

Ultimate Freedom:
A Commentary And Devotional
On The Book Of Galatians.

David J. Keyser, Th.M., Ph.D.

© 2007 David J. Keyser
All Rights Reserved.

This guide can be used by the student of scripture as well as a devotional divided into convenient sections so that the truth and nourishment can be taken in by large or small amounts.

David Keyser has taught in the pastorate and on the mission field in Kenya and in Mexico since he was ordained in 1967. David earned a B.S. in secondary education from The Citadel in 1964, a Master of Divinity from Columbia Theological Seminary in 1967, an M.S. in Industrial Relations from Loyola University of Chicago in 1977, and a Master of Theology degree from the University of Edinburgh in 1997. He received his Ph.D. in systematic theology from the University of Saint Andrews, Scotland.

FOREWORD

Why another book on Galatians? Many would consider Paul's letter to the Galatians as second only to his letter to the Romans in importance. It has been said that if you were to be stranded on a desert island with only one book from the Bible that Romans would be a very good candidate to take along as it so clearly lays down the primary principles of the Christian faith. Some would take a Gospel, perhaps Mark or John. Others might prefer something else. At any rate, Galatians is a sort of 'little Romans' as it deals with the same primary concerns. In the end everyone has different insights to various parts of scripture and if you read enough of them you will certainly be wise in the things of God. I believe, however, that I have some unique insights into scripture as the result of over 40 years in teaching and ministering and studying the scriptures and theology. Even if I do not have some unique insights, if you study Galatians for any reason you can only be richer for the experience.

David J. Keyser

CHAPTER 1

Galatians 1:1 Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;)

Paul always begins his epistles (with the possible exception of Hebrews) by identifying himself as an apostle, a sent one, of Jesus Christ. Today the use of this title might seem presumptuous, who would dare call himself an apostle? But for Paul it was a simple fact; he was sent by Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Paul was not ashamed to use the title as he was fully prepared, as he makes clear in several other places, by both actions (in the book of Acts) and words (in his epistles) to suffer the necessary persecutions that come to an apostle. And finally, there often seemed to be a need for Paul to establish or defend his apostleship in order to claim the loyalty of believers so that they might not believe the teachings and examples set before them by others who claimed to be apostles as well. Paul's defense of his apostleship is, in fact, for the good of the those who will follow him. Just as Paul affirms that he is sent by Jesus Christ the Son, he also affirms that this sending is also from the Father and that it is this very Father who raised Christ from the dead. Paul's authority, therefore, comes from a resurrecting Father, one who can reverse the dreaded consequences of the basic nature of human life. Human life is at its most fundamental level mortal. The only chance of immortality which anyone can ever have rests in the resurrecting power of God. Just as God raised Jesus from the dead, he is also capable and willing to raise each of us from the dead. This body is not eternal. But human life is eternal in Christ Jesus.

There is a possible conflict in these words affirming that the Father raised Christ from the dead with Christ's own words in the Gospel that he lays down his life and can

Ultimate Freedom

pick it up again. Who then is the one who resurrects? Is it the Father or the Son himself? Certainly the human Christ could not resurrect himself. But the divine Christ could. It is important and necessary to keep the human Christ and the divine Christ, who were and are inseparably united in one person, distinct in our own minds. As a man Jesus was mortal and weak. Jesus performed in all areas of his ministry and personal purity as a man by the power of the Holy Spirit. He had by agreement with the Father left his power and glory behind in order to become a man. There were things he did not know and things he could not do as a man and he was dependent on the Holy Spirit in order to know and perform these things as long as he was in the mortal human body. But once that connection was broken the full power of his Divinity was then instantly restored and it can be said that as God he raised himself from the dead as well as it can be said that he was raised by the Father. During his 33 years as a mortal man Jesus could say that he who has seen me has seen the Father even though his powers were limited and his glory was hidden because his character was indeed that of God; he was holy and he was good as only God is good. When he said, “Why do you call me good, there in only one who is good and that is God” he was simply urging them to acknowledge who he really was.

1:2 And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia:

Paul seldom traveled alone. There was always a group of disciples with him. Sometimes this got down to one; “only Luke is with me.” The reason for this was not just so that some could learn from Paul as they went from place to place as some had also done with Jesus. Neither was it just because it was a comfort and a help to Paul to have others with him to help and to encourage. The primary

reason was that no believer is intended to function by himself. The Christian faith is a faith of fellowship. There does not have to be a lot of people to fellowship; Jesus said that it only required two or three to make a church or a congregation. Often there are more than this, but the important fact is that the Christian faith is designed to work in groups. The format of the meeting is not nearly as important as the fact that we are there for each other.

1:3 Grace [be] to you and peace from God the Father, and [from] our Lord Jesus Christ,

Universally, this is Paul's standard greeting. It is more than a greeting. For those who will receive it, it is an impartation. Paul intends to actually impart grace and peace to the reader or hearer. In biblical times this would have been called a blessing because it was believed to actually transmit an intangible but real quality to the hearer. The formula here is simple and powerful. It is grace that we need and grace brings peace. Conversely, the peace of God will also bring grace. They go together. This grace and peace is from the Father and from Jesus Christ and not from one of them alone. Perhaps the impartation of grace is even more important to the Galatians addressed here as Paul's chief concern for them is their departure from the true teachings of grace to a sort of legalism which was draining all spiritual life and joy from them both individually and as a church. But Paul still seeks to impart both grace and peace to every church for which he considered himself to be responsible. Grace, the free favor of God to his people, is rarely understood. By the end of a study on Galatians a person should have a better understanding of grace than before such a study. As I mentioned in the introduction, Romans is also a good book to read to be strengthened in grace. The writer to the

Ultimate Freedom

Hebrews, whom I believe to be Paul ¹, says that “it is a good thing for the heart to be established with grace.” ² The grace of God is a very big and a very important subject.

Without taking anything away from what will be developed by Paul in Galatians, it would be good at this point to present and partially develop some highlights about grace. First and foremost, it is important to understand that to receive the grace of God we must first acknowledge both with our minds and our hearts that we are totally dependent on God. This is the first big problem. Today in Western culture we are taught that independence and self-reliance are the most important virtues that we can possess. In religious circles we are taught that we are dependent on God for our salvation because we are sinners and desperately in need of the help and deliverance that only he can provide. This is true. But in the teaching of this we are so often left with the impression deep down in our beings that the dependence is because of our sin alone. This is not true. We were originally designed to be dependent on God. Adam was given great power to be in charge of the entire natural world. But he had this power in dependence on God. He lost this power when he took his life into his own hands. Jesus said that he did not do anything that he did not

¹ Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles not to the Jews. He was hated by many of the Jewish community. A Jew would always put the very mention of God before anything else. So Paul starts Hebrews with “God” and not “Paul.” But the teaching of Hebrews is Paul through and through with his extensive knowledge of Jewish history and beliefs. It is doubtful that any one else living in New Testament times could have written Hebrews with the depth and clarity of Paul. And Paul’s mention of Timothy is a personal reference indicative of Paul himself. The King James translators entitle Hebrews as the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews. Those contemporary scholars who attempt to explain this away by the style of the Greek or other devices merely outsmart themselves.

² Heb 13:9 Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.

see the Father doing. Jesus walked in total dependence on God. Dependence on God is not wrong. Dependence on God is good. When our sins are dealt with by the cross of Christ, we are free from the consequences of them. But we were never supposed to be free from God. He wants us to draw from him continually. He delights in meeting our every need. The life of faith is an adventure with God meeting every need, even anticipating our needs and arranging the supply before we ask. This is healthy Christianity. To walk in grace, when we can only stop our sinning by degrees, requires us to be willingly dependent as a life long lifestyle. Only after we embrace this, can we truly understand grace. Many earthly dependencies have unwanted side effects.

Dependence on God has no unwanted side effects. The unwanted side effects of drugs, for example, are that they can in themselves be damaging to a person. Also, they will lead to a dependency which will take a person away from the good things in life. And, last but not least, the supply of the drug may be interrupted or stopped and painful withdrawal will result. A dependency on God will not lead to any of these consequences. God is not damaging to the person. His goal is to free the person and help that person to realize all his or her potential. A dependency on God will not take us away from the good things in life. Rather it will bring us into a complete fulfillment of the good things in life like health and love and relationship and joy. Finally, the prospect of not being able to receive God or the blessings of God at any time in the future is not possible, at least not from God's side of the relationship. God is always available to us and always will be in this life and in eternity. This dependency does certainly imply relationship. We are to live in a living relationship with a living God. This is not a book of rules. The rules, called the Law, were added because of the growth of disobedience. But rules have never been the object of God's relationship

Ultimate Freedom

with his people. A religion of rules is not the Christian faith; it is not the faith that Paul teaches; it is not the faith that Jesus teaches. They teach relationship with the living God. Sometimes it is easier for people to learn to walk by rule than by relationship. Sometimes people prefer rules to relationship. “Just tell me what the rules are and I will do it.” Relationship is harder than rules because there is a living being on both sides of the issue. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is one of relationship. Rules lead to death; relationship leads to life. They say that the three most important things in real estate are location, location and location. The three most important things in the Christian life are relationship, relationship and relationship; relationship first with God and then with our fellow human beings.

The peace of God that accompanies grace is a special peace. The peace of God is not dependent on circumstances. Circumstances can be difficult and we can still have the peace of God that comes from walking in relationship with him. The peace of God passes or goes beyond understanding. Sometimes, this makes Christians look irrational. This is not because they do not understand rational conduct but because they have been enabled to live beyond the rational when necessary. Most of the time they will probably live within rational guidelines and understanding.

1:4 Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:

Paul is ever mindful to the fact that Jesus gave himself for us. But beyond this he is also careful to tell us the reason that Jesus gave himself for us. He gave himself for us so that we might be delivered out of this present evil age and this is the will of our heavenly Father. What does

this mean to be delivered out of this present evil age? Does it mean that we will be separated from the evil around us and protected from it? Not necessarily, at least not in external things. We may be surrounded by the evil of the age as indeed we are. But the object of Jesus' giving himself for us is so that we become internally immune to the evil around us. We lose our appetite for it; we no longer want to participate. This should not be a grueling endless battle to abstain. A true work of grace will set us free from the tyranny of the evil around us. You see, when a person is addicted to the evil that surrounds us, there is never enough. This person is either driven from one appetite for evil to an even greater one or he spends most of his time and energy continually resisting this evil. The grace of God in Jesus Christ sets us free not only from the appetite but also from the fight. We do not have to rely on our own strength to win. This is why Paul is concerned because the Galatians have gone from a gospel of grace to a rule book of laws.

1:5 To whom [be] glory for ever and ever. Amen.

1:6 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:

1:7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

Paul is amazed that the Galatians are deserting, actually giving up, the gospel, the good news, of grace to go to another teaching. Notice here that Paul does not consider this wandering away to the rule book as a variation on the true gospel. He calls it another gospel. It is something different altogether. Sometimes we are content to mix the relationship of grace which we have with God with a set of rules. But these two are actually incompatible. It has to be one or another. The rule book is a distortion of the gospel of Christ. Paul makes it clear that although it is a

Ultimate Freedom

different message, the rule book is not a different ‘gospel’ because the Gospel is ‘good news.’ The Gospel is the news of our freedom. Another message, the message of the rule book and self effort, is not good news; it is bad news. It is bad news because it can only lead to failure and unhappiness. Some will say, “Well, aren’t we supposed to obey the ten commandments?” Yes, but even the Jews should have learned by Jesus’ time that people can not obey the ten commandments by focusing on the ten commandments. Paul had been an expert in this before his conversion to Christ. The rabbis had made us hundreds of other rules to reinforce the rules of the book of Exodus and Leviticus. All these additions had done was make it even more impossible to obey. The only way to be ‘good’ and be a good advertisement for the ten commandments is to keep our eyes on God and on our relationship with him. This is developed more and more as we get deeper into the book of Galatians.

1:8 But 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.

1:9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any [man] preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

Paul is so upset and angry about this departure from grace that he repeats his curse on anyone who would lead believers astray. Paul’s gospel is the right gospel; his is the correct and only gospel. All substitutes are to be rejected and condemned because they will only encourage self effort and failure and the resulting self condemnation that comes from such failure. God can and will change us. We can not change ourselves. An outward appearance of change is no change at all. This was the religion of the Pharisees which Paul practiced before his conversion. To

curse someone in biblical times was not merely to call him a bad name. To curse was the opposite of a blessing. It was intended to actually impart pain and misery and death. This is how strongly Paul felt about anyone who would take us away from our relationship to God in grace.

1:10 For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.

