

PREACHERS' STUDY PAPERS

GALATIANS

BOOK 3

CHAPTERS 5 AND 6

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First published 2005

Second Impression 2007

In our study of Paul's epistle to the Galatians, we have split our Preachers' Study Papers into three books. We did this out of necessity to make this material available as early as possible to those who needed it. It has taken us three years to complete the project. The current booklet consists of 7 studies spanning chapters 5 and 6 of Paul's letter in which he defends the gospel of grace.

The purpose of these Study Papers is to encourage preachers and pastors to present God's Word in its entirety. The apostle Paul was able to say that he taught the whole counsel of God. For us today that is the whole Bible, from its opening words in Genesis to the closing Amen in Revelation. Preaching on a text or a verse has its place, but it is difficult to cover the whole of the Scriptures in this way. When we think about this matter of teaching the whole counsel of God, does it not occur to us that the same Holy Spirit who inspired Paul inspired other writers to present God's truth in a format that would lend itself to being preached and taught? By working through the different books of the Bible as they are laid out for us, a preacher will have, over a period of time, presented to his congregation the whole counsel of God.

The format of Books 1 and 2 has been maintained. There is an introduction to the passage being considered. Then the phrases of each verse are examined and explained. The study is then concluded with a summary. A section follows with an outline of what could be preached on from the passage. These are only suggestions and there are many different sermons that could be preached. Some studies may include a Focus Point, which discusses in more detail a doctrine or other subject that arises out of the text. The study finishes with a series of questions for the reader to consider within the context of his own situation.

The division of the passages which make up our studies is done to help the reader understand Paul's letter and to follow the arguments he makes. These divisions do not have to be followed when preaching through this epistle. The important point is that the preacher understands the material he is working with and, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, presents God's truth to his congregation that will be the spiritual nourishment they need.

Our prayer is that this material will be of continuing help and encouragement to preachers in faithfully proclaiming the truths of God's Word for the salvation of souls and the edification of the Church.

Grace Baptist Mission
2005

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations in this publication are from the New International Version
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CONTENTS

Abbreviations for Bible Books

Old Testament

Genesis	Gen.	Ecclesiastes	Eccl.
Exodus	Ex.	The Song of Solomon	Song
Leviticus	Lev.	Isaiah	Is.
Numbers	Num.	Jeremiah	Jer.
Deuteronomy	Deut.	Lamentations	Lam.
Joshua	Josh.	Ezekiel	Ezek.
Judges	Judg.	Daniel	Dan.
Ruth	Ruth	Hosea	Hos.
1 Samuel	1 Sam.	Joel	Joel
2 Samuel	2 Sam.	Amos	Amos
1 Kings	1 Kings	Obadiah	Obad.
2 Kings	2 Kings	Jonah	Jonah
1 Chronicles	1 Chr.	Micah	Mic.
2 Chronicles	2 Chr.	Nahum	Nah.
Ezra	Ezra	Habakkuk	Hab.
Nehemiah	Neh.	Zephaniah	Zeph.
Esther	Esth.	Haggai	Hag.
Job	Job	Zechariah	Zech.
Psalms	Ps.	Malachi	Mal.
Proverbs	Prov.		

New Testament

Matthew	Matt.	1 Timothy	1 Tim.
Mark	Mark	2 Timothy	2 Tim.
Luke	Luke	Titus	Titus
John	John	Philemon	Philm.
The Acts	Acts	Hebrews	Heb.
Romans	Rom.	James	James
1 Corinthians	1 Co.	1 Peter	1 Pet.
2 Corinthians	2 Co.	2 Peter	2 Pet.
Galatians	Gal.	1 John	1 John
Ephesians	Eph.	2 John	2 John
Philippians	Phil.	3 John	3 John
Colossians	Col.	Jude	Jude
1 Thessalonians	1 Thess.	Revelation	Rev.
2 Thessalonians	2 Thess.		

20	TRUE FREEDOM Galatians 5:1-5	185
21	THESE PEOPLE ARE UP TO NO GOOD! Galatians 5:7-12	197
22	MADE FREE TO LIVE A HOLY LIFE Galatians 5:13-18	207
23	TWO DIFFERENT RESULTS: THE NATURE OF THE FLESH AND THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT Galatians 3:19-26	219
24	PRIDE AND SELF-EXAMINATION Galatians 6:1-5	231
25	WHAT YOU PUT IN IS WHAT YOU GET OUT Galatians 6:6-10	239
26	THE GLORY OF THE CROSS IS WHAT MATTERS Galatians 6:11-18	249
	INDEX TO FOCUS POINTS IN PREACHERS' STUDY PAPERS PUBLISHED UP TO 2006	264

What these verses mean

Verse 1

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.

There is a double use of the same root word “free” which gives great emphasis to the statement. A prisoner may be freed from prison but does not necessarily enjoy freedom as he goes back to his community. He may have to face up to being looked upon as an ex-criminal. He may not be able to return to his community for fear of his life. Being freed from a particular condition does not mean we are fully free. So here is a truth that is being stated by the apostle as vigorously as he can state it. “We’re free!” By “freedom” Paul means one special freedom – he means the freedom from God’s wrath which Christ obtained by his life and death for his people. By giving that freedom to believers, Christ has made them free indeed! Compare John 8:34-36. *See the fulness of this freedom explained in suggestions for preaching No 1, (i) – (vii).*

Stand firm, then,

We are to stand firm in this freedom that Christ has given to us. This means we are to enjoy and use this freedom. No longer does sin dominate our lives. In his letter to the Romans, Paul says, “Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.” He continues in the next verse, “. . . offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life” (Rom. 6:12-13). Paul often urged his readers to remain firm (1 Co. 16:13; Phil. 1:27, 4:1 1 Thess. 3:8). It was hard to be a Christian in those days; it was easier to give up. Paul used a form of this verb which means “Keep on standing firm”. In addition to our individual lives this call to stand firm is to be applied to defending the way this freedom is given by Christ. This is the whole point of the letter to the Galatians. The freedom we have in Christ is under constant attack. Legalism¹, nominalism² and false doctrine are all ways that Satan uses to bring about sin and unbelief. This then is a battle cry; watch out, stand firm, be brave, do not give in.

¹ Legalism describes a situation where the principles set out in God’s Word are replaced by a set of rules and regulations. God’s favour is then sought by keeping to the rules. For example, insisting on a particular dress code for the congregation is a form of legalism. The Bible is not specific on how we are to dress, but it does warn us of the weaker and stronger brother, immorality and the weakness of the flesh. There is an instruction for women to be modest in appearance so as not to draw attention to

See page 187 for footnote 2 and continuation of footnote 1 .

