not write it. Writing was a somewhat laborious task in those days, and it was a kind of profession to be a writer or scribe, before printing, of course, was known. Now the apostle in writing to the Galatians was so moved in love, and so yearned over them in their danger, that he actually wrote the epistle with his own hand. He draws particular attention to this fact ere he closes: "You see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand." Thus it was the ardour of love and grief; it was the earnestness of his purpose that could not bear in this instance to employ an intermediary. Just as he had shown that God in His love to man had given the promise direct, so the apostle Paul acts in his care for the saints of God where all the foundations were endangered.

Finally, he concludes by putting the sentence of death, if I may so say, on circumcision, and all such as might adopt it. He intimates also how vain a thing is legalism, because those that were pleading for circumcision in no case carried out their own principle. Bring in one part of law, and you fall under the authority of the whole. You are bound to carry it out consistently. This they

never thought of doing. The enemy had ensnared them by crying up circumcision, in order to betray them into a link with Judaism; but they had no thought of bearing the real burden of the law. As for himself, he gloried only in the cross. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Along with the cross goes a new creation. How blessed, and how all-important for our souls! The cross has sentenced the world; and this very sentence of the world is our deliverance from the world. We are crucified unto it by grace, as the world is crucified unto us by judgment. For the world there is nothing yet executed, any more than the great results of grace for the saints as yet appear in their fulness. The solemnities of Christ's judgment await men in the day of the Lord. But the whole matter is decided before God. And this is of immense moment to remember. Christianity brings everything to a climax; it also settles all questions. The Christian by the cross of Christ has terminated his connection with flesh, with the world, with the law. He is brought into another condition. And what is this? He is a new creature in Christ. Therefore, no wonder that he says, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ."

At the same time it is shown to be, not what it might seem, a negative power only, but along with it is the new creation into which grace forms us. "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." Gentiles might boast in their freedom. What ground is there for boasting in this? In Christ alone, in His cross, let us boast, and in the new creature which is by Christ. Therefore the apostle adds, And as many as walk according to this rule [that is, the rule of the new creation], peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God." Those that walk according to this rule would be saints in general. The "Israel of God," I apprehend, would mean, that the only part of Israel whom God owns now consists of those that really are of faith — those that received Jesus. It is not a vague general expression for all saints, but implies that fleshly Israel was nothing now. If any of them believe in the Crucified, *they* were God's Israel. Soon all will believe in Christ, and all Israel be saved. But this is a future prophetic vision not touched on here. The new creation is a present blessing that the soul already enjoys. It is an actual result of the cross of Christ. Consequently we have no allusion to the Lord's coming in this epistle to the Galatians. It is all devoted to the deliverance of the saint from this present evil age by the cross of Christ, and his consistent maintenance of the new nature and position of grace — of the new creation in Christ Jesus.

May the truth of God sink into our hearts! Thus all things fall into their place, and the Spirit connects us in heart with that which God is doing and will do for the glory of Christ. The apostle had heard enough of circumcision: it was repulsive to him henceforth. It was his to bear in his body a very different brand" the marks of the Lord Jesus," the scars of the only warfare that is precious in the sight of God the Father. Lastly, he desires for his brethren, that "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" might be with their spirit. Nothing more in keeping with the wants of those addressed, who had so soon turned aside from the grace of Christ to a different gospel.

*William Kelly*