Paul explains how he is not seeking the favor of men in his ministry. If he were, he would merely agree with men in order to gain their favor. But Paul is not a politician. Paul stands for the truth even if no one should join him. And sometimes the ranks could get pretty thin. How did Paul do this? Was it through the sheer strength of his will? Paul was obviously a very strong willed man. He proved this by his actions before his conversion. But his strength here came from God and it permeated Paul's entire being because of the bond-servant relationship which is a binding to God out of free choice and not out of compulsion. Let me explain this. In the Old Testament when a person was bankrupt, he could pawn his land which he had received as an inheritance from the conquest of Canaan under Joshua to a rich neighbor for seven years. The rich neighbor would pay this man's debts and hold his homestead for him and the poor man would work as a servant for his rich neighbor for the seven years to work off his debt. Then he would have his homestead back and a new chance to make it on his own.³ However, at the end of this time, if the man wanted to stay on in his master's house for his entire life as a matter of *free choice* he could do so. Why would he want to do this? Well, he had had seven years to think about this.

³ Ex 21:6 Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever.

Ultimate Freedom

Maybe he wasn't a very good money manager. Maybe he was happier not on his own. The reasons given are: I love my master and his family and I have done better here than on my own. This man is an excellent manager and a loving landlord. He takes good care of his family and me and my family. I believe that I want to stay on here. I will give up my place for my life time and leave it to my children. They can decide what they want to do for themselves. After this decision was made this man would have his ear pierced to the door post for a few seconds to signify that he was a bond-servant for life and he would stay in the other man's house for the rest of his life. This was a bond servant. It was not reversible once the decision was made. Paul knew what this meant. Paul and the other apostle's would refer to themselves as bond-servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is important to notice here that the *debt was paid*. It is not a matter of sin. All sin is paid for by Jesus Christ for every believer. There will never be a bill to pay for sin. We do not become bond-servants because of the bill for sin. We have our homestead back and we are usually bound to Christ for a period of time during the honeymoon time. We love his fellowship and we are a little afraid to go it on our own. But the time comes when the honeymoon is over and we are tempted to try it on our own for a while. This is permitted. But sooner or later we will probably come to the conclusion that we can do better by staying. So we make a free decision to stay. This is not a conversion decision. This is not because of sin. The debt is paid forever. This is a decision of love. This is a decision for benefit. And these two do not contradict. We can not love others if we do not love ourselves. Self love is not selfish. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves. It is necessary to love and respect ourselves in order to love others. When we choose to prosper in our master's house, we choose prosperity. But we also choose out of love for the master and his family. This is a free choice. This choice gives us the strength to

stand against men like Paul did. We no longer curry the favor of people because we have the favor of God and we know it.

1:11 But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.

1:12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught [it], but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Paul is careful to point out that he did not receive his message through any of the other disciples. He did not hear it by word of mouth. Paul received his message by direct supernatural revelation from the risen Jesus Christ after his supernatural conversion on the road to Damascus as we read about it in Acts. Not everyone has such a conversion experience. For some, like Paul, who were strong willed and violently anti-Christian, this kind of conversion is necessary. Also, Jesus had a particularly difficult job that he had chosen Paul to do.

1:13 For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:

1:14 And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

As I have already mentioned, Paul had been a very zealous Pharisee. He was far ahead of most young men of Israel in his day and he was proving it by persecuting the Christians around him. He would actually get written authorization from the Jewish authorities, backed by the Roman government, to put Christians in prison and persecute them.

Ultimate Freedom

*1:15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called [me] by his grace,
1:16 To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:*

Were you set apart unto God from your mother's womb? All believers were. God knew you long before you came to know him. This should be a comfort to us all because the heaviest weight of our relationship does not fall on us but on God himself. He was looking for us before we knew that we were lost. He had plans for us before we were even self conscious. Just as human parents begin to have plans for their children before they are born, God has plans for us. And God's plans for us are all for good. God plans no evil for us. He wants us to 'have a future and a hope'⁴

It is always by grace that we are called. This does not merely mean that God plans for us and calls us out of his free love for us which is not dependent on anything that we deserve. This also means that he intends for us to use his favor. What kind of a human father would be pleased if his child or children never asked anything of him? Would he feel like a good provider? Would he love his child more for never asking? Or like human parents is God pleased to provide for us especially when we ask? There are some things which can be had merely for the asking. Other things require seeking in earnest. And still others require determined knocking. But God is pleased to supply them all and the difference between the asking, seeking and knocking is for our benefit not because God only wants to give the best to some and not to others.⁵

Paul says that God was pleased to reveal his son *in* him, not to him. Is this a mistake in the scripture? Is it a

⁴ Jeremiah 29:11

⁵ Mt 7:7 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

‘translational problem?’ No, it is what Paul means. God puts his Holy Spirit into believers so that Jesus can be seen *in* them. This does not mean that Jesus can be seen in everybody before they are converted. Some commitment on our part is necessary. But the greatest pleasure for God is when the ‘family resemblance’ is noticed by others. We have heard people say things like, “he has his mother’s nose” or “she has her father’s eyes.” The family resemblance is there. Parents usually like to hear such things said. “He’s tall like his dad.” “She’s pretty like her mama.” God wants to reveal his Son in us. So that he shines through and other people can see him. They might not understand what they see. They might not even like what they see. But it is pleasing to God when he can be seen in us. Paul not only wanted Jesus to be seen in him, but he proceeded to proclaim Jesus to those he was particularly called to, the gentiles or the non-Jews of his day. Paul was so confident of the truth of the message that he had received directly from God that he did not even consult with the other apostles for some time.

1:17 Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.

1:18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.

1:19 But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.

1:20 Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not.

Only after 3 years time did Paul finally consult with the other Apostles, men who had known Jesus personally while he was here, just to be sure that he was not telling anyone anything that was wrong. Then he really started his ministry.

Ultimate Freedom

1:21 Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia;

1:22 And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ:

1:23 But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed.

1:24 And they glorified God in me.

Paul had quite a reputation for persecuting the Christians of his day. Many of them had never seen him and since there was no photography or television, they did not know what he looked like. But they had heard of him. And they had also heard that he had had a complete change of attitude, a true conversion. He was now preaching the very faith that he had been persecuting so zealously. Why would God who knows everything and is not confined to the boundaries of time like we are allow Paul to persecute Christians for as long as he did and then convert him and send him to preach the gospel of grace? There are several reasons for this. One of the main reasons that God does things like this is to 'get glory' for himself. If we do not understand this, we can form an opinion that God is 'a glory seeker.' God is a glory seeker. But this is not because he has a big ego and can not get enough credit or praise to satisfy himself. This would be a motive for a human glory seeker. God knows who he is. He has absolutely no doubts about his 'self image' and he has never failed at anything that he has done. Even the fall of Adam and Eve was known to God before hand and he had a plan not only to correct the problem but to make things better than they would have been if the fall had never happened. Yes, better, not just as good again. God is not a 'status quo' God. He will make everything turn out better no matter how much people or the devil try to mess it up. He is that

strong and that wise, far stronger and wiser than we can imagine.⁶ When God gets glory for himself, it is merely what he rightfully has coming. In many things God is hidden from us. The angels can see him and his glory but we can not. When his glory is seen in the dimensions of our world there is a break through of a bright shining light into our dimension. This is why he let Paul work against him and then converted him. Jesus said to Paul, “why do you persecute me?” To persecute Jesus’ people is actually to persecute Jesus himself. He identifies with us that much. He is the head of the new race of humans. So people glorified God when they saw this ‘hard sell’ of a man totally turned around and proclaiming the gospel of grace. We need to see these bright flashes. They encourage us in the midst of the day to day muddle of life. Some in Paul’s day were a little skeptical of this conversion. It was almost too good to be true. Many of the times when God’s glory shines through, especially like at the resurrection of Jesus, seem almost too good to be true, but they are true and deep down we really want them to be.

A very special Christian man once said, “I am a Christian for one reason only, because of the absolute worship-ability of Jesus Christ. By that word I mean that I have found no other being in the universe who compels my adoration as he has done.”⁷ We all need someone to ‘compel our adoration.’ If it is not Jesus, it will be someone else. And that someone else will sooner or later let us down. Jesus will not ever let us down. He will sustain us in

⁶ Ro 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose. 1Co 1:25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. Isa 55:9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

⁷ A lonely Pakistani Christian man who had seen little evangelism around him quoted in, John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God; The Holy Spirit And The Christian Mission*, London, SCM Press, 1972.

Ultimate Freedom

life and “raise us up on the last day.” No one else can do that, actually reverse the effects of death. It is a good thing to get a glimpse of his glory. It is good for us.

Similarly, people should not be too skeptical about miracles today. God still wants to get glory for himself and the miraculous in Christianity will do this and be an encouragement for us. Sure, check it out. It might be a fake. But do you really want it to be? Deep down? A lot of times it is real. And when it is real, a pure bright light beams forth for our encouragement.

So this is our start in Galatians as we have finished chapter one. But there are still many more great and encouraging things to come as we move on the chapter two.

CHAPTER 2

As we begin chapter two, we see how Paul eventually met with the other apostles to confirm that he was on the right track. Let's take a moment here to consider how we handle what God tells us directly and what we hear from others. There is a balance needed here. Every believer is supposed to be able to be led of the Lord.⁸ However, often this leading does not come in the form of words. Sometimes you will hear a Christian say that God 'spoke audibly' to them. We can not say that this is not true. But the Holy Spirit often speaks to the human spirit in ways that can not be formed into sentences or even words. These leadings could be called impressions. Your spirit is that third part of your human nature that is designed to fellowship directly with the Holy Spirit. Your intellect is part of your soul and the impressions of the Holy Spirit communicated to your human spirit often need interpreted for your mind. As a person continues to experience their walk with God, they should grow in the ability to understand the leadings of the Spirit. In the book of Acts the spirit indicated in many ways what he wanted the early disciples to do in following him.⁹

2:1 Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with [me] also.

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

⁸ Ro 8:14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

⁹ In reading the book of Acts you will find that the Holy Spirit led, hindered, spoke, forbade, impressed and used many other methods to guide the disciples.

Ultimate Freedom

Here, in Galatians, Paul is saying that after fourteen years he finally went to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus in order to be sure that the gospel that he was preaching was approved by the other apostles. He wanted to be sure that he had not ‘run in vain.’ In other words, that he had not been teaching people the wrong things about Christ. Paul had received a very special communication from Jesus in being entrusted with the gospel by direct revelation from the risen Christ. Paul does not tell us exactly what form this revelation took, whether it was in words, or visions, or dreams or a combination of them all. But even with this very special revelation given to Paul, who was a man who had never talked to Jesus during the time he was living in a mortal body, Paul was careful to verify with the others what he earnestly believed that he had been taught by the risen Christ. This makes it even more important for all Christians today to verify their leadings, teachings and impressions with responsible persons who have a proven ministry within the Body of Christ. If Paul who wrote so much of the New Testament by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit could humble himself and seek such verification, surely all believers are under the same responsibility to verify what they believe they have heard from Christ, no matter how strongly they feel about their leadings.

2:3 But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised:

2:4 And that because of 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:

2:5 To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

These three verses are a short parenthetical statement inserted here. But they represent a very important issue for Paul. Paul and Barnabas were Jews. And during

the early years of Paul's ministry Barnabas was the one who was considered to be the 'older brother' in their partnership.¹⁰ When Paul got to be better known in the ministry, Barnabas willingly took a back seat to Paul and continued to support him in the work. Barnabas should be an inspiration to all those who seek personal glory or credit in the ministry. Paul and Barnabas, being Jews, had both been circumcised as this was the rite of passage for all Jewish boys when the foreskin of their penis was cut away when they are eight days old to signify that they were a part of the covenant people. For the Jews nothing was done to the girls. In the Christian faith baptism with water takes the place of this rite although medically it is still practiced and recommended as a way to avoid certain diseases. The most important thing about circumcision is that it was a legal requirement among the Jews and at this early stage Christianity was still considered to be a sect or division of Judaism. Paul did not believe that gentile, non-Jewish, Christians should have to be subject to Jewish rules. So he would not give in to pressure from some who had been sent to these meetings as spies who attempted to force Titus to be circumcised in accordance with the Jewish law. The reason that this is so important to Paul is because since he discovered grace, the free favor or God in Jesus Christ, he was violently against any imposition of the Jewish law upon Christians, especially non-Jewish Christians. Paul considered it important not to yield to these legalistic demands not only for the sake of Titus but for the sake of all those who had heard the message of the good news preached by Paul.

2:6 But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no

¹⁰ Acts 9:27, 11:25, 11:30, 13:2, then 13:43, 13:46, 13:50, 15:2, etc.