INTRODUCTION TO BOOK 3



A new section of the epistle begins in chapter 5. See page 4 of Book 1, “What is Galatians about?” Chapters 1-4 have been full of arguments in which Paul has defended his gospel as God-given, and he has attacked the message of those who wanted believers to keep the law of Moses as a means of salvation. In the first part of chapter 5 (verses 1-12) Paul concludes this defence with an appeal to the Galatian believers concerning their freedom and how they had been misled.

From verse 13 in chapter 5 and in chapter 6 Paul begins to instruct the Galatian believers as to how a person who has been changed by God’s grace is altered in their behaviour and attitude. The Judaisers were teaching that the law of Moses was the key to being made right with God. They were arguing that you had to become a Jew by taking on all the rites and ritual of the Jewish religion. Obedience to the law of Moses would make a person conform to a set of rules and shape their behaviour. If doing this pleased God then the resulting lifestyle must be regarded as being good. Paul, having defended the gospel of grace and refuted obedience to the law, now shows his readers that the gospel of grace will produce a pattern of behaviour. The change in the Galatian believers came about by the work of the Spirit, so Paul exhorts them to live in the Spirit (see verses 5 and 16). This is a different way of life from formal law-keeping.



Galatians 5:1-5

This Study Paper contains the following :-

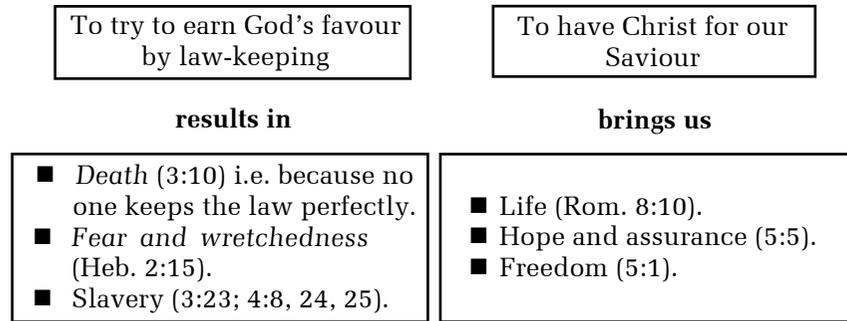
- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Notes
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 Two suggestions of what you can preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: The Pharisees and Sadducees
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

Paul has been setting out his case, layer upon layer, for the Galatian believers to recognise and accept God's grace as being at the centre of their lives and not human good deeds. The reason is quite simple. It is impossible to please God with our deeds; the attempt just alienates us from him. Those who had come amongst the Galatians were not trying to add to or amend the gospel of grace, they were denying it! They were stressing the outward, conforming and obeying a set of rules. True Christianity is spiritual and the only way a person can possibly please God is by his Holy Spirit indwelling and leading that person's life. Such a person has been set free and is no longer imprisoned by the slavery of obeying laws and ritual. This true freedom can only be gained in one way, through believing in Jesus Christ and the gracious sacrifice of his life on the cross.

the righteousness for which we hope.

The hope of this eagerly awaited righteousness is produced in believers by the faith they receive from the Spirit. By the “hope of righteousness” Paul means the hope of a favourable verdict in the last judgement. See Romans 2:5-16. The believer receives all the merits of Christ and will be therefore publicly declared “not guilty” – i.e. righteous – in the last judgement.



Verse 6

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value.

Circumcision, along with other God-ordained ceremonies, was temporary until the coming of Jesus. They gave people hope in this transient period, for without these visual symbols they would have been lost. Whilst these symbols could not save the people, they could make them appreciate the grace of God. The coming of Jesus signified that the time had fully come and the temporary arrangements were replaced with permanent things. Therefore the permanent things are to be found in Christ Jesus and not the temporary ones. Being circumcised will not bring salvation and being uncircumcised will not make salvation impossible. Instead, we need to concentrate on things that are lasting and in Christ we find the answer.

Footnote 4 continued from page 189

is still hoped for. All three are true and we have to understand it that way. When Jesus died on the cross his work of atonement was finished. All the sins of his people (past, present and future) were punished. When a person through faith first believes in Christ they are saved. They now experience being a child of God, addressing him as Abba, Father. They have that assurance of being saved. Yet whilst upon this earth the believer still has a sinful nature and daily needs to confess his sins and be forgiven. (Jesus told Peter that a person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet – John 13:10.) Their salvation will only be fully complete at the day of resurrection (or judgement day) when Jesus returns.

and do not let yourselves be burdened again

In some Bible versions the phrase “do not be entangled again” is used. Pagan religions had a complicated system of rules and regulations. Judaism had a similar system of compulsory behaviour. Both pagans and Jews were like people caught in a net that restricted their freedom. Paul says to the Galatians: “Don’t leave one net (paganism) simply to be caught **again** in another (Judaism).” Compare 4:9.

by a yoke of slavery.

A yoke was a beam of wood that was put across the neck of two oxen to keep them together as they pulled a heavy load. The idea is that of imprisonment, being enslaved under a heavy load. The animals are not free to roam about, but are under a taskmaster. The meaning here is enslavement to the law and condemnation to endless striving in a futile search for righteousness.³ Compare Acts 15:10. The many Old Testament ceremonies became a tiresome burden to the Jews and to make matters worse they had added many more of their own rules and regulations. This fact explains Jesus’ words (Matthew 11:28-30). Jesus said that belief in him and receiving his salvation was a delightfully restful yoke compared with the unbearable yoke of Moses.

Verse 2

Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you

Some of the strongest statements of the whole letter will now follow. Paul makes it clear that these are carefully thought-out words, with his full apostolic authority behind them. (He does the same on several occasions. Compare 2 Corinthians 10:1; Ephesians 3:1; Colossians 1:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:18; Philemon 19.)

themselves (1 Tim. 2:9). Another example would be insisting on following a way of doing things as if it were all a ritual. This could be the way we come to worship and conduct our meetings, or in the way we behave individually. Often we can confuse cultural practice with biblical principles, when cultural practice takes over and becomes a substitute. The set of rules that the Pharisees had introduced was legalism. (For Pharisees see Focus Point at the end of this study.)

² Nominalism is believing in name only and not the idea or object. For example, a Christian believing couple raise their children in the Christian faith. The children grow up following the practices of their parents. They do not do this out of conviction but because they have always done things this way from earliest childhood. When they become adults and if they themselves do not come to a personal faith and trust in Christ, but continue in the Christian lifestyle, they will be nominal Christians, that is in name only. This is a problem that is experienced in second and subsequent generations of Christian communities. What is needed is for nominal Christians to come to true repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; then they will be genuine Christians.

³ Edgar Andrews, *Free in Christ* (Evangelical Press).

that if you let yourselves be circumcised,

Perhaps they had not yet submitted to this rite. But they had begun to observe special Jewish festivals (4:10). Paul feared they might also submit to this Jewish ceremony. The act of circumcision seems to be a tiny thing, but it was also a theological symbol with great significance. It stood for a way of salvation by human effort.

Christ will be of no value to you at all.

