

By Love Serve One Another.

We are reading together Paul's epistle to the Galatians. It is a very interesting epistle. Indeed, all the epistles are interesting, but it may be thought that Galatians is not interesting because it deals with a problem that we are very unlikely to be concerned with— whether we should keep the Law of Moses.

But this error, which it was written to combat, is merely the primary background for an interesting record concerning Paul himself, and a beautiful, positive exposition that goes far beyond the problem itself.

The Galatians were in south-central Asia Minor, the turning around point of Paul's first missionary journey, including the cities of Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Actually, Derbe was only 125 miles from Paul's original home of Tarsus, on the main east-west Roman road, but there was a mountain range in between, and not much general intercourse.

The date of the epistle, and its time-position in relation to Paul's travels, is not certain, but it appears to be early, and some consider it his first epistle. It was certainly after his first visit to them (Acts 14), and seems to be before the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), though this is not certain. If it was, it would be during the "long time" at Antioch of Acts 14:28.

It has six chapters, and is divided into three clear parts: chapters 1-2: Paul's establishment of his direct divine "call" and "authority" completely independent of the apostles of Jerusalem, but in full "harmony" and "agreement" with them; chapters 3-4: expository, the relation of the Law of Moses to the Abrahamic promises and the dispensation of grace and faith; chapters 5-6: exhortation, the total life of complete "transformation" and "dedication" and "purity" and "love" and "self-sacrifice" and "service" that must follow our redemption in Christ, or else faith is only a hypocritical, still-born abortion.

These three sections necessarily run into each other a little, and overlap, but the general distinction is quite clear.

Unlike his other epistles, when he has a warm personal greeting, and words of commendation, even when he has a message of censure, Paul here starts right out with the burden of his reproof:

"Paul, an apostle, not FROM men, nor even THROUGH men" (1:1).

That was the issue; that was what they questioned, and that is what the first two chapters establish. He was in no sense a messenger from the other apostles, nor even had he obtained any of his instruction and understanding through them. Both his "call" and his "doctrine" were direct from Christ himself and God. It is vital that he establish this, for clearly the Judaisers who pretended to represent the Jerusalem apostles, were endeavoring to undermine it.

Then, after the briefest of greetings, and a basic statement of his proposition that deliverance comes "from" and "through" Christ alone, and specifically through Christ's death for sin, according to the will of God, he plunges right into his sharp rebuke (v. 6):

"I MARVEL that ye are so soon removed from him that called you— that is, God— into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel."

The Galatians had turned from God, from the grace of Christ, and from the Gospel of salvation. They would not, of course, "recognize" or "admit" this, but Paul leaves no middle ground. He cuts the issue sharp and clear from the very beginning: it's this or that: they are opposite extremes: it can't be both.

This is what we must do in our presentation of the Truth. There are those who want to emphasize all points of agreement first, and then work up to the differences. This is confusing. The scriptural way is to point out the great, broad dividing line between Truth and error—the "major," "basic" differences that one must choose between at the outset— then fill in the details.

Then come those thundering words twice repeated, which are so often, and rightly, quoted to introduce our lectures:

"If we— or any man— or an angel from heaven— preach any other gospel, let him be accursed" (vs. 8-9).

What vehemence! Where is the "gentle," "diplomatic," "conciliatory," "brotherly" Paul? He shows up later in the epistle, in the proper place, after he has lifted up the fallen banner of Truth among them, "high" and "bright" and "uncompromising"; but this is the time for "very," "very" plain speaking.

Then, beginning at verse 11, to the end of chapter 2, he demonstrates that the gospel he preached came directly and independently and in its entirety to him from God through Christ, and that he had learned nothing second hand through any man on earth.

He had a thorough knowledge of the scriptures from his youth. He was exceeding zealous, and "profited" or "advanced" (Revised Version) beyond his contemporaries (v. 14). He must have pondered many things.

Then Christ struck him down with a personal appearance on the way to Damascus, and the announcement that he whom Paul was persecuting was the one who fulfilled the whole Old Testament revelation. Paul had three days of darkness and fasting for intense self-searching and meditation, rearranging his entire mental picture. There is an indication that Ananias gave him only pre-baptismal instruction. It was simply a reception of his sight, and a filling with the Holy Spirit, and immediately he arose and was baptised (Acts 9:18).

"And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues" (Acts 9:20).

His account here, in Galatians 1:16-17, is:

"Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood, neither went to the apostles at Jerusalem but went into Arabia" (to be entirely alone).

The "*immediately*" would indicate that this directly followed his public announcing in the synagogues of Damascus his new found belief in Christ. Where he went in "Arabia"; or how long he stayed, or under what conditions he lived, we are not told. The whole impression we get is that it was for a "direct," "detailed," "personal revelation from Christ, and his mental adjustment to this tremendous revolution in his life. It could have been in the desert near Damascus, or it could well have been at Sinai where other wonderful revelations had been received.