Ultimate Freedom

man's person:~) for they who seemed [to be somewhat] in conference added nothing to me:

In the context of what we have been saying about grace and the law, Paul tells us that the other Apostles did not tell him to add anything to what he was teaching and preaching. Paul's message, as far as the other apostles were concerned, was complete.

*2:7 But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as [the gospel] of the circumcision [was] unto Peter;
2:8 (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:~)*

It was agreed by the apostles at Jerusalem that Paul was to specialize in reaching out to the non-Jews, the gentiles, and that his ministry was of the same importance as the ministry of Peter to the Jews. Evidently Peter was considered to be the primary apostle to the Jews by this time. This is amazing as Peter had been the one that had denied the Lord at his crucifixion. God not only restores those who are weak but often puts them at the head of the work that is being done for God.

2:9 And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we [should go] unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

In summary, Peter, who was also called Cephas in the Jewish language, and John, the beloved disciple, who had been so close to Jesus while he was here and was actually now keeping Mary, Jesus's mother, in his own

home, and James, presumably Jesus' own half-brother by Mary and Joseph or possibly the other disciple James, all agreed that Paul should preach the gospel of grace to the gentiles and the others would go to the Jews which were called the circumcised. And they shook hands on it.

2:10 Only [they would] that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.

The only other thing the apostles at Jerusalem asked of Paul was that he be sure to remember the poor Christians with offerings. This has a particular significance as the people that Paul was called to preach to, the gentiles, which included many Greeks and Romans, often had much more wealth than the Jews. So in reality, the apostles in Jerusalem were asking Paul to take up collections from the gentiles and send the proceeds to the Jews from time to time. We read in other places that Paul actually did this as he was asked. This is an early expression of the New Testament church to take care of each other regardless of their cultural, racial and social differences that we would do well to learn from today.

After this congenial and helpful first meeting between Paul and the apostles in Jerusalem, a controversial disagreement took place between Paul and another apostle who was no less than Peter himself which again stood at the center of Paul's understanding of the importance of Christian freedom.

2:11 But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.

2:12 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.

Ultimate Freedom

2:13 And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.

2:14 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?

2:15 We [who are] Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,

In the city of Antioch Peter had been friendly with some gentile believers and had paid no attention to the Jewish ordinances about what kind of food to eat and who to eat it with. Peter had learned this directly from God in a dream as he waited on the housetop in Jerusalem.¹¹ At this time Peter had learned the very important and historic lesson that the gospel was to go to the gentiles as well as the Jews and he was glad to receive Cornelius and to preach for him to gentiles. God had illustrated this to him in the dream by telling him that it was alright to eat any animal, thus setting aside the Jewish dietary laws which had been given long ago by Moses for reasons that were important at that time. So Peter knew in his heart that this was a good thing to do, to eat gentile food (that was not Kosher) with the gentiles. But when some other Jews showed up, Peter shrank away from his gentile friends and their table because he was afraid that these Jews would accuse him of being a bad Jew. This made Paul furious for two reasons. For one reason Peter changed his actions for the sake of the opinion of others. And in the second place Peter himself was content to live without obeying the

¹¹ Acts 10:13-15 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

Jewish laws but seemed to be in favor of wanting others to obey them. Paul initiated a public confrontation with Peter over this for the sake of Christian freedom of conscience. Paul says this is a violation of the principle of freedom of Christian conscience which would be a bad and confusing example to all who saw it or heard about it. As a matter of fact, Paul says that even Barnabas who was a strong believer was influenced by Peter's actions. If Barnabas could be confused and influenced so, how much would it throw others off the proper track? After all, Barnabas had been Paul's coach, so to speak, when he first came to faith in Christ. Paul was always ready to stand up for Christian freedom of conscience and this theme is developed fully in this letter to the Galatians. Let's read on for more.

2:16 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 might 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.

Here is the heart of Paul's gospel and of the book of Galatians. It is only faith in Christ that makes us Christians and takes away the guilt and consequences of sin from our lives. Other things that we do have absolutely no effect on our being saved. This is the sometimes difficult to grasp central truth of the Christian faith. Somehow basic human nature rebels against being cleansed and accepted by God merely on our faith in Christ. This faith says that we believe that Christ took all the punishment that we deserved for sin and that by believing in him we gain total favor from God. We become children of God through our faith in Christ. Jesus Christ is our 'older brother' in the faith and he is the perfect mediator between God and man because he is both God and man himself. All we have to do is believe. Often we want to *earn* our acceptance with God. But no

Ultimate Freedom

one knew better than Paul who had tried so earnestly to earn God's favor that we are not capable of earning it, so we might as well accept it as a gift that has been paid for by Jesus himself in his life, his death on the cross and his victory in his resurrection from the dead. Paul would not put up with anything that in any way contradicted this free gift. The gift is free but not cheap. To try to pay for what Christ had purchased with his own blood cheapens the gift because we do not have anything of value to give for it. Our very best efforts are not only without value but 'are as filthy rags' according to the word of God.¹²

2:17 But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, [is] therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.

Paul goes on to say, that if he gives up the free gift of salvation that was purchased by Christ even by seemingly insignificant actions, he is in effect trying to pay for his salvation by his own efforts again and is actually giving up salvation itself. This is no small matter to Paul and should never be to us either.

2:18 For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

Paul says that he once and for all turned his back on self justification. He has no faith that he can save himself by his actions. And now he will not put back or rebuild that which he has forever turned his back on.

2:19 For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.

¹² Isaiah 64:6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

Because Paul could not make himself righteous or acceptable to God through obeying the law – the law itself had shown him that it was too hard for anyone to keep – he had given up trying to keep the law, or as he says, he had died to the law. He no longer tried to respond to the demands of the law. When a person is dead to something, he no longer responds to its demands. Because of this being dead to the law Paul is free to live for God. Jesus supplies the will and the energy to live as God would have him to do.¹³ This is living by faith. This is real. I shall mention again in this book the idea that many people because they believe that God wants them to be good will seek the help of the Lord in being good so that God will in turn accept them and love them. God does not want this. God does not want us to seek good. That does not work. God wants us to seek God. Remember it is relationship, relationship, relationship. Even with God's *'help'* we can not be good enough to please God. When we seek God Himself, we automatically get better without hardly noticing it. That is the easy way.

The object of the whole thing is for us to change. In order to change we have to have life-changing power in our lives. Grace, outrageous grace, accomplishes just that. The secret is that we as believing Christians never get what we deserve. If we believe that we get what we deserve, then we are locked into a never-ending loop of frustration and failure. Even if we seem to improve and then fall back again, we are again locked into the loop of failure. With outrageous grace, which is the same as amazing grace or just plain grace, the loop is broken. It is just that we have to realize the amazing and outrageous nature of just plain grace. We get only what Jesus deserves, which is the very

¹³ Php 2:13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Ultimate Freedom

best of favor and goodness from God. When we fail and sin, we get what Jesus deserves not what we deserve which is condemnation and punishment. We have to root this out at the deepest levels, or rather the Holy Spirit has to root this out for us, but we need to realize His task and try to cooperate as much as possible. Our repeated failures are what defeat us more than the occasional ones. We feel that we deserve to be punished by God. Sometimes we actually feel like we want to be punished then we can feel that we have earned the return of God's favor. But we can not play this game with two sets of rules. It is one or the other. If we try to change the rules away from outrageous grace, then the failure loop is in place again in our lives.

A loop, just as in computer usage, just brings us back around to the same place to start over again and again. There is seemingly no escape unless this loop is broken. The loop of condemnation and guilt only brings about more failure in us because we are expecting failure and we do what we expect. If we believe that we deserve failure, then we will no doubt fail. We will not measure up to God's desires for us or our own desires to please Him. Grace breaks the loop every time. Actually in God's eyes the loop was broken once-and-for-all when Jesus finished his work in the flesh and it broke the loop once-and-for-all for you as an individual when you accepted His work the first time. But the flesh re-establishes this loop again based on our experience of failure upon failure to measure up to our own expectations of growth and holiness. The person who does not want to please God has less of a problem here. I say less of a problem because his or her goal is not set to please God. But deep down they still know that they are failing their creator. But the sincere believer is constantly faced with the record of his or her own failures. So we abandon outrageous grace because we reason that it did not work. In truth it is just not done working. We are not giving it long enough to work. How long does it need? As long as it

takes. As long as it takes to change us. Never mind how long that is. It is not your job to decide when it should be done. God is not worried about whether it will work or not. He designed the system and has sent Jesus and then the Holy Spirit to make it work. Failure is not part of God's vocabulary. God has never failed. He has "all the time in the world." Time is not a problem for Him. God is master of time just as He is master of all other things as well. We can not set the limit for when grace should be finished working in our lives. So when you find the condemnation loop reactivated in your life, the guilt loop, the failure loop, the punishment loop, the only thing to do is to break it with the power of grace realized. You can not reason your way out of this loop. You can not manipulate your way out. You can not shout your way out. Only grace can break it.

Be convinced that you ALWAYS get what Jesus deserves. He got what you deserve. He nailed it to the cross and allowed it to kill Him and then rose from the dead having conquered sin and destroyed the works of the devil. Even if you do good consistently, you will not get what you deserve but only what he deserves. In other words, you can take no pride in personal growth since it is His work in you but you do not have to take the blame either. The object of the game is change. You will change, you are changing by the power of grace. The thing is once you do change you do not see it clearly because if you are really walking convinced of outrageous grace, you are not seeing yourself but Him. That is why both the sheep and the goats in the parable do not remember their own works. The goats do not remember what they failed to do because they never got the original message in the first place. The sheep do not remember what they did do because when they actually managed to do it, they were so changed that taking credit never entered their minds. This is what it means by loosing your life in order to find it. For too long this teaching of loosing your life has been understood or misunderstood as

Ultimate Freedom

the need to make painful and artificial sacrifices in order to please God. It is not just an initial doctrine of grace and then a miserable life. It is grace working in your life throughout your earthly existence. It is outrageous. It works. It actually brings about change. You may think that it is taking you a long time to get better but it is not too long for God. He knew how big the job was when He took you on.

2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Here is the secret in summary. Because Christ has been crucified in our place, taking what we deserved, we are in God's eyes crucified with him. And we should be so crucified in our own eyes. But the best thing is that because Christ has been raised from the dead, he is living his life over again in each of us by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. So the life that we live we are not actually living. He, Christ, is actually living it in us. Because he overcame sin when he was tempted, he can do it over and over again in our lives.¹⁴ I take issue with this otherwise very good translation here. It is not by faith *in* the Son of God that we live this life or goodness and victory but "by the faith *of* the Son of God" as the Authorized or King James Version translates the original Greek of the New Testament. It is in the genitive case. It is actually Christ's faith which was and is a perfect faith that is working in us to cause us to live a life that is pleasing to God. And it is the love that Christ has for each of us which was shown in his great sacrifice of his life on the cross that proves it. It not only proves it but in actuality it made it possible.

¹⁴ Luke 4 1-13.

Someone had to take the carnal human life, sometimes called ‘the flesh’ by Paul, to the cross and kill it. Jesus took the flesh so that he could conquer it. He never sinned although he was tempted. He was made a real man when he was made flesh. He resisted the flesh to the end even when they wanted to make him king without the cross. And finally he crucified the flesh and then raised himself from the dead as God to be the eternal God-man. He lives in us. We must abandon ourselves to His living in us and this great secret of Paul’s gospel will work in our lives.

2:21 I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness [come] by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

Paul considers that to act in any other way than to absolutely depend on Jesus to live in you and through you is to go against the grace, the free favor, or God and to revert to trying to earn our salvation and favor from God. Paul knows for certain that this will not work. And Paul knows that to revert in such a way would be the same as holding that there was no reason for the death of Christ on the cross. What a magnificent and freeing position. And in the following chapters from Galatians Paul brings forth all the ramifications of this wonderful truth.

Ultimate Freedom

CHAPTER 3

3:1 O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?

3:2 This only would I learn of you, received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

The basis for all other Christian beliefs is the sacrifice that Jesus made for mankind. Paul considers the Galatians to be under a spell as if they had forgotten what had been so clearly taught to them about the cross. He calls this a ‘public portrayal’, almost like in a play. This is not to say that it was not real. But it does give the impression that Paul used every means at his disposal to impress on the minds of his Galatian hearers the momentous truth about the cross of Christ. Everything depends on the cross for it was there that all the benefits of salvation were purchased for believers. For this reason there should be no idea that we can earn these benefits by obeying rules. The greatest benefit, one which enables us to receive all the rest, is the gift of the Holy Spirit Himself. The Galatians are reminded that they did not receive the gift of the Holy Spirit Himself by keeping the law, but by believing what they heard. Their hearing was ‘mixed with faith’¹⁵ in their hearts and as a result they actually experienced the Holy Spirit coming into their bodies and souls to live there. The result was not merely an intellectual understanding of their salvation. Nor was it simply a good feeling. Both these things can accompany the coming of the Holy Spirit into a life. But the actual big event is His coming itself. Christianity was always intended to be an experiential faith. It is personal

¹⁵ Heb 4:2 For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

Ultimate Freedom

and there are experiential milestones to be enjoyed and referred to along the way.