Whoever tries to go the way of salvation by human effort can have no benefit from Christ. Such a person actually insults Christ, which is even worse! God has said, “The only salvation is by Christ.” What an arrogant insult it is for someone to reply to God, “No, I will save myself.” How insolent to reject God’s great gift of his Son, and lose the spiritual benefits Christ gives, for example to be without the Holy Spirit’s presence and gifts.

Verse 3

Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised

It is vital for the Galatians to grasp the difference between gaining salvation through faith in Christ and going through a physical ritual. Circumcision is the false way; it is a delusion. Paul is saying, “I protest against this way!” Why is Paul protesting so strongly against circumcision? He continues.

that he is required to obey the whole law.

Paul explains again why circumcision done for religious reasons is utterly wrong for those believers. Circumcision was the badge, the sign, of a covenant agreement between God and Israel. Whoever puts themselves under the religion of that sign must be expected therefore to live by all the regulations of that covenant, and cannot live as a person freed from that old covenant by Christ (5:1).

The Greek words translated “no value” (5:2) and “required” (5:3) sound very similar when spoken. Perhaps Paul is making a pun here, “Not only will Christ **not** help you . . . you will be **helplessly** caught by the whole law.”

Verse 4

You who are trying to be justified by law

The Galatians were being persuaded that submitting to the law (being circumcised) was consistent with their faith in Christ. “Not so,” Paul thunders, because they are trying to be justified through the physical ritual. In other words they think God will accept them as being righteous because they have obeyed the law of Moses through circumcision.

have been alienated from Christ;

This means “you are severed from Christ”. When the knife cut their flesh in circumcision it would signify they were also cut off from Christ as Saviour. The verb translated “become of no effect”, or “severed”, is also used in Romans 7:2 and 6 (“released”, “delivered”) where it relates to “a marriage completely ended by death”. Religious circumcision would divorce them from Christ.

you have fallen away from grace.

To fall from grace is the opposite of Romans 5:1,2 (by faith in Christ we have access into God’s grace). To reject Christ by seeking to save ourselves is to expel ourselves from God’s grace. Whoever seeks salvation by their own effort not only loses the benefits Christ gives (5:3) but also loses him (5:4). Does this mean that true believers can ultimately be lost? No, this verse does not contradict the doctrine of the final perseverance of believers (John 10:28). The doctrine of final perseverance means that no true believers will finally turn back to trying to save themselves and so will never come under the solemn words of these verses 3 and 4. But these words are a warning, which can stop a believer from ever wanting to reject Christ. (Believers are constantly under attack and whilst they are safe in God’s hands, they still experience doubts and fears due to their sinful nature - see Study 22, pages 210-211.)

Verse 5

But by faith

Faith is the key. Faith is received from the Spirit (2 Thess. 2:13) as a gift from God (Eph. 2:8) and those who receive it use it to trust in Christ for salvation.

we eagerly await

Paul says that **true** Christian believers (those who have received the gift of faith) confidently wait to receive the full benefits of salvation when Jesus comes again. This is so different from those who trust in their own efforts to please God, because they actually cut themselves off from Christ and the blessings he gives (5:4), The Greek word for “wait” literally means “to eagerly expect”. Compare Philippians 3:20,21.

through the Spirit

The Holy Spirit who gives believers spiritual life in the first place (4:29) causes believers to have the hope of salvation.⁴

⁴ The way that the Bible describes salvation in different time periods can at first seem a bit confusing. For the believer his salvation is complete, it is being worked out and it

ii. **God gives salvation freely because there is no better way for us to gain it** (Gal. 5:3).

If salvation had to be earned by what we do, we become hopeless slaves to obey rules and regulations: “the whole law”. And **one** failure destroys our merit. Moreover, for any act to be pleasing to God

- the motive must be right (the love of God)
- the manner of doing it must be right (God’s way)
- the aim of doing it must be right (God’s glory)

We cannot fulfil any of these conditions. We are therefore hopeless slaves. Salvation **by grace** is best for us! To add is to subtract!

iii. **God gives salvation freely because that best glorifies Christ** (Gal. 5:4).

If we can earn our own salvation we have no need of Christ. If we need to add anything to what Christ has done, then what he did was inadequate. But if our salvation is by Christ alone, **all** praise is due to him. If we will not wholly trust Christ to save us, we fall out of the stream of salvation by grace through Christ. We insult him. To add is to subtract!

Conclusion

Because salvation is the gift of grace to those who don’t deserve it, the only way to disqualify yourself from receiving it is to pretend you do deserve it! To add is to subtract!

 **Focus Point:**
Pharisees and Sadducees

The Pharisees and Sadducees were the religious leaders of the people in New Testament times. They were, however, opposed to each other. The Sadducees denied some doctrines which the Pharisees accepted.

The Pharisees (the name means “Separatist”) arose in the period between the Old and New Testaments. They were strict Jews who taught that no Jew should adopt any foreign customs but should meticulously keep the law of Moses. The Pharisees studied the law of Moses and worked out in great detail how each of those laws was to be kept in the society of their day. For example, it was lawful to wear stitched sandals on the Sabbath but unlawful to wear sandals with nails, because that would mean doing the work of lifting iron: work

The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

If a person has true faith in Christ, then loving, Christlike acts will follow. See James 2:26; 1 Peter 1:22. The evidence that people are true Christian believers is the loving lifestyle which their faith inspires them to practise. Neither the act of circumcision, nor any other ceremony, can produce this kind of lifestyle. This love does not come naturally to sinful and corrupted human nature. It stems from the Holy Spirit changing the person and giving him or her the faith to believe. This faith enables the person to understand and experience the love of God through his Son, Jesus. It is that type of love that now shows itself in the person who has been saved by faith.

 **Notes**

1. Paul has now mentioned the three graces which together comprise the essence of true spiritual experience – faith, verses 5,6; hope, verse 5; love, verse 6. See also Romans 5:1-5; 1 Corinthians 13:13; 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 5:8.
2. In these verses Paul does not put baptism as the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament circumcision ceremony. It is not biblically correct to say we must now baptise the babies of Christians because the Old Testament Jews circumcised their babies. According to Paul the New Testament equivalent to the Old Testament sign of circumcision (to show a person to be one of God’s people) is the possession of spiritual faith, hope and love. That is one reason why Baptists baptise only **believers** who by **their faith** show that they are God’s **New Testament** people.