Then he returned to Damascus (v. 17) and preached so energetically that the disciples had to suddenly and secretly send him away to save his life from the aroused antagonism of the orthodox Jews (Acts 9:23-25).

This verse 18 of chapter 1, was three years after his conversion, and it was not until now that he had any contact with the apostles, and then only for fifteen days. His purpose in going to Jerusalem was to make the personal acquaintance of Peter. That's what the word translated "see," *historeo* (history), means, information, verse 18. This would be very fitting, both from a personal point of view of interest and friendship, and also for the unity of the Truth. Paul was obviously becoming more prominent, and he was prophetically and announcedly destined to become much more prominent still, as the specific "*apostle to the Gentiles.*" Jerusalem was the headquarters of the work of the Truth, and the headquarters of the apostles whom Christ had previously appointed to preside over the dissemination of that Truth. It was virtually essential that he and they meet in fellowship to symbolize and cement this unity.

Again, Paul on this visit preached at Jerusalem so energetically that he aroused bitter and violent opposition, and had, as at Damascus, to be sent away to save his life (Acts 9:26-30). For eleven more years he preached independently, first in the region around his home of Tarsus, and later— after Barnabas had fetched him from there (Acts 11:21-26)— at Antioch, which was growing into the major centre of the Truth after Jerusalem.

Chapter 2:1-10 discusses another visit, eleven years after the first, and fourteen years from his conversion. There has always been a question whether this was the famine visit of Acts 11:30, or the Council visit of Acts 15. There are good arguments for both, and good answers to each argument, making either possible. The answer is not vital, and it is easy to over-spend attention and energy on questions that can never be positively determined. We will probably find ourselves alternating from one view to another as we weigh the arguments. However, it seems simplest and most natural to take it that this was his second visit to Jerusalem, and that he is not skipping over one to the third. He is explaining his total independence from the apostles, and the reasons and circumstances of his Jerusalem visit.

The epistle itself, too, seems to fit better before the Acts 15 Jerusalem council which officially and publicly determined the Gentiles' freedom from the Mosaic Law. But this is not conclusive, because the Judaisers' argument might now be, not that this Law was absolutely necessary, but that it was a holier and higher way for a special standing with God. We know that even after the Jerusalem Council, the Judaisers did continue to plague the Body, and finally corrupted it into the Catholic Church.

Paul says (ch. 2, v. 2) that on this visit he privately explained to the leading apostles the Gospel he preached "*lest he had run in vain*"; not that he sought their advice or approval, but that they should all present a united front against the Judaisers, and not allow them to set one

against the other, to the destruction of Paul's work.

He says the apostles at Jerusalem added nothing to him (v. 6), made no addition or adjustment to his knowledge or his gospel, and gave him the right hand of fellowship in, and blessing upon, his work (v. 9). He also says (vs. 3-5), that some "*false brethren*" applied pressure to have his companion, the Gentile Titus, circumcised, but that he resolutely refused, obviously with the full knowledge and agreement of the apostles.

The second half of chapter 2, verse 11 on, is the case of his rebuking Peter at Antioch. Peter was clearly the most prominent of the Apostles. He had been chosen to open the gates of the Kingdom to both Jew and Gentile. He had received the vision of the unclean animals, and he had eaten with the Gentile Cornelius, many years earlier. At first, at Antioch, he did the same, eating freely with the Gentile believers; but when some Judaisers came from James (but not necessarily with James' approval of their views), Peter withdrew from eating with the Gentiles. Following his example, so did all the other Jews, including even Barnabas.

Doubtless it was love and kindness. Doubtless the motive was good. Doubtless they did not want to offend the Judaising Jews who had not yet come to see the picture clearly. Quite likely they explained this to the Gentile believers, that the Jerusalem Jewish believers were not ready for this, and it was not a time to force an issue and cause a division— that the strong must bear with the weak, and not do anything to cause a brother to stumble. But Paul could see the issue more clearly, and recognized that this was a crisis that had to be resolutely faced and decisively dealt with, if the unity of the Truth was to survive. Properly handled, it was a passive incident. Neglected, It could be a permanent detour in the Truth's advance.

An unchallenged victory for the Judaisers at Antioch, the then centre of Jewish-Gentile unity and freedom in Christ, could have set a radiating pattern of disruption and turmoil, and division between Jew and Gentile. Paul's address to Peter starts in verse 14; where it ends is not clear. It was a public rebuke, and doubtless on the occasion, Paul went beyond the specific rebuke to Peter to a general address to all present on the basic principles— which were not necessary for Peter himself, for he knew and accepted and practised them. So the rest of the chapter will sum up what Paul said on the occasion, and also converges back into Paul's message to the Galatians. He sums up the basic principle in verses 19-20:

"I through the Law am dead to the Law" or, more literally and generally:

"I through law am dead to law ... I am crucified with Christ ... I died ... I live again under an entirely new principle ... yet it is not I but Christ that lives in me, and I in Christ ... I am wholly absorbed in Christ ... my entire life and being are in the faith of Christ who loved me and gave himself for me."