3:3 Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

It follows by the simplest logic that if the Christian life is begun by the experience of the Holy Spirit coming into our beings, that the best, even the only, way to continue this life is to continue by walking in a cooperative harmony with this very same Holy Spirit. To change course in mid-stream, so to speak, would not be the way to proceed. We must follow through in the same manner in which we began. To continue by obeying rules is to trust again in our own ability, or to go on ‘in the flesh.’ When Paul speaks of ‘being perfected’, that does not mean that we can actually become completely perfect in this life but it does mean that we grow up, we mature as believers. We mature by walking in the Spirit. We do actually become better but this is because we are following the leading of the Holy Spirit and he is empowering us to change.

3:4 Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if [it be] yet in vain.

Evidently, the Galatian believers had been persecuted for their receiving and following the Holy Spirit. Paul is concerned that they suffered this persecution for nothing if they are now going to go back on God’s plan and attempt to improve themselves by self-effort and legalism. In these days when self-improvement books abound it is important that Spirit-filled believers guard against the influence of self-improvement methods in their spiritual lives. We improve by our relationship with God.

3:5 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?

Not only had the Galatians experienced the Holy Spirit for themselves but they had seen actual miracles worked by the power of the Holy Spirit. Anyone who has ever seen a miracle knows that it was not performed by obeying laws. Sometimes things that seem like miracles come about by our obeying certain natural laws – although the Law that Paul refers to is the Moral Law – but such things really have sound scientific basis. For instance, it seems like a miracle that an airliner which weighs thousands of pounds actually flies. But the principles of aerodynamics and lift can explain this when they are properly understood. And sometimes God does what have been called ‘quiet miracles’ when something comes about gradually or quietly which seemed very improbable. But the miracles of the New Testament which can still happen today were supernatural interventions by the Holy Spirit into the natural realm; and the Holy Spirit does such things in response to faith.

Since Abraham is considered to be the Father of faith, Paul points to him as an example in the verses that follow.

3:6 Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.

This is perhaps the most amazing statement in the Bible and there are a lot of amazing statements in the Bible. It says that because Abraham believed God that God considered Abraham to be righteous. At first glance such a statement might not make a lot of sense, especially to someone who was not raised to believe the Christian scriptures. What did Abraham believe? Did he believe in

Ultimate Freedom

the gospel of Jesus Christ as found in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John? No, these books would not be written for many centuries to come. Did Abraham even know what the Messiah's name would be? No, that was not yet revealed. As a matter of fact Abraham really probably did not think much about a Messiah. Those prophecies were still centuries away. So what was it that Abraham believed? Well, he believed that God would do what God had promised. God had promised Abraham that he would have a son, a son of promise, by Sarah. God had promised Abraham that his descendents would be like the sand of the sea and the stars of the heavens. And late in life God had commanded Abraham to sacrifice this son who had finally come to Abraham and Sarah in their old age. Abraham was fully prepared to sacrifice Isaac because he believed that God would raise the boy from the dead in order for God to fulfill his promise about descendents. This did not turn out to be necessary but Abraham was prepared to obey.¹⁶ So in the end all that was important was that Abraham believed that God would keep his promises. He did not, as far as we know, confess his sins and ask God to save him and give him eternal life. He simply believed what God had communicated to him. We do not know if Abraham heard God's voice like we would hear another person's voice or whether he was just spiritually sensitive and followed the impressions that God gave him. But it says here that he believed God. For this simple believing which was really tailored to Abraham's personal situation and time, God considered that Abraham was righteous. It was not for his kind acts or great wisdom or any other reason that God considered Abraham to be righteous. It was simply because he believed God. This puts the whole emphasis in one place. When we believe God, that is pleasing to God. There

¹⁶ Ge 22:2 And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

is a lot more for us to know and to believe since the New Testament than Abraham had to know or believe. But it is not more difficult. We are simply to believe that God will do what he has promised us. We have a whole book full of promises from God, some have counted over 8,000 of them, that we can believe. But the believing is still a simple thing. A child can do it. As a matter of fact Jesus said that we should all believe like a child.¹⁷ When we grow up, we tend to make things more difficult than they have to be. Believing God is child's work, the work of the children of God.

3:7 Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.

3:8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, [saying], In thee shall all nations be blessed.

3:9 So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

Since Abraham was, so to speak, the original believer, then all the people who believe God who have come since then are considered to be his spiritual children. We are accepted by God and receive all the blessings of His acceptance because we believe what he tells us. Today the highest authority on what He tells us is the Bible but, of course, unless you accept the help of the Holy Spirit who alone can really enable you to believe God's promises, you can not really believe as God wants you to believe. Now, it is important to understand that this plan, receiving by believing, was God's plan from the beginning. It was

¹⁷ Mt. 18: 2-4 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Ultimate Freedom

always God's original plan and it has not changed. Anything else that tells us or implies to us that there is any other way into God's favor is not true. Paul indicates this when he says that the scriptures foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, not by the law or by any Jewish practices or other practices. To indicate this it says that the gospel was actually preached to Abraham when God told him that all the countries and races in the world would be blessed in Abraham. In other words, when we believe God like Abraham did, no matter what our background or individual differences, we are blessed by God. All of God's blessings are available to us. All we have to do is believe God for them. This is not complicated. It does not require, as we said before, a great intellect. It does not require a lot of books. It does not even require a complete Bible. Abraham did not even have a Bible. The writing down of the Bible was not even started until the time of Moses many centuries later. We just simply believe what God has promised us and He gives it to us. It seems deceptive because it is so simple. Few things in life are this simple. Abraham is called "the believer." We are also called believers. Next Paul moves to the root of the problem for the Galatians and for many others who fell into their error over the centuries forward even to today.

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

Many people have believed that they can at least obey some of the rules. And, of course, the one great set of rules is the Ten Commandments. There are many more rules in the Old Testament in addition to the Ten Commandments and over the years religious leaders and teachers have added more and more rules. Paul tells us that

there is a “catch” to the whole thing. And that catch is that if you want to be judged by God as being righteous or good by your ability to obey the law, you must obey all of the law. Not one small part can be disobeyed or you lose all credit for obeying any other parts. This is what the curse of the law is. You can not win. Even the best of human beings might be able to obey 98 percent of the law. But this person would flunk God’s test just as badly as someone who could only obey 8 percent. It is the story of the one great jumper, “The Fifty Foot Jumper.” Imagine a group of jumpers who can leap a variety of distances. There is a great crevice between two mountains that is 50 feet wide and the fall down the crevice is many hundreds of feet. The 47 foot jumper is a much better jumper than the 20 foot jumper. But if they both try to jump the crevice, they will both end up falling and broken at the bottom of the crevice. Only Jesus Christ kept all of the law. He is “The Fifty Foot Jumper.” We can go over “in Him.” He took our faults to the cross and was raised again to prove that he was a righteous man. We then take his credit.

3:11 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, [it is] evident: for, The just shall live by faith.

3:12 And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.

This is a very old quote from the Old Testament from the book of Leviticus.¹⁸ This is a part of the ‘Torah’ or the law. The law was not the original plan but one that was put into place until Jesus came to fulfill the law on our behalf. We must remember that faith was God’s original plan and not the law or anything else for us to have eternal life and to have life abundant. It is, after all, primarily a

¹⁸ Lev. 18:5 from the law.

Ultimate Freedom

matter of living forever. All other blessings are secondary to this. Eternal life is the one great prize.

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

3:14 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

We always want to remember that in practical terms the curse of the law is the ‘catch’, that we must obey every bit of the law continually in order to be made righteous by the law. This we are not capable of doing. But there was also a more mysterious factor to this curse. In order for us to be totally and forever delivered from the curse of the law which judged us for our inability to obey the law in God’s sight, Jesus had to take our place in this judgment and become a curse for us. He did this by going to the cross, the tree, on our behalf. Then all of the consequences of the law regarding us were cancelled. The law no longer has any claim on us. We can no longer be judged guilty by our inability to obey the law. Jesus has done it all for us. For this very important reason, the most important of all reasons, Paul grieves that any believer would put themselves back under the law. Why would we return to a system under which we can not win when we have been given forgiveness and favor with God by the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Himself? All we have to do is believe in the free gift. But there is a tendency in natural human beings to want to try to justify himself or herself. It is a matter of pride. It is something that must be resisted. The Galatians had fallen into the trap and the whole of this letter was written by Paul to try to recover them out of this trap.

3:15 Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though [it be] but a man's covenant, yet [if it be] confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto.

The concept of a covenant is the most important one in the Bible. A covenant differs from a contract in which both sides bind themselves to particular actions out of a distrust for one another. In a covenant, such as a marriage covenant, both parties agree to come together for the mutual benefit or each other. A covenant properly understood means that each member entering into the covenant will act first in the best interests of the other and not of ones self. A covenant is based on trust not distrust. Based on his understanding of covenant which was considerable for Paul as a Jew and as one trained in theology, Paul says that even a human covenant, one between two human persons, once it is ratified, you can not ignore it or add conditions to it. To be ratified a covenant required some sort of action. In the Old Testament it was usually accompanied by an oath and a sacrifice of some kind. Using an oath or swearing was considered very serious in biblical times. The closest thing we have to it these days is when someone swears to tell the truth in a court of law. A person swears to do a particular thing and binds themselves by something that is precious or valuable to them. In court for many centuries a person would swear on the Bible. There is also a penalty for breaking that oath. In court if a person promises to tell the truth, “the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God,” and then lies, this is called perjury and you can be punished for that; you can go to jail. When God made his covenant with Abraham, he swore or promised by his own Name which is the highest thing that God can swear by. He had Abraham set up a sacrifice in the same manner as he had been taught from his youth. In this Abraham created a ‘bloody alley’ between the pieces of slaughtered animals and waited for

Ultimate Freedom

God to tell him his part in the covenant. To his surprise he saw the Presence of God Himself walking between the bloody pieces. Abraham had expected to be told to walk between the pieces and swear to do certain things as his part of the covenant or else end up himself like the pieces of the animals around him. This was the way it was done. But instead God took the entire responsibility of the covenant upon himself. He promised to be the sacrifice himself. And he fulfilled this promise when he came as man and was crucified on a bloody cross to keep the covenant. All Abraham was to do was believe. That is all we have to do as well. We believe in God's promise and in God's sacrifice and that is our side of the Covenant of Trust, the Covenant of Faith. This covenant can not be set aside or added to in any way. It is complete forever.

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

Here Paul is telling us that the promise of God's covenant is properly not to all the children of Abraham but to one in particular, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. He is the single descendant of Abraham who receives all the benefits of God's covenant because of his ability to live a righteous life. We share these benefits with Him because by the Holy Spirit we are joined to him. Jesus is the Head of a new race of human beings. We are "in" Him as the scriptures say.¹⁹ This keeps us aware that our faith is not just believing in a concept put forth by God but it is in fact a relationship which we have with God through our being joined with Jesus in the Spirit.

¹⁹ Ro 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. And many others.

3:17 And this I say, [that] the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.

3:18 For if the inheritance [be] of the law, [it is] no more of promise: but God gave [it] to Abraham by promise.

3:19 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.

Since the law was not part of God's original plan to save and bless us, it was added, Paul says, after the covenant was established. The law was added to help keep the Jews in line because they had rejected personal relationship with God. It was also added to show everyone, Jew and Gentile alike, that we could not keep the law. But it was not added to the covenant. Paul has already told us that you can not add to a covenant once it is ratified. It was merely added as a temporary discipline and a lesson. When Jesus came and completed the sacrifice and sent the Holy Spirit to change us from within, the law was cast aside and we returned in practice to the original covenant of faith. It is either law or promise, but there can not be a mixture of the two. So it is really a covenant of promise. God promises and we believe. We depend on Him and He sends the Holy Spirit to change us into the person that He wants us to be and that we want to be as well.²⁰

3:20 Now a mediator is not [a mediator] of one, but God is one.

²⁰ Php 2:13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Ultimate Freedom

The law was given through a mediator, a go between. The Gospel was done in person by God, through Jesus Christ, who had become one of us. That is another reason why the Gospel is better.