 **Summary**

Paul has been setting out his case of “grace” against “works” in the matter of man’s salvation. Grace is God’s acting in love, works is man’s trying through his own actions. In the first four chapters Paul has been approaching his subject from different positions. He has had to defend his own apostolic rôle, how he was taught the

Continued on page 192

Summary continued from page 191

gospel of grace he had brought to the Galatian believers, and the wrong view that the Judaisers had of the law of Moses and Jewish religion. When Paul originally wrote his letters it was without the division of chapters, that being added years after Paul's life. The first part of chapter five can be looked upon as a continuation of the previous chapter. Paul is bringing his argument to a close before moving on to practical application. To emphasise his case he contrasts the freedom we have in Christ with the bondage (yoke) of the law. Having gained this freedom we are to stand firm in it. Circumcision, the ritual that the Judaisers were advocating, belonged to the Old Testament and has been replaced by faith. This faith comes through the Holy Spirit's making known to the person the truth about Jesus, that the person's sins were punished when Jesus died on the cross. The Spirit then indwells the believer, bringing righteousness, hope, assurance, love and fruitfulness of life. This can only come about through grace and not by works.

Two suggestions of what to preach about from these verses

1. Believers are free! (Gal. 5:1.)

Introduction

Freedom is regarded as being a basic human right. Slavery is acknowledged worldwide as wrong. Everyone wants freedom. Not everyone understands what it is. Freedom does not mean removal of all limitations – that is chaos. True freedom is not the opportunity to do what you like, but is the opportunity to do what you ought. A thing is free when it can happily fulfil the purpose for which it is made. Christian freedom is not freedom to sin but freedom from sin.

The spiritual freedom Christ gives to believers includes:

- i. Freedom from the old covenant which required all the law of Moses to be kept. Christ has fulfilled it for us. See Book 2, page 153 and the note on 4:10.

- ii. Freedom from the penalties that the old covenant required of guilty law-breakers. Christ has paid the penalties and removed the guilt.
- iii. Freedom from having to obey our old sinful nature. Christ by the Spirit has given us a new nature.
- iv. Freedom from having to obey Satan's suggestions. Christ has defeated him and broken his power over believers.
- v. Freedom from any false teaching or wrong public opinion. The teaching of Christ enables us to test all other teachings and reject what does not agree with his truth.
- vi. Freedom from evil and dictatorial human authorities. Christ has taught us to obey God rather than man when human authorities require unjust behaviour of us.
- vii. Freedom from fear of death and from the bondage of decay. Christ's resurrection signals the resurrection of all believers and the coming of a new and incorruptible heaven and earth.

Conclusion (Gal. 5:13)

The popular idea of Christianity is that it is a religion that forbids so many things. Actually it is a religion that liberates the human spirit from so many things that control unbelievers.

2. To add is to subtract! (Gal. 5:2-4)

Introduction

Preachers are sometimes criticised for what they say. Paul was often attacked for his message. Not because he said bad things, nor because he said wrong things. But Paul was often criticised because he insisted that God gives salvation away freely to people who don't deserve it: i.e. salvation **by grace**.

People often like to think they **do** deserve salvation: i.e. they prefer salvation **by works**. Hence they proudly object to receiving grace: they prefer to think they can earn their favour in God's sight. Paul insists that to try to add human effort to God's gracious gift of salvation is to destroy the possibility of receiving grace! To add is to subtract!

- i. **Paul knew the truth of what he taught.** Saul the Pharisee tried hard to earn his salvation from God and failed. See Philippians 3:5-7. As soon as he had seen the great glory of Christ on the Damascus road (Acts 9), Saul knew he could never attain such holiness whatever he did. Paul the Christian knew from experience that salvation must be received as a gift from God.

What these verses mean

Verse 7

You were running a good race.

In 2:2 Paul used the illustration of running a race to describe his own spiritual progress. Similarly, he used the same illustration of himself in Acts 20:24; 1 Corinthians 9:26; 2 Timothy 4:7. The Christian life, like running a race, requires discipline, training, patience, a goal to aim for and strenuous effort.

Who cut in on you

The idea in the original Greek was “to break up a road and so make it impassable”. The false teaching they were listening to was not a minor deviation: it was so wrong as to break up the spiritual road they were running along. The phrase used in our more modern translations takes up the idea of someone getting in your way to make it difficult for you to finish the race. Paul uses the picture of a race to describe the Christian life. The starting line is where the person first puts their trust in Christ. The finishing line is the arrival in the presence of Christ in heaven. When a person becomes a Christian he or she sets off in this race, pressing on for the finishing line. The believer fixes his sight upon Christ (the finishing line), refusing to be diverted by all the tactics of Satan. So Paul is challenging the Galatian believers by making them think about what those who had been teaching the law of Moses were doing to them. The Galatians were being impeded not helped. Compare verse 4 above.

and kept you from obeying the truth?

Paul does not merely refer to their wrong thinking, but to the fact that their behaviour was not obedient to the truth of the gospel. Wrong beliefs result in wrong behaviour. In 2:5,14 Paul uses the phrase “the truth of the gospel”. He means those facts about salvation through Christ which God has revealed. For example, salvation is God’s gracious gift, not a thing obtained by our efforts. The Galatians were beginning to behave disobediently to that fact by insisting on the necessity of working to obtain their salvation.

Verse 8

That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you.

In 1:6 Paul reminds them that God had called them to be believers. Not obeying the truth of the gospel (5:7) therefore means saying, “No!” to God. Because it is not God who is causing them to disobey, then it must be Satan who is behind their disobedience. That is what Paul is

was forbidden on the Sabbath. It is easy to see how this kind of person could become cunning and hypocritical in nature. They concentrated on outward, ceremonial law-keeping. See Matthew 5:20, 16:6, 23:1-33.

The Sadducees (possibly the name means “righteous ones”) were probably an older religious party than the Pharisees and were usually drawn from the top wealthy class of society. The Sadducees made no attempt to adapt the law to different situations as did the Pharisees but sought to enforce it rigidly and literally as it was first written. They also denied the doctrines of the resurrection, the existence of angels and the predestination of God, claiming that not one of these truths was found in the law. They accepted nothing as truth but what could be found spelled out in the law, or could be proved by human reason. See Matthew 22:23-33; Acts 23:6-9.

Both Pharisees and Sadducees were priests. During the time of Christ the Sadducees were the controlling influence on the Sanhedrin. Both parties died out with the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by the Romans in AD 70.



Over to you

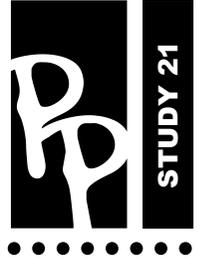
Is there any way that you or your church could give the impression to the people in your congregation that they could gain acceptance with God through their own actions? Consider this carefully in case some of your people are looking to themselves rather than to the mercy of God (even though you may not know they are doing this).

What hope do your people have? Do they view their acceptance by God on Judgement Day with certainty or are they unsure? If the answer to the first question does not take the people beyond their earthly life or they answer “no” to the following question, what do you propose to do?

If you are a church leader, what are you looking for in those of your people who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ?

THESE PEOPLE ARE UP TO

NO GOOD!