He had gone far beyond law. He had grown up out of law. He had left it behind like the necessary, unexplained, mechanical disciplines of early childhood. He had grown up to love and devotion where the will of the loved is infinitely greater incentive and restraint from the most rigid of compulsory legal requirements. "*The law,*" he said to Timothy, "*is not for the righteous, but for the lawless and disobedient*" (1 Tim. 1:9).

We must develop far beyond the elementary kindergarten lessons of compulsory law to intense, personal love of Christ and God and righteousness and the beauty of holiness—

"I delight to do Thy will, O God!"

But unless this complete absorption into Christ— this complete and driving devotion and

dedication to drawing ever closer and closer to God and to perfection— unless it truly takes over and transforms our life, then the Judaisers were right after all by casting off the pure and holy bonds of law, we have just opened the door to all the indulgences and deceptiveness of the flesh.

Chapters 3 and 4 are the doctrinal arguments against the present application of the Law of Moses— that it was a secondary, temporary arrangement added much later to the basic plan of salvation through faith; that it was, 1) To expose sin; 2) convict all of sin; 3) show to all the impossibility of anyone earning life; 4) to foreshadow and typify and lead up to Christ; 5) that it was the mere elementary, passing impotent shadow of which Christ is the glorious, all-powerful, eternal reality.

To return to the Law of Moses is not, as the Judaisers claimed, a higher step of holiness, but a falling right back down from the things of the Spirit which transforms the heart, to the things that merely regulate the flesh. The doctrinal argument continues to verse 12 of chapter 5.

"I would they were even cut off which trouble you."

— a verse that most modern commentators give an absurd and crude meaning, which the NEB even coarsely inserts into its text as if it were the Word of God.

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The exhortation begins (v. 13 of ch. 5)—

"Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty: only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but BY LOVE SERVE ONE ANOTHER."

Liberty is a tremendous responsibility. Like matured adults, we have been turned loose from the detailed and mechanical restraints of law. We have been told by God:

"This is what I desire. This is what will please me. If you love me, this is what you will work to do, and you will never feel that you have ever been able to do enough: you will always yearn to do more and better. You will have no interest in worldly rubbish."

The obligations of love are infinitely greater and deeper than the obligations of law. Just as the responsibilities and duties of adulthood are greater than those of childhood.

"For all the Law is fulfilled in one word: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (v. 14).

Who ever attains to this divine ideal of loving others as themselves? — of taking on all the joys and burdens of others, and sharing everything we hope with them without restraint? But this is the ideal to which we must constantly strive to bring ourselves. Anything short of this is ugly, fleshly smallness and selfishness of heart and mind.

"But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another" (v. 15). This in the Truth should be absolutely unthinkable. IS IT? We may be a long way from reaching the pinnacle of the ideal, but if we haven't gotten far beyond this, we haven't even begun.

"This I say, then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (v. 16).

Man is a very strange contraption. He is like a pair of scales. One side or the other can very easily go up or down. And when it goes down It can very easily go very far down. But he can also attain very high.

"Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."

It is the only way. We must give ourselves wholly to the Spirit of the Word. We can choose—we can choose what we throw onto the scales. We can choose the guidance of the Spirit as revealed in the Word of Life, or we can choose the guidance of the thoughts and desires of the flesh. No one can plead inability. We can do whatever we want to do, if we want it badly enough, and will seek the help and guidance in the right place.

We can *"walk in the Spirit."* If we couldn't, we would not be told to do so. God does not mock us, any more than He lets us mock Him. Of course we cannot reach perfection. Of course we shall repeatedly stumble, and have to try again. But the basic portion of our life can be purity and love and kindness and service and holiness and spiritual-mindedness, if we really want it to be.

"The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh... so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (v. 17).

The flesh is always there, and always strong. We shall never accomplish fully what we desire in love to do for God. But in interpreting these words, let us remember that Paul falls within their description. He could say *"Be ye followers of me, even as I am of Christ."* He could say *"God is witness how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you"* (1 Thess. 2:10). But still he would be the first to recognize that, having done his utmost, he himself came under this description:

"Ye cannot do the things that ye would,"

In the rest of the chapter, he lists the works of the flesh and the fruits of the Spirit. Among the works of the flesh are some terrible things that hopefully none of us would ever dream of. But also there are some other terrible things that, sadly we do not always realize are so terrible in God's sight, but to Him they may be the most terrible, because they violate and profane and tread underfoot the very essence of love for one another, which is the basic principle of the law of life:

"Variance, hatred, wrath, strife, envying, and such like."

"They which do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God" (vs. 20-21).

But (vs. 22-24)— **"ARE WE CHRIST'S?"**

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