3:21 [Is] the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

The law does not contradict the promises of God. Indeed, God really wants us to act like the rules of the law dictate. But we can not first gain favor with God by obeying the rules. We already have favor with God because of his covenant which he initiated with us. So we must simply believe this. Even after we believe, we can win no points with God by obeying the rules. Sure, he wants us to live like we are obeying His rules. But we can only do this by letting the Holy Spirit change us and by concentrating on our relationship with God. If we think on the rules, we will break them. If we think on God, we will keep the rules. That is how it works. It is a great secret and a great power.

3:22 But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

3:23 But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

3:24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster [to bring us] unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

3:25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

The law was like a temporary school teacher which tries to keep us in line until we discover the life of faith in Christ. In biblical times the tutor was actually more than a

teacher. He was called a ‘pedagogue’ and actually had complete charge of the children. He was even allowed to discipline them or beat them. And often this pedagogue was a slave that was purchased by the parents to teach and care for the children. It is still better even today to be under the law until we find, or are found by, Christ by faith. But after this greatest of all discoveries there should be no need for the law or the rule book anymore because we can now have relationship. We can now behave as grown children who understand our position. It is only when we consider relationship to be too difficult that we resort to rules but actually it is the rules that are more difficult. Sometimes we have to learn this lesson over and over again.

3:26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

As the little brothers and sisters of Jesus we are actually the sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father and His Heavenly Father. As such we are treated as children and not as servants and certainly not as enemies. We are adopted into the family of God. Actually it is more like being brought back into the family that God always intended us to be a part of.²¹

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

To be baptized into Christ is like putting on a new clean garment. Our own personal disfigurements and

²¹ Eph 1:5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will. And right here in Galatians 4:5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

Ultimate Freedom

imperfections are no longer seen. All that God sees when He looks at us is the cleanness and perfection of Jesus.

3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

Because of this new garment, our individual differences no longer matter before God, only the garment. We need to pray for eyes to see that we will also esteem each other equally because of our 'includedness' in Christ. When we discriminate because of individual differences, we are not looking at the new clean garment that God has given us. We are looking at the natural person. And that breaks up the unity which we all have as children of God. Sometimes Christians think that this means more and more social or legislative action to bring equality within the body of Christ. But social and legislative action will not work unless the unity is believed in the heart of each individual believer. We must not only see the other person in their new clean robe, but we must also be able to see ourselves in our new clean robe. Only God can enable us to see this. This brings us back again and again to relationship with God.

3:29 And if ye [be] Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

The summary conclusion to this chapter is this. We belong to Christ. We are, therefore, Abraham's children. As Abraham's children, the children of faith, we inherit freely all the promises that God made to Abraham and to Christ.

CHAPTER 4

The message that begins this chapter is “grow up!” It is based on what we have already learned so far in Galatians.

*4:1 Now I say, [That] the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all;
4:2 But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.
4:3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:*

In the natural world a heir is set to inherit everything from the parents. But while the heir is still a little child, he does not have authority over his inheritance even if the parents should die. While the heir is a child, other people, adults, control the inheritance until the child is old enough to manage his own inheritance. Usually the age for being allowed to manage the inheritance is set beforehand by the parents. Paul is saying here that although all believers in both the Old and New Testaments were actually heirs, they did not personally possess their inheritance until the time set by the Father had come. Until that time they were under guardians and managers like the law. This is historically true. There is also another possible interpretation of this example of the heir, the managers and the Father. As long as we insist on being immature in the faith, we can not enjoy most of the benefits of our inheritance. This does not mean that we can not have a child like faith, one that takes God at his word. But to be immature is to insist on one's own way. Our own way is to seek to gain acceptance by God through our own ability and works. God's way is to receive what he has for us by faith.

Ultimate Freedom

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

4:5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

In history God selected a particular time for Jesus to come into our world. He was born of the virgin Mary at just the right time. Everything was ripe for his coming. God had prepared the world to receive him. The Pax Romana, or the Peace of Rome, had put a stop to most of the territorial wars in the then civilized world. The Roman system of roads and government allowed for free travel and the spread of the gospel. The Jews were desperate for a Messiah, and we should remember that many of them did embrace Jesus as the Christ. Many of the gentile peoples were also seeking a true spiritual reality in their lives. Their own gods had not saved them from their enemies. They were tired of conquerors and cruelty. The centurion, or Roman army captain, that came to Jesus was one of these seekers and Jesus praised him for his faith. The Syro-Phoenician woman and the Samaritan woman at the well were also seekers. God knows just the right time to send his messengers and this time He came Himself. He came to adopt all believers as His own children.

4:6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

This word “Abba” is very, very important. When the Holy Spirit comes into a person as they receive Jesus as their Redeemer, the Holy Spirit enables us to call the heavenly Father, “Daddy.” This is the very familiar form of the word “father.” Before Jesus came, no devout Jew would have thought of calling the Most High God, “Daddy.” But Jesus knew Him as just that, his beloved Daddy. Our English word “Daddy” does not quite do the Hebrew word

justice. It is an extremely personal and precious word. For this reason Paul calls the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of Adoption.” Jesus knew the Father as one who could be depended on. Jesus was happy, no delighted, to be continually dependent on the Father but with no hint of servility. He lived in the world like a prince in his father’s house.²² When we think that our need to depend on God is a sort of punishment for our sin, we are wrong. It is really a privilege to be dependent on God. We need to change our thinking on this. We may have been led astray by someone teaching or implying that our dependence on the Father is some sort of a punishment. Jesus had no sin. Yet he was glad to depend on the Father for everything.

4:7 Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

Our status as a child of God and our inheritance are all tied up together. One depends on the other. If we are happy to be God’s child and to call him “Abba”, we have access to our entire inheritance, not only forgiveness of sins in this life and life eternal in the next but also many other blessings right now and in the future.

4:8 Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.

Paul says that when people do not yet know the true God, they are in bondage to other things. People have to have a god of some kind even if that god is a bad god. This has been amply proven by missionary studies of all the peoples of the world. We will worship something. It is human nature. We may express that worship in many

²² John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God; The Holy Spirit And The Christian Mission*, London, SCM Press, 1972, 160

Ultimate Freedom

different ways, but all people, primitive or educated, will find something to worship. And the worship of any other thing or being other than the Living God will put us into bondage. All other gods are cruel gods. They have no love for us for they are merely idols. They are not gods at all.

4:9 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?

Right here Paul clears up a subject which has been an object of debate at many times and in many places. Who finds whom? Do we find God or does he find us? Paul starts by saying that we find God. But then he says, “rather” it is God that finds us. All of our decisions are made within the boundaries of God’s decisions. We decide. We feel like we have decided. But God has already decided for us and set things up so that we can decide for him. Paul calls the law, living by the rule book and the like, “weak and worthless.” They are “elemental” parts of the natural world like dirt and stones. And if we dedicate ourselves to them, we will be enslaved all over again. The battle against legalism over and against relationship is fought over and over again. But it is worth fighting for our liberty. If a great patriot can say, “give me liberty or give me death”, about natural or earthly liberty, how much more important is true and eternal spiritual liberty?

What are some of the ways that the Galatians were returning to the bondage of the law?

4:10 Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.

They were observing special holidays and seasons, esteeming one day as more holy than another. Paul considered this to be bondage. He believed that we had been set free of such things. If we consider one day to be

more holy, then another day has to be less holy. But for the Christian every day is a day spent in fellowship with God. So we can not pull down one day because we have raised up another. Some may say, what about the Sabbath or Sunday? According to Paul in Hebrews the real “rest” for the people of God is a spiritual state that we are supposed to live in all the time.²³ All of the “pressures” of the modern world that upset us and affect our health are not supposed to be something that we are subject to. God has a rest for us to enjoy all the time as we live in fellowship and trust with Him.

4:11 I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.

4:12 Brethren, I beseech you, be as I [am]; for I [am] as ye [are]: ye have not injured me at all.

Paul’s paternal feelings begin to show here. He is wondering if they ever really heard his message of grace in the first place. The tendency of people to return to the law from the freedom that they have in Christ is so common place, it is not unusual for even Paul to wonder if the message was heard in the first place. It is probably one of the biggest pitfalls for the Christian of every age; bigger even than the pitfall of living for the flesh and calling it freedom in Christ. It is possible to abuse our freedoms in Christ, but if we truly have relationship with God, we will grieve when we grieve Him. Legalism continues to be a temptation because it tells us that we can contribute something to our own righteousness and that spares our pride. Paul begs them to be in agreement with him. He reminds them that he lived with them as one of them. He reminds them of how they loved him and cared for him. He

²³ Heb 4:9-10 There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.

Ultimate Freedom

is “pulling out all the stops” in an effort to pull them back over to his side. Like any good parent he is willing to try anything for the benefit of his children. His pride does not get in his way.

4:13 Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first.

4:14 And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, [even] as Christ Jesus.

4:15 Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if [it had been] possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.

Paul had evidently not been in the best of health when he first came to know the Galatians. He reminds them not only of his love for them but of their love for him. They had accepted him with his health problem while he was with them. Some think that this passage indicates that Paul’s “thorn in the flesh”²⁴ or physical infirmity had something to do with his eyes. Perhaps he had a vision problem, and perhaps this particular problem gave him an unpleasant appearance. He reminds the Galatians that they would have given him their own eyes if that would have helped. We can not be sure if this is a reference to Paul’s infirmity, but it is a good possibility. It does remind us of Paul’s “thorn in the flesh.” We must remember that this thorn of Paul’s is not a license to throw out God’s will for us to be in good health.²⁵ God insisted that Paul keep this affliction because of the “abundance of revelation” that he

²⁴ 2Co 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

²⁵ 3Jo 1:2 Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. {wish: or, pray}

had received. It was put there to keep him humble. When someone tells me that they have a “thorn” like Paul’s, I always want to ask them about the great revelations and visions that they have had.

4:16 Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?

This is a wonderful question. Telling someone the truth may irritate them. It may even make them very angry. Often the truth hurts and offends. But it is not the nature of an enemy to tell someone the truth. It takes a true friend to tell another the truth knowing that this may result in rejection. In this case telling them the truth was for their own best good in a very important area, perhaps the most important of their lives.

4:17 They zealously affect you, [but] not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them.

Here is an excellent motive for someone to want to impose legalism on someone else. It is a selfish and evil motive. It is a political play. The legalists, the Pharisees, want to separate the Galatians from Paul (and Paul would add, from God.) If they can do this, then the Galatians will be in constant need of the legalists. They will be in need because once you start walking by rules there is always a need for more and more new rules to clarify the old rules. This keeps them dependent on the legalists. This makes the legalists feel important and needed. This keeps the Galatians, or anyone else in that position in bondage. This is the worst thing that a parent can see their beloved children caught up in.

4:18 But [it is] good to be zealously affected always in [a] good [thing], and not only when I am present with you.

Ultimate Freedom

It is always good to have people seeking after you if there is a good reason for it. Paul means to say that he is not jealous in any wrongful way. He wants his children to be sought after. They could be sought after because others see that they have a great treasure in Christ that people are hungry for. Paul does not want them to be sought after only by him. He wants them to be sought after by many. This is what often happens to people who have a joy and a peace about them that comes from their relationship with God.

4:19 My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you,

Here the concept of childbearing is applied. Often we have been blessed at Christmas time when we hear the virgin Mary saying, “be it done unto me according to thy will.”²⁶ Mary submitted to the Holy Spirit to be made pregnant with the Christ child. He grew in her like any baby grows in its mother womb for nine months. Then he was born into the world. This same process has to be completed in every Christian. In the Christian it is a spiritual process. The Holy Spirit conceives Jesus again in our hearts. He grows in us until he is fully formed. Instead of being born by coming out of us he continues to live in us by the Holy Spirit and gives us all the victories that we need in life. Paul sees here that although Christ had been conceived in these people, he was not yet fully formed or they would not want to return to legalism as a way of life. They would not want to give up the magnificent freedom that they have in Christ.

4:20 I desire to be present with you now, and to change my

²⁶ Lk 1:38 And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

voice; for I stand in doubt of you.

Paul does not like to have to speak to them harshly but it is for their own good. Next he brings up a very poignant illustration from the Old Testament, from the law, or the Torah, itself.²⁷

4:21 Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?

4:22 For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman.

4:23 But he [who was] of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman [was] by promise.

For many many years Abraham and Sarah could not have any children of their own. God had promised them that they would have many descendents. Still, they grew older and older, past the child-bearing age for Sarah. They had both heard God promise them children. God had even changed their names from Abram to Abraham and from Sarai to Sarah. Abraham means “the father of many nations” and Sarah means “princess” which also indicated that she would be the mother of a great line.²⁸ As time went on and as they became more and more desperate, Sarah struck on a plan that would seem strange to us today but which was not that strange in their day. Sarah had a servant, a slave actually, (Abraham was a very well-to-do man), named Hagar. Sarah told Abraham that she wanted him to make Hagar pregnant so that they could have a baby by proxy, so to speak. Since Hagar belonged to Sarah, then her baby would also belong to Sarah and she could raise the child as her own. Abraham went along with this and a boy

²⁷ The Jewish “Torah” is our Genesis through Deuteronomy.