Galatians 5:7-12

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Special note 1 on Galatians 5:11
- 📁 Special note 2 on Galatians 5:12
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: The significance of leaven (yeast) in the Bible
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

In this study we come to the final part of the letter in which Paul has strongly defended the way of salvation through God's grace and not through the works of man. From verse 13 Paul moves to the practical outworking of God's grace in people's lives. He will contrast that with the sinful nature which dominates fallen man. Those who advocate the law of Moses as the way of pleasing God will not possess the ability to live a life that is harmonious with God's character. Before he begins this new section, Paul has a final word about the way the Galatians have been misled. He uses an illustration from the sport of athletics and how there are those who will try and stop the runner completing the race. They have a bad effect that can spread quickly. Paul concludes with some harsh words for these false teachers.

against circumcision as a religious ceremony whereby anyone could think that they thereby earned God's favour. Only Christ has earned God's favour, which he now shares with all who believe in him.

Therefore Timothy was circumcised because he had Jewish relatives. That circumcision was a cultural act, not a religious one. Having been circumcised, Timothy would be accepted as a Jew by Jews and so could preach the gospel to them.

Titus was not circumcised. He was a Greek who became a Christian. It was important to make it very clear that Titus was a Christian because he simply believed in Christ, and not because he fulfilled any Jewish ceremonies. Therefore Paul would not allow him to be circumcised.

Paul was not inconsistent. He was following his practice as described in 1 Corinthians 9:20-22. Paul would never do anything which could give the impression that the blessings of the Christian gospel were to be earned by some human effort. Everything Paul did was designed to show that salvation is possible only because of God's gracious gift. See 1 Corinthians 9:18. We must never do anything that would contradict the freeness of the gospel.



Special note 2

Galatians 5:12

Some people have been surprised that Paul could speak so sarcastically as he seems to speak in this verse. Can Christians ever wish that other people would harm themselves? Ought we not to love our enemies?

Paul describes the false teachers as "those who trouble you". The Greek word means "to cause an uprising". These teachers were "perverting the gospel of Christ" (1:7). They were the cause of a major upset among the Galatian believers, which could have led them into a completely false gospel. Such spiritual treachery is the greatest of sins.

Jesus pronounced a fierce condemnation of those who lead Christian believers astray. See Matthew 18:6. The purity of Bible teaching is so important. What could be a greater sin than to misrepresent God's words and teach others that error? See Matthew 5:19; James 3:1.

suggesting. Paul used the present tense of the verb "call": i.e. it was not only in the past that God called them to belief – God is calling them still!

How do we test whether a particular teaching comes from God?

God calls men and women through his grace and by no other means. Therefore if the teaching or doctrine in question does not stem from that source, but instead looks to human works, then it is not from God. It is the enemy of God, Satan, who is masquerading with teaching that may look attractive and sound pious, but is not God-glorifying.

The way we should test all teaching is by asking these two questions;

- Does the doctrine or teaching make Christ central and glorify him?
- Does it exalt the grace of God, over against the activity of man?

Verse 9

"A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough."

At the time of the Passover, the Jews were commanded to destroy all leaven (yeast) from their houses (Ex. 12:14-20). As there must be no leaven in the Jewish home at Passover, so there must be no disobedience to the truth among believers. Wrong ideas lead to disastrous consequences (e.g. 5:4) as surely as a little leaven spreads through the whole dough. See Focus Point at the end of this study on the significance of leaven in the Bible.

The loss of a nail meant the horseshoe came off;
The loss of the horseshoe meant the horse fell;
The fall of the horse meant the death of the rider;
The loss of that soldier meant the battle was lost;
The loss of that battle meant the kingdom was conquered
by the enemy;
All this because a nail was lost!

Verse 10

I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view.

Paul was confident that the Galatian believers would not reject Christ because he knew they were "in Christ", i.e. they were part of the spiritual body of Christ: Christ's spiritual life was in them. His confidence was not in the Galatians but in the Lord. Compare 2

Thessalonians 3:4. Paul says they had been running well – i.e. rightly. Paul knew that what he had seen in the Galatian believers was a good work begun by God. If that is so, they cannot finally go astray. Compare Philippians 1:6. Paul used a form of the verb “to persuade” which has the meaning that this conviction was something Paul had reached about them in the past, and his present opinion was still the same.

The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be.

Anyone who deliberately teaches contrary to gospel truth will be punished. Compare Matthew 18:6. This punishment may take place in this life, but if not it will take place at the final judgement day. Compare Revelation 19:20. This truth is so important that James advises his readers to be very careful about becoming teachers (James 3:1). What a warning to all preachers to keep carefully to Bible truth! What a comfort to know that error will not always triumph but must eventually be exposed as wrong!

Verse 11

Brothers,

Even though Paul has spoken sternly to the Galatian believers (3:1; 4:9; 5:4), he insists on reminding them that they are his brothers in Christ, sharing the same salvation. Compare 5:13.

if I am still preaching circumcision,

Some people accused Paul of being inconsistent, and they tried to discredit him. Paul had circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3) even after the church had agreed that circumcision was not necessary to make a person a Christian (Acts 15:24). Paul’s enemies were saying that he was double-minded (see 1:10) and therefore he was not a reliable teacher. Paul had never advocated circumcision as a means of salvation, though it would have made life easier for him with the religious leaders if he had. See special note 1 below.

why am I still being persecuted?

Everywhere Paul went preaching the gospel, he suffered persecution. Therefore, says Paul, “I cannot be preaching that circumcision is the way to please God. People would receive me happily if I did preach in that way.” Paul was not taking the easy option by telling people what they wanted to hear. If he had taught the necessity of circumcision (an external, physical ritual that did not involve commitment and submission, but gave the person the idea of being in a privileged

position) then he would have been readily accepted and not faced opposition. Instead of circumcision he taught something else that caused offence and brought him trouble.

In that case the offence of the cross has been abolished.

Central to Paul’s teaching was the cross and Christ’s death upon it. To be put to death on a cross was to be cursed by God, according to Jewish belief; see note on 3:13 (Study 12, pages 101-102, Book 2). No Jew would be willing to believe that Jesus who died on a cross could be a Saviour. To a Jew Christ’s cross was offensive. If Paul had preached circumcision, as some had alleged he did, then no-one would be offended because the subject that caused the Jews such great offence had been omitted. Their hostile reaction to Paul’s teaching showed that that was not the case. Moreover, to argue as Paul did that salvation is only by Christ’s death on the cross and never by any ceremony like circumcision would make Jewish hearers doubly angry and offended. This was the “offence of the cross”.

Verse 12

As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

Greek = make themselves eunuchs

Because the false teachers who were worrying the believers taught that a little cutting of the flesh (i.e. circumcision) gains salvation, Paul remarks that they should go further and castrate themselves! Perhaps to cut more flesh will mean even better salvation? Paul is deliberately exposing the stupidity of the teaching that physical acts can earn spiritual benefits! See special note 2 on page 202.



Special note 1

Galatians 5:11

It was true that Paul did agree to have Timothy circumcised, and equally true that Titus – another of Paul’s fellow-workers – was not circumcised (2:3). Because of this apparently contradictory behaviour, some people have criticised Paul.

Paul was not, in fact, contradicting himself. Paul did not argue against circumcision as a simple medical, or Jewish, practice. He only argued



Over to you

Are your preaching and teaching a hindrance or a help to the believers in your congregation as they run the Christian race? (Think carefully of what you bring to your people; is it God-honouring and Christ-centred or is it about human effort and success?)

How important is it for church leaders to be aware of what is being said and taught around their people? Think of the effect of leaven.

What do you do if you come across a passage in the Bible that you know some of the people in the congregation will not like?

Paul did not hate his enemies as people; he would pray for them to be saved. But he would vigorously oppose the errors taught by the false teachers. So must we all defend the truth from error (Jude 3).



Summary

Paul concludes his defence of the gospel of grace with a picture of the Christian life being like a race. There are obstacles and diversionary tactics being used to try and stop the believer from finishing the race. Those who have come amongst the Galatians and have been telling them that they have to become Jews first by following the law of Moses are impeding them in this race. They are getting in the way making it difficult to finish the race. Despite these setbacks Paul is confident in God that when the Galatians first heard the gospel of grace from his lips and believed, it was the work of God. If so, they will not fall away by following the false teachers but will trust in Christ alone for salvation. They will run the race well by obeying the truth and submitting to Christ's teaching. The central point of this is submitting to the one who was crucified on a cross. This is what Paul preached. It caused great offence, especially to the Jews. He would have been readily accepted had he taught that circumcision was the way of salvation. That was not the way and in telling the people that Jesus dying on the cross was their only hope, Paul suffered much persecution. The teaching of circumcision was so alien to God's designed way that Paul wished any who advocated that way to have their masculinity fully cut off and not just to have a small snick. This showed how corrupt Paul considered their teaching to be.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

New Testament religion defined: Galatians 5:5,6

1. There is such a thing as a distinct New Testament religion. Many teach that all religions are the same. They teach that what one believes is not important so long as those beliefs are sincerely held.

The New Testament, however, constantly urges us to seek out the true religion and to test every doctrine to make sure it agrees with Bible truth. We must reject what is not biblical. To follow a non-biblical religion (whether nominal Christianity or some other religion) is to be outside of Christ. See Galatians 5:2; John 14:6. Paul urges the Galatian believers to reject the wrong teaching they were receiving.

2. Paul defines what is the New Testament experience of true religion.
 - a. True believers are in a certain spiritual condition (verse 5). They can have a sense of rest in their souls because of the hope of being accepted by God as righteous ones for Christ's sake.
 - b. True believers have a special spiritual occupation (verse 6). The believer's faith works – i.e. expresses itself by continual acts of love. See James 2:20. We need all three – hope, faith and love for a complete New Testament religious experience. There is something wrong about our experience if any one virtue is missing.
3. All three of these virtues make up a complete spiritual experience.
 - a. Faith gives us the reason to persevere in loving behaviour; hope will prevent despair and give us calmness. Faith is the root, hope the flower, love the fruit.
 - b. Faith looks back to Christ the Saviour; hope looks on to future glory and Christ the King; love looks around in the present and spreads the teaching of Christ the Prophet.
 - c. Hope is obtained by faith; love is produced by faith and hope. And all three are produced in believers “by the Spirit” (verse 5) – not by any human effort (see 5:22). The Spirit uses the Scripture to affect us. See Romans 10:17.

Not to know by personal experience these three virtues is not to be a New Testament Christian. Nothing else but these three show us to be Christian. Having these three, nothing else matters much (verse 6)!



Focus Point:

The significance of leaven (yeast) in the Bible

In Hebrew life leaven was not only something used in bread making; it was also used as a symbol in religious and social ceremonies. The process of making it began with fine white bran mixed with grape

juice and allowed to ferment. Barley flour was also used, mixed with water and allowed to go sour. In bread making, the leaven would be a piece of dough kept from the previous batch of baking, allowed to ferment, and then mixed with the flour for the new baking.

The Jews were forbidden to use leaven during the Passover meal (Ex. 12:34), or during the seven days before (Ex. 12:15). This was because their exodus from Egypt had to be hurried. There could be no waiting for leaven to spread throughout the dough. Wandering tribes in Arabia still use unleavened bread today for the same reason.

Leaven was also strictly forbidden in most of the tabernacle offerings (Lev. 2:11, 6:17, 10:12). This was because the fermenting of leaven suggests the idea of disintegration and corruption. Decay was always regarded as unclean in Hebrew thought and therefore anything decaying was looked upon as being offensive to a holy God.

However, there were two occasions when leaven could be offered (Lev. 7:13; Amos 4:5). In these two instances the bread was eaten by the offerer and not burnt with the offering. No offering that was burnt (i.e. dedicated to God) could contain leaven or honey.

In the New Testament leaven is often used as a symbol of erroneous teaching that causes the corruption of people's knowledge and behaviour (Matt. 16:6, 22:16-29, 23:14; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1; 1 Co. 5:6; Gal. 5:9).

In one of his parables, however, Jesus used leaven as a symbol of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:21). Jesus was teaching that just as leaven quietly and secretly spreads its influence in the dough, so the kingdom of heaven (i.e. believers whose lives are governed by the rule of Christ) can have an influence which spreads and affects the situations where they are.

Note: It is always important to look at the context of the passage to understand its meaning. We have seen in the case of leaven that it is not always used in a negative way. Leaven is used in Scripture to illustrate truth because of its characteristic; a small amount influences all that it comes into contact with. It is used to illustrate the effect of bad teaching, but also the positive effect of the kingdom of heaven. If leaven were just interpreted as a negative influence, then the parable in Luke 13:20-21 would not make sense.

and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

The phrase is very emphatic. Whoever lives in the presence of the Holy Spirit can never at the same time be a slave to sinful human nature. This is an infallible test of the true condition of a believer. If spirituality does not hinder the habits of carnality it cannot be a real spirituality. This includes sexual sins but also much more. See the list of 17 words in verses 19-21. “The flesh of no faithful man is so good, but, being offended, he will not bite or devour, or at least omit somewhat of the commandment to love” – Martin Luther.

No believer has so completely conquered the old nature that he never *bites* or *devours* or fails to love. Until our death our *flesh* will trouble us.

Note: It is important to realise that “sinful nature” here does not mean our physical bodies. It means our whole human nature, spoiled by sin. Paul is not suggesting that believers are to ill-treat their bodies in order to become spiritual persons. Fasting, self-flagellation, penances and living in solitude do not make the soul holy. “My face was pale with fasting, but my mind was inflamed with desires in my cold body; my flesh was half dead, yet the flames of fleshly lust burned within me” - these are the words of Jerome, an early church leader (345-419) who tried living as an ascetic. What Paul is saying is that if we are filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit we will be spiritual. The way to prevent weeds growing is to fill the plot with good crops.