²⁸ Ge 17:15 And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah [shall] her name [be]. {Sarah: that is Princess}

Ultimate Freedom

was born. His name was Ishmael. As the boy grew, Hagar, his mother, began to act more and more superior around Sarah because she was able to have a baby and Sarah was not. Eventually, Sarah demanded that Abraham throw Hagar and Ishmael out of the camp which Abraham did. God heard the child crying in the desert and sent help and promised to make a great nation of him also.²⁹ When Abraham and Sarah finally have a son, Isaac, in their old age, God's promise is on its way to fulfillment. In the natural Abraham is the father of the Jewish nation. In the spiritual he is the father of all who believe since he was the first true believer. Even the father of faith could have a lapse in his faith. God is forgiving when we have lapses even though he is pleased when we persevere in our believing. However, when important men make mistakes, they often have harsh and far reaching consequences. Abraham was the father of the Jews through Isaac but he was also the father of the Arab peoples through Ishmael. And they are violent enemies even today.

4:24 Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.

4:25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.

4:26 But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.

4:27 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 an husband.

²⁹ Ge 17:20 And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation.

4:28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.

Paul uses this true story to make a point. He says that Israel under the law is like Hagar's children. They are people who are in slavery. It is not the same covenant that God has with the children of faith. We can not be the children of promise if we choose bondage, the bondage of the law, the bondage of legalism, and obeying rules instead of nurturing a relationship with the living God.

4:29 But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him [that was born] after the Spirit, even so [it is] now.

There is a natural enmity between those who would walk according to grace and those who would walk after the law. Those who prefer the rulebook will not treat those who want grace nicely. They look at them as rule breakers. Since the legalists do not have a relationship with God of their own, they are jealous of anyone who claims to have such a relationship. The legalists will always be looking for a way to condemn those who are free on "a technicality." Hagar and Ishmael treated Sarah and Isaac spitefully. So the father, Abraham, threw Hagar and her son out. Paul says that is what the children of promise, the free children should do. They should reject the position of the legalists. It is not necessary for a Christian to reject the legalists themselves, only what they believe in. The legalists, the Pharisees, treated Jesus and the disciples badly. Jesus did not go easy on them. He called them "hypocrites" and "blind guides."³⁰ Pharisees or legalists are always hard on people. It is not a casual thing to call a person a "Pharisee." I do not use the word as a curse word. A Pharisee was

³⁰ Mt 15:7 [Ye] hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you. And other places in the gospels.

Ultimate Freedom

simply a very devout and religious man who believed that only God could deliver his people from their oppressors. In New Testament times it was the Roman Empire. However, the Pharisee also believed equally as strongly that God would not help his people unless they first “got their act together.” The Pharisee believed that the Jews should embark on a strenuous course of self improvement that would make them good enough to warrant God’s help. That is why they had so many rules. They were hard on every one. They can always find or create another rule to prove people wrong and make them feel unworthy.

Rule keepers are hard on men but they are especially hard on women. They are especially good at finding another rule to condemn women. Sometimes these Rule Keepers are women themselves. A lot of the time they are males. The Pharisees brought to Jesus the woman caught in the act of adultery.³¹ Now any adult can tell you that it takes two to commit adultery. Where was the man? They let him go. But Jesus did not condemn the woman. He let her go and drove away her accusers. He did tell her to sin no more for her own good. Jesus is the liberator of women. This is little understood even these days. Many do not want women to become the person that they can become. Jesus does. Jesus talked to the Samaritan woman.³² Jewish men of his day did not do that. Jesus’ prejudice against the Syro-Phoenician woman was not because he was a man but because he was a Jew but he soon overcame that as well.³³ Paul’s instructions suppressing women in his other epistles was for the people of that time and place not for all times and all places.³⁴

³¹ Joh 8:3 And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst,

³² John 4:6-26.

³³ Mark 7:26

³⁴ Those who would deny women equality in the church are quick to say that slavery was an institution of Biblical times which we have

Rule keepers do not understand relationship with God.³⁵ Jesus put down the objections of three prominent groups in his day: the Herodians, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees. The Herodians were the political activists; they were easy to answer. “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s.” The Sadducees did not know or believe the scripture and so they were easy to dispense with. The Pharisees did know the scriptures but they did not know God. They did not understand how the Messiah could be David’s descendent and his Lord at the same time. David knew that there was another person in the Godhead.³⁶ He called this person, my Lord, and distinguished him from Yahweh or the LORD, as the English Bibles print it out. A thousand years later this Lord of David’s would become his descendent through the Incarnation of the Son as Jesus of Nazareth. David knew this because of his relationship with God. The Pharisees of

done well to eliminate. But slavery is not condemned in the New Testament. Only a slave is encouraged to be a good servant and the master is encouraged to be a good master. Yet we acknowledge that it is an improvement not to have slavery. Yet we would keep women under the same restrictions as they were in New Testament times. Some would say that we should either restore slavery or free women if we are to be consistent. Ephesians 6: 5-9 Servants, be obedient to them that are [your] masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether [he be] bond or free. And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.

³⁵ Lu 20:41- 42,44. And he said unto them, How say they that Christ is David's son? And David himself saith in the book of Psalms, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, . . . David therefore calleth him Lord, how is he then his son?

³⁶ Ps 110:1 A Psalm of David. The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

Ultimate Freedom

Jesus' day had no relationship with God like David did, so they were stumped.

People still have many oppressors, some natural and many spiritual. God will deliver us when we believe. We do not have to qualify in any other way first. We can change later with God's help by the Holy Spirit. We do this to please God not to convince him to help us. People who are hard on people do not know God. They may know about him but they do not know him.

It is not correct to believe that we should seek God's help so that he will help us to be good so that he can love us more. God does not want us to seek good. No, he does not. He wants us to seek God. Then we will have it all, God and goodness. A wrong focus can spoil the entire endeavor.

4:30 Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.

4:31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

We are not children of the slave. We are children of the free through faith and the grace of God. "The glorious liberty of the children of God."³⁷

³⁷ Ro 8:21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

CHAPTER 5

Simply put, Christ has set us free so that we can be free. That was the entire reason. Freedom is not only a way to be able to do other things but it is also a blessing in and of itself.

5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

Since Jesus has already done what is necessary to set us free and the Holy Spirit has willingly applied this to the Christian's life, we can only get back into slavery to the rulebook if we choose to do so. Paul is pleading with the Galatians not to volunteer to go back to the bondage of the law. A yoke is a heavy collar with two sides in it. It was used to attach two oxen together at the neck so that they could pull a wagon. It is usually made out of wood. Paul calls being subject to the law a "yoke of bondage." It puts us into slavery. There is another yoke spoken of in the Bible. This is the yoke of Jesus. Jesus said, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."³⁸ In this yoke Jesus is offering to get into the other side with us. He is offering us the chance to exchange a hard yoke for an easy yoke. It is not a matter of having no yoke at all. As human beings we have a need to be yoked or joined to something. We do not need to be alone. There is something that Jesus can provide that no other person can help us with. So he is offering to be yoked with us. But this is not a yoke of bondage. It is a yoke of freedom. It is freedom

³⁸ Matthew 11:28-30.

Ultimate Freedom

because, as Jesus tells us, his yoke is easy and his burden is light. It is easy and light because he is pulling with us. No matter what weights we have to pull in life if we have Jesus, he is pulling with us. And he is much stronger than we are, that is what makes our yoke easier and our burden lighter.

A heavy burden to pull will not only exhaust us but it will cause the yoke to chafe and hurt our neck. With Jesus in the other side he does most of the pulling. Also, being yoked to Jesus causes us to get to know him better. We learn what kind of a person he is. We learn because where ever we go and no matter what chores we have to do, he is right there beside us pulling with us. We learn that he has a soft heart for us and that he does not make harsh demands on us like the law does. We learn that he loves us and wants to help us. He deals with us gently and often acts like our servant instead of our Lord. If he is to be Lord of our lives, we have to make him Lord because he will not bully us into it. We choose to make him Lord when we see how loving and caring he really is. We can only learn these things by being yoked to Jesus. But we have to choose the yoke of Jesus. We have to reject the yoke of the law. Again, it is rejecting the rulebook and choosing the relationship. In the old days when a farmer wanted to train a young ox to pull, he would yoke it to an older more experienced one. That way the young one would learn how to pull. At first he would jump around and try to do it his own way. But after a time he would settle down and follow the more experienced ox. This made the pulling much easier because the older one knew how to pull. When oxen pull a wagon, they lean against each other to pull. This makes them both stronger in the pulling. As we learn to pull with Jesus, we can lean against him and the pulling gets much easier.

5:2 Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised,

Christ shall profit you nothing.

The Old Testament sign of receiving the yoke of the bondage of the law was circumcision. In this a boy would have the skin on the front of his penis cut away to signify that he was under the law. Paul is telling them that they should not submit to this as it was, in effect, denying the benefits of the gospel of forgiveness which is offered to us in Christ. Paul is very firm on this subject.

5:3 For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.

Again Paul makes the point that if you try to win God's favor by obeying the law, you are obligated to keep the whole law. You can not just pick the parts of the law that you want to obey. You must obey it all and at all times for your entire life. This is something that no one is capable of doing. It ends only in frustration and failure.

5:4 Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

For those who choose to seek favor with God by obeying the law, they are separated from Jesus. It is like being cut away with a knife. It is like falling from a high place of favor into the gutter. There is no compromise on this with Paul and Paul was taught the gospel personally by Jesus. It would be a good thing to remind us at this point that Paul is not telling us that we should behave badly, only that we should seek to change through our relationship with Jesus and not by trying to be good by obeying the rules.

5:5 For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.

Ultimate Freedom

5:6 For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

We will get everything that we need from God in only one way. We do not get what we need by any ‘self improvement’ methods. We get what we need from God, all the strength and help and healing and eternal life, by believing in the promises that God has made to us. These promises are all in the Bible. But even in believing we can not do that alone. The Holy Spirit helps us to believe. He provides us with the ability to believe. We can do everything that we can to believe but we must also pray with the man in the Bible “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.”³⁹ And when we ask for this help, the Holy Spirit is able and willing to give it to us. In all of this believing love is the big key. We want to believe because we love God. The Holy Spirit helps us, actually enables us, to believe because He loves us. God our Father loves us. God the Son, the Lord Jesus, loves us. The Father and the Son love each other and the Holy Spirit enables us to share in that love.⁴⁰ When we concentrate on love instead of on faith, we find ourselves believing. You see, it is easier to turn your eyes toward love because in love there is always another person involved. It is hard to believe when we are thinking about believing. But when we love God and let him love us, it is really easy to believe his promises. And this makes us love other people more as well.

5:7 Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?

Paul says that someone must have said something that got the Galatians off the track. He knew that someone

³⁹ Mr 9:24 And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.

⁴⁰ Augustine

had been teaching them bad things which were leading them away from the truth. Unfortunately, in life there is often someone who is teaching us the wrong things. The worst thing we can be taught is that we must win God's favor by keeping the rules. We already have his favor. All we have to do is accept it. It is free because Jesus paid the price on the cross. And we must never try to earn God's favor in another way; that is an insult to Jesus.

5:8 This persuasion [cometh] not of him that calleth you.

This wrong teaching does not come from God. It is God that attracts us by the power of the Holy Spirit and he never tells us wrong things.

5:9 A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.

Leaven is something that a baker puts in the dough to make it rise. The leaven actually ferments in the dough and creates a gas which causes the bread to rise so that it will not be thick and hard. The thing about leaven is that once it is put in, you can not find it in the dough and it effects the whole lump of dough and not just a part of the dough. Paul calls this thing that he is fighting against for the Galatians, this legalism, a leaven. He says that once it gets into their lives, into their thinking, that it will change their whole life. And it certainly does. When we are convinced that we must earn God's favor by keeping rules, it changes the way we think about ourselves and everyone else. We are constantly thinking of how we can be good enough. And we are constantly sorry because we can not be good enough for God or for ourselves or for anyone else. It effects everything that we try to do. And the actual leaven, the legalism, hides way down deep inside ourselves. If we think that God does not approve of us, we soon get to thinking that no one else does. This is why people who are

Ultimate Freedom

grown and often have grown old are still trying to gain the approval of their parents or teachers or other important people in their lives. And they can never seem to get it right. All our relationships are built on our relationship with God. This is why Paul says that a little leaven leavens the whole lump. Furthermore, when we actually think that we can not measure up to be accepted by God, we actually start acting different and this attitude can be seen in our lives. We must be convinced that we are loved and accepted by God to live a healthy life. God gives this to us as a free gift in Jesus.

5:10 I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be.

Paul tells them that deep down he is sure that they will make the right decision and choose grace and faith over the law. Very often deep down inside ourselves we are aware that there must be a better way than the law but we have to get quiet and consider the good news that we have heard from God. Paul is also sure that whoever it is that is trying to bring them back into bondage under the law will be judged by God and that even if Paul does not know this person's name, God does and God is capable of finding this person and passing judgment on him.

5:11 And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased.

Paul reasons that if he were still preaching legalism, then the Jews would not be persecuting him because legalism is their religion. Then he speaks of "the stumbling block of the cross." A stumbling block, of course, is something that is placed in a path to cause people to

stumble and perhaps even fall. The cross of Jesus Christ was intended to be a stumbling block to the human mind. It makes no sense to the natural human mind for the Son of God to be so cruelly crucified. When governor Pilate put the sign over the cross that said “The King Of The Jews,” he was intentionally ridiculing the Jews. Pilate was saying to these troublesome Jews that Rome had sent him to govern and that their king was a man who was crucified like a common criminal. This was an insult to the Jews. This is still an insult to anyone who does not understand God’s wonderful plan for salvation. Not only did Jesus pay the price for our sins, but when he was raised from the dead, it was proven that he was indeed not a criminal but God himself. The natural mind stumbles over this. The mind that is renewed by the Holy Spirit understands that it is the wonderful plan of God.

5:12 I would they were even cut off which trouble you.

Now this is a very strong statement. Paul wishes that those who are teaching legalism to the Galatians would hurt themselves like when a person is badly cut up with a knife. Paul is really angry about this. And, in the end, legalists actually do just that in a spiritual and emotional way. They hurt themselves by insisting that we human beings can actually make ourselves acceptable to God by our own efforts. They do not see the wonderful free gift that Jesus gives to us. If they do not see it, they can not accept it.

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

We are sought out by God so that we might be free. In the power of the Holy Spirit we are free to choose to live

Ultimate Freedom

in a way that is pleasing to God and satisfying to ourselves and to others. But we can misuse this freedom and continue to sin because we are free to do so. But Paul reminds us not to choose to sin but to use our freedom to choose to help one another in love. Some who are uncomfortable with free grace say that if we are really free, then we will choose to do the wrong things. This is true if we have no relationship with God. But if we talk to God and really get to know him, we will want to do the right things and not the wrong things. Those who believe that we can not be free because we will choose the wrong things have no confidence in the relationship that we can have with God.

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

Actually to obey the whole law we do not even have to think about the rules. All we have to do is to love our neighbor as our self. There are two keys in this. First, we have to love our self. To love our selves is not selfish. Most people that hate other people do not value themselves very highly. This is because they have not heard God tell them in their hearts that He loves them. When we know that we are loved by God, we have a higher regard for ourselves. People that are always trying to look good by putting others down actually have a great need to be accepted. When we know that we are accepted by God, we can accept ourselves and then we can do the second thing which is to love others. This really works. It is the only way to go. If we read God's word in places like John 3:16 and then take time to talk to God privately, then we can really understand and accept that he loves us. The rest will take care of itself.

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

5:16 [This] I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not

fulfil the lust of the flesh.

5:17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

There is a little war going on inside every Christian. This war is between the Holy Spirit and that natural selfish part of us that Paul calls the “flesh.” He is not talking here about the body. The body is neutral in this battle. The flesh is a part of our soul that is in rebellion against God. They both want to win, the flesh and the Spirit. Even when we want to do the loving thing, this flesh fights and interferes. It is important for the Spirit to win inside us. The Spirit is not only capable of doing this but he has had a lot of experience winning inside Christians for many centuries. He started winning inside the person of Jesus Himself when he was here. When Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted and to win, it was the Holy Spirit that worked with him to defeat all temptation. There are only three areas that people can be tempted in. These areas are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.⁴¹ Adam and Eve were tempted in the same three areas and lost the battle.⁴² Jesus was tempted in the same three areas and won not only for himself but for us as well.⁴³ Even though these three areas have many variations, it is still always the same three areas that we are tempted in. The devil knows about these areas very well and he seeks to find more and more ways to tempt us in them. We have the assurance

⁴¹ 1Jo 2:16 For all that [is] in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

⁴² Ge 3:6 And when the woman saw that the tree [was] good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

⁴³ Luke 4:1-13.

Ultimate Freedom

from scripture that God will help us to defeat these temptations.⁴⁴ And even if we lose some battles in the short run, we should not give up on winning. God does not give up on us and we should not give up on ourselves. The lust of the flesh concerns basic desires; this can be a desire for too much food or for drugs or it can be sexual desire run amok. The lust of the eyes concerns things that we see and begin to want; sometimes we want these things too much. This lust of the eyes often works with the lust of the flesh to provide a “double wammy.” The pride of life concerns deeper matters of the ego and pride. It can cause us to elevate ourselves above others and cause us to want things for the sheer reason of status or superiority. Eve saw that the forbidden fruit was good for food, was pleasant to the eyes and was desired to make one wise; so she wanted it. Coupled with this appeal of this fruit was the devil’s lie that if she ate it, she would be equal to God and that God’s real reason for forbidding it was because he was selfish and did not want to have any equals. Eating this fruit did not make Adam and Eve equal to God. Nothing can ever do that. And it did not make them wise; it only gave them a responsibility for their own lives that they could not handle and did not need. They had true happiness and blessings merely by obeying God in the garden.

Jesus was driven into the wilderness to be tempted just after he was filled with the Spirit. Jesus was tempted in the same three ways and he won on every count. He refused to turn the stones into bread even though he was very hungry after a 40 day fast. After 40 days a healthy person begins to live off of their own blood. Jesus turned down all the kingdoms of the world that he saw by supernatural sight and denied the lust of the eyes as well. Finally, Jesus

⁴⁴ 1Co 10:13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

refused to throw himself off of the temple so that the angels could cause him to float gracefully to the ground and he would be proclaimed Messiah because this was not God's way for him to gain the Messiahship. So the devil left him after he defeated him in temptation. Now the Holy Spirit who empowered Jesus in his temptation is also available to help us to win in the same ways. If something appeals too much to our flesh or to our eyes or to our pride, we can learn to recognize this as wrong and call on the Holy Spirit to help us to win against the temptation.

5:18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

Again Paul contrasts the law and the Spirit. The proof that a person is not under the law, that he or she is not trying to gain God's favor or to win against temptation by obeying rules is that that person is being led by the Holy Spirit in a vital relationship with God himself. It is not a matter of having the right doctrine. It is solely a matter of being led by the Holy Spirit experientially by the day and by the hour. It is wonderful that we can be led by God himself in this way.

*5:19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are [these]; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,
5:20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,
5:21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told [you] in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*

Paul lists here the things that the flesh does when it is left on its own without the help of the Holy Spirit. The flesh acts in these ways in unbelievers and in believers who are not being led by the Holy Spirit. Most of this awful list

Ultimate Freedom

are fairly easy to understand. Paul says that they are “evident.” This means that they are easy to identify in a person’s behavior. They include all sorts of bad morals and displays of bad temper. They also include breaking up into warring groups and just acting selfishly and irresponsible. Sorcery or witchcraft is an interesting item on this list. Some might think that witchcraft was an act of the devil through a person and it certainly is. But it takes the cooperation of the flesh to enter into such an agreement with the devil. Paul makes it clear that those who operate in the works of the flesh will not receive the things that God has for his children. The opposite of the works of the flesh are the fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is important to understand that the things that the flesh does are “works,” things done by the energy and will of the fallen nature. On the other hand the things that we do that are empowered and enabled by the Holy Spirit are not referred to as “works.” These things are “fruits.” These good things are actually the result of our cultivated relationship with God. They grow in us as living things. They do not require strenuous effort. They are as natural to the thriving Christian as any fruit is to the tree it is made to grow upon. As long as we are planted in the soil of God’s love and watered by the water of the Holy Spirit and walk in His light, we can produce these fruits in our lives.

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

There is such a thing as “wax fruit.” This fruit may look like the real thing but it will not nourish. It has no real taste. Wax fruit is produced by self effort and hypocrisy, pretending to be something that you are not. Real fruit is produced by relationship. It does not matter which version of the Bible you use to memorize this short list of the nine

fruits of the Spirit. But it is advisable that you stick to one version so that you do not get confused as each version changes the wording somewhat. The fruit of the spirit is like the personality traits of Jesus. The last eight really come forth from or are derived from the first one which is the love of God. The Greek word for the love of God is “Agape.” This love is not like any other kind of love. This love loves even when it is a known fact that it will be rejected.⁴⁵ Other kinds of love do not work like this. They do not keep loving unless that love is returned. Romantic love or “Eros” requires that love be returned by the other or it stops loving. Brotherly love or “Phileao” is the same way. But the love of God just keeps on loving. We can not do this by our own effort. We have to depend on God to enable us to love like he has loved us.

All the other fruits follow from love. Joy is a wonderful thing. The joy that comes from the Holy Spirit is not dependent on circumstances. Happiness is dependent on circumstances. Happiness is dependent on everything “going your way.” Jesus endured the cross despising the shame for the joy that was set before him.⁴⁶ Joy comes from love. Joyfulness should be one of the hallmarks of the Christian life. It is communicated to us supernaturally by the Holy Spirit and it is infectious. The Greek word for joy is derived from the same word as the Greek word for grace. It is my opinion that we receive the most joy when we meditate on the fact that we are eternally accepted by God without conditions. This makes me aware of the fact that God has chosen me forever for himself. This makes me joyful. No matter how things are going for you now, you can know that you have God’s eternal free favor, his grace.

⁴⁵ 1Jo 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

⁴⁶ Heb 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Ultimate Freedom

Joy is the inevitable result. Sometimes the joy of the Lord can make people appear to be drunk.⁴⁷ The joy of God can give you strength to keep going.

The peace of God does not depend on circumstances either. The peace of God goes beyond understanding.⁴⁸ The Greek word for peace has the strong implication of wholeness. To be whole inside means that you are not divided into many parts. You are not trying to go in several directions at the same time. You are not fractured or broken up inside. It is true that your will should be yielded to God but this is not an unhealthy brokenness; it is a free choice. When we choose God above all else,⁴⁹ we are made whole inside. Then we have God's peace and circumstances can not destroy us anymore.

Patience, as the word is rendered in this version, is not a natural attribute. Some people are by nature more patient than others. The fruit of patience is supernaturally grown in or "on" the believer like all the other fruits. This patience requires a dependency on God and a confidence that God will neither be early or late in helping us but that he will always be exactly on time as we trust him. A "bite-your-tongue" sort of patience is not a fruit of the Spirit. It is a "wax fruit." It may look good on the outside but inside it

⁴⁷ Ac 2:15 For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.

And Eph 5:18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

⁴⁸ Php 4:7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

⁴⁹ Jos 24:15 And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

And Mt 6:24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

And Jas 1:8 A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

is not really there. It takes a lot of trusting in God to grow the fruit of patience.

The word rendered “kindness” here is sometimes rendered “gentleness” in other translations. In the Greek it is related to the word “anointed” which actually is the name of the Christ or the Messiah. To be anointed in the Old Testament was to have a holy oil poured over you. The priests and kings were anointed for their jobs. As Christians we are also anointed with the holy oil of the Holy Spirit. This oil should make us a comfort to others as the Holy Spirit himself is called the Comforter. This is more than a natural kindness. This kindness has a healing virtue in it. It is a sign of the power of the Holy Spirit in the church and the lives of individual believers.

There is one thing about the word “goodness” as it refers to a fruit of the Spirit here. In the Greek dictionary it says that it is a root word. In other words, the word for goodness is not derived from another word like so many words are. It is a basic word. It represents a very profound and basic truth. To be good is to be Godlike. The very word god in the English language is just the word good with one “o” removed. To be good is to be like God. Most everyone has some idea what it means to be good. Jesus would not let people call him good if they were not willing to admit that he was God as well.⁵⁰ Certainly this fruit like the others can not be produced by natural means. It takes the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives and our yielding to him to produce it.

Faith is a fruit of the Spirit which is also listed as a gift in I Corinthians. It is both a fruit and a gift.⁵¹ But there is a difference in the way that faith comes as a gift and the way that it comes as a fruit. This is true of all the gifts and

⁵⁰ Mr 10:18 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.

⁵¹ 1Co 12:9 To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit.