Verse 17

For the sinful nature desires

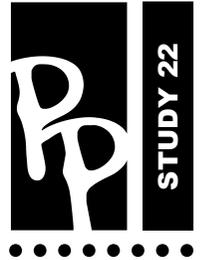
Compare Romans 7:15,16. Paul makes it clear that by himself the believer cannot succeed in living the Christian life. This does not mean that the Christian life is an experience of continuous defeat. Believers are not left to themselves; they have the Spirit in addition to themselves (5:18)!

what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature.

This war between the Spirit of God and sinful human nature began in Genesis 3:15. After Pentecost, with the Holy Spirit poured out on all believers (4:6), the conflict now takes place within each believer’s own experience. There can never be peace between these two forces; nor can they live permanently together. There will come a time when at death the Spirit will be finally victorious as he has promised. Mean-

MADE FREE TO LIVE

A HOLY LIFE



Galatians 5:13-18

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 Two suggestions of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

There is a danger with what Paul has been setting out at the beginning of chapter 5. Christ has set his people free. This can be and has been completely misunderstood. A reaction of the human mind to freedom is, “I can do what I like”; there is no restriction, all the barriers are taken away. The result of such an attitude is lawlessness and anarchy. The theological word for this is antinomianism.¹ Is this what Paul has been setting out? No, Paul knows very well how what he has been teaching could be so easily twisted and incorrectly interpreted. So, in opening the last part of the letter in 5:13, Paul warns the Galatians about misapplying this freedom. They are not to indulge in the old, sinful nature, but instead they are to pursue a life serving one another in love. This is easier said than done, so Paul makes it clear that the Christian life is a continual battle between the Spirit who indwells the believer and the believer’s old sinful nature. There is no teaching in the New Testament to suggest that holiness comes to the believer in one spiritual experience or by some automatic gift from God. Instead, the New Testament continually urges believers to fight, run, work, resist, put off and put on, mortify, etc. The Christian life is a continual battle.

¹ Antinomianism - anti (against) nomos (law)

What these verses mean

Verse 13

You, my brothers,

Paul explains again why the false teaching about salvation's being earned by observing ceremonies is so wrong. The sentence begins (in Greek) with the word "for", which expresses the reason for what has been previously said. At this point Paul ends his theological argument and begins to write about practical Christian living.

were called to be free.

Until now Paul has been proving that salvation cannot be earned by slavishly keeping any laws. Instead, salvation must be received from Christ who has perfectly fulfilled the law on behalf of all who trust in him. They are now freed from the burden of trying to keep the law for their own salvation. See note on 5:1 (Study 21, page 186 of this Study Book). They must also be free from immoral habits.

But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature;

The "sinful nature" ("the flesh" is in the original Greek and in some other translations) means not the physical nature but the sinful nature that is in us all. See verses 19, 20. Freedom from the law does not mean that believers can be immoral. Believers have come out from the control of a mere system of legal requirements and are now under the control of a person – God the Holy Spirit (verse 16). They must, therefore live holy lives. And to have the Holy Spirit guiding us from within is better than merely relying on a law that is outside of us – compare Jeremiah 31:31-34.

rather, serve one another in love.

Paul here develops in more detail what he had begun to say in 5:6. True belief must produce a life of good works. The word "serve" is related to the Greek word "slave". Believers are not to be slaves of any law, nor of any sinful habit, but they are to be slaves of Christ (see 1:10) and of each other. The freedom the believer receives from Christ is not a freedom to be independent of other believers.

Verse 14

The entire law is summed up in a single command:

See Romans 13:10. The true intention behind the ten commandments is fulfilled by the believer who is controlled by the Holy Spirit, who fills him with love (Rom. 5:5).

"Love your neighbour as yourself."

The consequence of being free in Christ is that there is a distinct lifestyle which is set apart from the rest of the world. This lifestyle is governed by a single command, "Love your neighbour as yourself." This is a quote from Leviticus 19:18, from the laws given to Moses, the very thing Paul has been arguing that the Galatians should not rely upon for their salvation. Here is the important thing that Paul has been getting at, the law prescribes love but cannot produce it. The rules tell us we should love, but we cannot keep to the rules, we break them. But through faith in Christ a person is able to put this love into practice. The key to this is the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit living in us

Verse 15

If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

Perhaps the introduction of the false teaching into the Galatian church had been the cause of many quarrels and arguments. The words "bite" and "devour" and "destroyed" are the common Greek words which describe animals fighting among themselves. Paul means not that Christians can destroy each other's salvation, but that arguments which produce hatred will destroy Christian fellowship. Differences of opinion among believers must be resolved by loving discussion to discover the truth of God's Word on the matter and never by bitter or angry confrontation.

Verse 16

So I say, live by the Spirit,

"Spirit" here means the Holy Spirit: it cannot mean our personal souls. The human spirit is not itself antagonistic to our human nature. Our souls are part of our human nature, here called "the sinful nature" (flesh), against which the Spirit fights (5:17). "Spirit" therefore cannot be part of our human nature but must be something different: i.e. the Holy Spirit. To live by the Spirit means to behave in such a way as to please the Holy Spirit who is a person and therefore capable of being pleased or grieved. Believers are to behave as the Spirit would behave. The emphasis here is more on the Spirit as being the source of our spiritual strength. (He is both, of course.) The old law does not set the standards for the believer, but neither is lawlessness the standard for the believer. The indwelling Spirit now leads the believer to Christ as the standard to be followed.

to sin. This love delights only in holiness; this love only seeks the benefit of others; this love is intensely loyal to Jesus Christ. See 1 Corinthians 13. Without this love freedom from law-keeping is very dangerous.

- ii. The believer is indwelt by the Spirit from the moment of new birth (see 3:2, 4:6). The Spirit's presence and his fruitful work in the believer's life will guide the believer's behaviour (verses 22,23). But the Spirit must not be grieved or quenched (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19). And he will never guide any believer to do anything contrary to the teaching of the Bible, which he inspired. Instead of being guided by fear of punishment or hope of reward or by the opinions of others, the believer is to be guided by the Spirit of Christ within him, giving him understanding of Bible teaching.
- iii. Christians are not to be individualists. Believers are to be slaves of each other (compare John 13:1-17). This "slavery" means believers are to have respect for each other; to seek the best welfare for each other; to be willing to give help to and receive help from each other; to worship, to serve Christ and to witness of him, with each other.

Although believers are freed from the necessity to keep the ten commandments as the way of salvation, their lives will now be full of all the goodness of those laws because, being inwardly and spiritually motivated by the Spirit, believers now seek to be Christlike (Rom. 8:4). Christians should never behave contrary to the good purposes which are expressed by that law.