Ultimate Freedom

the fruits. When we receive a gift, it is ours from the moment we receive it. But we do not have any thing invested in a gift. It is exactly that, a gift. God gives us faith as a gift because we would not even be able to get started with God without the gift of faith. But the fruit of faith is something which grows in us as it is nourished and watered by the Holy Spirit. In fact the fruit of faith is a cooperative venture between God and each of us. We have something invested in this kind of faith. Both kinds of faith, the gift and the fruit, actually do the same thing. They enable us to believe God for his promises and to actually receive them and enjoy them for ourselves and for others. But the fruit of faith is ours always and we grow it in cooperation with God in relationship. Eventually the fruit of faith can entirely replace the gift of faith in our lives.⁵²

Gentleness implies teachability. It does not imply weakness. The mighty ox is teachable but he is not weak. The ox is a good example of a gentle being. God is gentle with us. Jesus is gentle; he said that he was.⁵³ I once watched a team of two mighty oxen at Colonial Williamsburg pull a wagon with over a dozen people in it. They were mighty and they moved at the slightest touch of the stick used by the driver. These oxen were extremely teachable. They pull together to accomplish their task. There was never a yoke made for just one. When we have on the yoke of Jesus, he is always in the other side helping us to pull. We can also help one another pull the loads of life. This fruit is another great one to have.

Self-control replaces any need for the law. It is exactly that. It is control of one's self. There are within

⁵² Ro 12:3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

⁵³ Mt 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

each of us many tendencies that are not gracious or pleasing to God. We can not help that they are there. Everyone is born in sin and has these tendencies. The fruit of the Spirit called self-control enables us to live in such a way that these tendencies are not in control.⁵⁴ In the resurrection we will not have to contend with these tendencies. But now in this life we do. Temptation is not sin. Jesus was tempted but he did not sin. We can resist temptation and not give in to these tendencies because the Holy Spirit grows the fruit of self-control in us.

There is no law against the fruits of the Spirit. God would never make any law against them. For one reason they are part and parcel of God's own nature as supremely illustrated in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. For another reason these fruits actually fulfill every instruction of the law and they come not from a slavish observance of rules but from profound inward change based on a relationship with God. Fruit is not hard to grow for a tree. When we are planted in God, we are naturally trees for God. If we want to concentrate on something, if we want to put effort into something, then that concentration and effort should be in advancing our relationship with the living God.

5:24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

There is only one way to get rid of the flesh. It has to be crucified. It has to be killed. Remember here, that we are not talking about the body but about the carnal nature that works against God in our lives. Jesus took the flesh and the body to the cross. Because he was crucified, our flesh, our carnal nature, can also be put to death. We do this by

⁵⁴ Ro 6:12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.

Ultimate Freedom

identifying with Christ. When we pray and give our natural passions and desires which are listed under the works of the flesh above to Jesus to be crucified, then the Holy Spirit applies the death of Jesus to our natural passions and desires and raises us to new life in the Spirit with him. This is not merely a doctrinal fact. This actually works in our everyday lives. It is the result of a life lived in relationship with God in the power of the Holy Spirit. Because Jesus did it, we can do it too.

5:25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

The emphasis here is on daily application. When we walk, we place one foot in front of the other. We do not complete a trip in a few steps but it takes many steps each taken one step at a time. Every time we find ourselves slipping back into the natural and performing the works of the flesh, we have to return to Christ and ask for help in adjusting our walk. This does not have to be a chore. Actually, we should enjoy the fellowship of our Good Friend. As this fellowship becomes a habit, the fruit of the Spirit gradually overcomes the works of the flesh and we find ourselves walking in the Spirit without thinking about it or concentrating on it very much. But it is always done one step at a time step after step after step. And it works! Often we do not realize how well we are doing except for an occasional glance backwards when it suddenly dawns on us that we have not committed a particular work of the flesh for some time now.

5:26 Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

As a result we do not put one another down. It is possible for the Christian to put another down just because the other does not live up to Christian expectations.

Someone who walks in the fruit of the Spirit does not do this. With the fruit of the Spirit we are only concerned about helping our brothers and sisters to be good producers of this fruit. This fruit is not only for the benefit of others, and it is certainly nicer to be around fruitful people, but it is also for our own blessing and benefit. If we know we are loved by God, we will be more loving. If we have joy in our hearts we will give joy to others. As a matter of fact, we can not give anything we do not have. To try to give love or joy or any other fruit of the Spirit without having it is futile. We must first have it and enjoy it ourselves before we can share it. It is a subtle and dangerous error to presume that we must give what we do not have. Trying to give what you do not have is exhausting and useless. To be selfless is to give all that you can give all the while knowing that God will more than replenish your supply. God never runs out of his ability to produce fruit for us or in us.

Ultimate Freedom

CHAPTER 6

At the end of the last chapter Paul began to set up his teaching in this chapter. Here he encourages us to help a brother or sister that has fallen to get back up and try again.

6:1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

We are reminded that the primary criteria for spirituality is a forgiving and helpful attitude. Instead of crying “guilty” when we find that a brother or a sister has sinned, we should help them to recover their sense of self respect and self worth. Usually for a sincere believer there is nothing that we can say that could be harsher than what the person who has made a mistake is telling himself. Only a self-righteous person tries to defend wrong actions. A sincere Christian will feel bad enough about his sin and needs the other Christians to help him in the process of repentance and restoration. We are also reminded that the next time someone slips up it may be yourself and then you will want all the understanding and help that you can get. The Christian life is not a life of perfection; it is a life of mistakes that hopefully get fewer in number and longer in between as we seek to grow in the Lord.

6:2 Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

6:3 For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

6:4 But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.

6:5 For every man shall bear his own burden.

Ultimate Freedom

Verses 2 and 5 here are two sides of the same coin. There is a place to bear your own burden or load and there is a place to help one another to bear burdens. These burdens can be some individual responsibility or problem or they can merely be the burdens that we all have to bear at one time or another in life. Balance is the key to the Christian walk. Sometimes a person will come into the church that seems to want everyone else to carry them. This is alright for a time. Perhaps this person has just experienced a great loss. Then he or she needs the others in the body of Christ to help them and to carry them like they carried the man to Jesus to be healed and lowered him through a hole in the roof.⁵⁵ But sometimes a person expects to be carried by his or her fellow believers and is not willing to carry his proper share of the burden. It is a mark of maturity to be willing to carry your fair share of the burdens in life and also to be willing to let the brethren help in times of particular need. Then again, there are certain things that some people are not capable of doing. In these cases the others should fill in the gap and do for them what they can not do for themselves. One of the hallmarks of the early church was that it was said of them that they “loved one another.”

Verses 3 and 4 between the balancing extremes of verses 2 and 5 tell us how to walk in this balance. On the one hand we are told not to think of ourselves too highly. This is the sin of pride. And yet we are also told to really consider how we are doing and to try very hard to properly evaluate our actions and our Christian walk so that we will not make the opposite error of having a false humility. Above all, we are told to compare our actions and attitudes to our own actions and attitudes to see if we are improving and not to try to make ourselves feel better or worse by

⁵⁵ Mr 2:4 And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay.

comparing our lives to others. Such comparisons are very dangerous. Jesus is the one who is the judge and when we judge one another, we are often wrong.⁵⁶

6:6 Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.

This verse is probably one of the primary verses for the practice of the paid clergy. Often Paul worked at his craft as a tent maker while he preached and disciplined his followers. He did this so that they would know that he was not ministering to them just for the money. But here he is telling us that it is a good thing to pay those who study the Word of God all the time and then teach it to others. There is no one right way. A “tent making” or bi-vocational ministry has much to recommend it. A bi-vocational minister will be less likely to be tempted to tell people what they want to hear because his income is not dependent on their offerings. On the other hand, a full-time minister of the Word has less distractions in his studies and meditations. It is a matter of what is the best for each man or woman in each situation.

6:7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

6:8 For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

6:9 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

⁵⁶ Mt 7:1 Judge not, that ye be not judged. And John 21: 21-22. Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.

Ultimate Freedom

The law, or perhaps we should say, the principle of sowing and reaping always functions. We do not want to confuse a dynamic principle with the law of legalism. The law of gravity, for example, makes it necessary for something that is not supported to drop to the ground. When corn seeds are planted, they will eventually produce corn. When peas are planted, they will produce peas. When acorns are planted oak trees will eventually grow. This principle works in spiritual things as well. If we sow anger, we will reap anger. If we sow peace, we will reap peace. This is all sown and reaped in this life. Furthermore, if we sow the things of the flesh, we shall only reap them in this life and if we sow the things of the Holy Spirit, we will reap the things of the Holy Spirit and this even includes eternal life. It is sometimes easy to be deceived in this sowing and reaping principle because the results are not instantaneous but come at the proper time. Each natural seed has a normal growing time. You can read about these growing times in any book about seeds. Spiritual fruit will “come in,” as they say. The crop will grow. If it is carnal or bad fruit, it will come in and it will not be pleasant. If it is spiritual or good fruit, it will also produce in its time. Sometimes we get tired of waiting for the good fruit to grow but we are told here not to get discouraged. It will grow; it will be harvested. Sometimes we have to wait while a crop of bad fruit is cleared away in our lives so that the good crop can come in. But, once the crop is “turned around,” it is worth the wait.

6:10 As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all [men], especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

It is important to do good to everyone. But it is especially important to do good to other Christians. This is

most important to God. And when we please God, we are blessed.

6:11 Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand.

Paul would often have someone write his letters for him and then pen a brief greeting at the end in his own hand. However, in this letter it appears that he wrote the entire letter himself. Some think that Paul had someone else write for him because he had an eye problem – perhaps his “thorn in the flesh”- and could not see to write clearly. Of course, these letters would have been written on parchment with a quill pen dipped in the ink bottle. Since this issue of legalism and getting away from the grace of the Gospel was so important to Paul, he would have struggled through the writing of this letter no matter how difficult it was for him.

6:12 As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.

6:13 For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.

6:14 But 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.

6:15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

This section is a summary of the whole theme of the letter. Those who wanted the Galatians to go back to the law of Judaism just wanted things to look good in the natural area of religion. In this way they would avoid being persecuted as Paul was for the gospel of grace. Religious observances are popular both with Jews and Christians and

Ultimate Freedom

these people professed to be both. For the first few centuries of the Christian era Christianity was seen as a sect or a division of Judaism. The cross of Christ is an offense. It was the worst way for a person to be executed in Roman times and those who were killed in this manner were always considered to be the worst sort of criminals. It took true spiritual vision to be able to see that the cross of Christ was a sacrifice for the sins of the world. Paul goes on to say that these legalists who were leading the Galatians astray did not even keep the law themselves. This is a common occurrence among those who want to convert others to legalism. They want their converts to obey every rule but they are not capable of obeying the rules themselves. Jesus accused the Pharisees themselves of this.⁵⁷ The Christian's only boasting or bragging should be about the cross of Christ. This wonderful sacrifice has taken away our sins and separated us from the power of the world. When we are "crucified with Christ," we no longer respond to the things of the world; the world's pull and temptations are dead so far as we are concerned. It is not the outward observance of religious ritual that matters. This is Paul's primary point. It is being made a new creature in Christ Jesus that matters. And we are made a new creature when we are "born again" of the Holy Spirit. Only the God who created everything in the first place can make us a new creature. This "born again" experience is as much of a created act as the original creation of the world was in the beginning. When we realize this, we can have a whole new appreciation for what God has done for us in Christ.

6:16 And as many as walk according to this rule, peace [be] on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

⁵⁷ Mt 23:4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

This is the only “rule” that Paul recognizes. His use of the word rule may be a little “tongue-in-cheek” here since rules has been the subject of this entire letter. Paul’s only rule is a new creation which actually does away with the need for rules in religion. For those who walk as members of the new creation, a big part of the reward would be a lot of peace and mercy in their lives and they will show this mercy and peace to those around them. Downtrodden and hurting people will be glad to see them coming because they will give peace and mercy and not the burden of more and more rules to follow and more and more guilt to contend with because folks can not follow the rules successfully.

6:17 From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

Paul bragged also about the scars and wounds on his body which he had received as a result of preaching the gospel.⁵⁸ These were his credentials, not the miracles that he had performed. He considered his suffering for the gospel to be the true marks of his apostleship and not any honors that man had bestowed upon him.

6:18 Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [be] with your spirit. Amen.

⁵⁸ 2Co 11:24-27. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

Ultimate Freedom

Grace. The free favor of God. This is the blessing of the gospel and of the apostle Paul. He prays this blessing to be with their “spirit.” This is the human spirit which hungers for the favor and blessing of God. Even after all the trouble and pain they had caused him, Paul calls them “brothers.” This is because even with our faults we are still the family of God.