2. "They are in conflict with each another": Galatians 5:17 (These notes are longer than usual. The material could be used for a series of sermons, rather than all at once.)

- i. Christians need to be good fighters! Not in order to fight each other, nor to fight anyone else; but each believer has a fight within himself or herself. The Christian life is a battle, not a sleep.
- ii. The Christian battle is fierce and lasts as long as life. This is because both powers – the Holy Spirit and the sinful nature – oppose each other. It is not merely one of the two that hates the other, but each hates the other. What the Holy Spirit proposes, "the flesh" resists. And this will go on as long as "the flesh" exists.
- iii. But unbelievers also know struggles of conscience in their lives. What is the vital difference between the soul-struggles of unbeliev-

while, up to the point of death, the struggle continues in the believer; only death can end it. That is why believers can see in death one great blessing (1 Co. 15:54-57).

They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

Whilst we are on this earth there is a conflict between the new creation and the old nature. The old nature includes our body, mind, feelings and emotions. Within all this we must recognise that God has given our bodies natural appetites; they are neutral and can be used for holy or sinful purposes. These must not be confused with sinful desires. The old nature is still present and battles with the new creation. If we were to resist the desires of the old nature through our own will-power, i.e. by following a set of rules, we would fail. We have failed to keep God's rules, his laws. The tendency of the old nature is to rebel and disobey; if a rule tells us not to do something, then the old nature will stir within us to do it. Paul brings this out in Romans 7:21. All believers experience this conflict. This conflict will not diminish as a person gets older and matures in the Christian faith. If anything, the battle can intensify. There are some who maintain that a Christian can attain sinless perfection on this earth – it is a delusion.

Verse 18

But if you are led by the Spirit,

The verb is in a form which means that the action is continuous: i.e. continually led; it is not one, or even several, separate instances of Spirit-guidance that is being spoken of. Paul means a life continually under the direction of the Spirit. This kind of life is one in which the continual influence of the Holy Spirit causes the believer to seek to avoid all known sin and to make use of every biblical means possible to improve the holiness of his life. See Philippians 2:12,13.

you are not under law.

To be "under law" means to be judged by the law as the standard we must reach to earn our salvation. Because we fail to do this, we are condemned sinners. To be under the influence of the Spirit, however, must mean that we are now among those for whom Christ has obtained salvation by his perfect law-keeping. The Spirit is only given to believers. They are liberated from the rule of the law (5:1).

“that He might come to have FIRST PLACE” . . . Col.1:18

The Holy Spirit is a gift to all believers promised by . . .
The gift was purchased by the perfect life and work of . . .
The Holy Spirit was poured out by the glorified . . .
The Spirit now delights to find ways to glorify . . .
The Spirit continues on earth the ministry begun by . . .
The Spirit leads believers to become like . . .
The Spirit helps believers to pray in the name of . . .

CHRIST

See Acts 1:4,5; Acts 2:33; John 7:39; John 16:14; Acts 1,2; Romans 8:9, 26.

To think about:-

To be filled with the Spirit is to be under the lordship of Christ.



Summary

At the beginning of the letter Paul was quick to condemn false teaching, which claimed to be the gospel but was not the gospel at all (1:6-7). The true gospel is the good news that salvation is given through believing in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and his death on the cross.

False teaching advocates a person's having to do something to please God and through good works to gain salvation. In the case of the Judaisers, the ones who had come amongst the Galatian believers, their teaching was that faith alone was insufficient; something else was required. It was the observance of the law of Moses, epitomised by the ceremony of circumcision, which was what they had filled the Galatians' minds with. The apostle had therefore set out a series of arguments as to why salvation through faith alone was the only and true way. For Paul this was not a theoretical or philosophical matter. The difference between the two teachings can be seen in the way it affects people in their lives and attitudes. This is the practical application that Paul will now engage in. As he does so, he begins with a word of warning. Christ brings freedom to all who put their trust in him.

Summary continued on page 213

Summary continued from page 212

Paul explains what this freedom means in case people start to interpret it in the wrong way. This freedom introduces the person to a new lifestyle, which does not indulge the sinful appetites of human nature. Instead it obeys the commands of Christ, which are summed up by one of the Old Testament commandments, “Love your neighbour as yourself.” Evidently, this was not happening amongst the Galatians. They were biting and devouring each other. Was that the result of the man-centred approach, which lay at the heart of the false teaching? For the Christian living out this command, he or she experiences the continual conflict between spiritual rebirth and the old sinful nature. They are opposed to each other and the battle between the two takes place all the time. It is only by living in the Spirit (depending upon Christ alone) that the Christian can be helped in this internal battle. Trying to live by obedience to the law will not help the person to overcome the desires of the sinful nature. This can only come about by continually being under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.



Two suggestions of what to preach about from these verses

- 1. “Serve one another in love”:** Galatians 5:13
When a nation has won its freedom in any struggle against an oppressor, it has only won half the war. There is still the harder task of using the new-found freedom rightly. In the same way, to be freed from the obligation to keep laws and ceremonies for salvation is one thing; to live as a believer, rightly using the spiritual freedom Christ gives, is a harder thing. Believers are not free to do whatever they like. They are under a new law – holy love; they have a new master – the Holy Spirit; they have a new sphere of service – one another. Spiritual liberty means more self-discipline for the believer, not less! It is no longer adequate just to obey laws outwardly. There is to be inward obedience too.
 - i. Love is the energy that causes faith to be productive of good (5:6).** See “A suggestion of what to preach about”, Study 21, pages 203-204. Love is also the guard that protects liberty from leading

ers and of believers? It is important to understand whether our soul struggles are Christian in nature. We must not deceive ourselves.

- (A) **In unbelievers** the struggle is between the three parts of their own personalities: i.e. their reasoning, their desiring and their deciding: e.g.
- a. The reasoning of the mind disagrees with the desires of the emotions, or
 - b. The desires of the emotions disagree with the decision of the will or
 - c. The decision of the will disagrees with the reasoning of the mind.

Unbelievers say, for example:

- a. "It would be unwise to do this, but I want to do it," or
- b. "I want to do this, but I will not," or
- c. "I will do this, but it is foolish to do it."

So there is conflict within the divided personality.

In believers the struggle is between the Holy Spirit and the old sinful ways in which believers used to behave before the Spirit indwelt them. In the believers' experience, the Holy Spirit says within them:

"It is unholy to do this; it is unChristlike; it is against Scripture teaching; it will hurt the Christian fellowship; it will be a bad witness."

But the united reasoning, desiring and will of the old sinful nature remaining in those believers often proudly replies:

"I can do this if I want to and I don't care what the consequences are."

Therefore the struggle is fiercer in the believer because:

- a. Two powers are involved – self and Spirit, and
- b. The old nature can be united against the Spirit and not weakly divided within itself.

See Galatians 5:19-25.

- (B) **In unbelievers** the struggle is usually to comfort themselves: e.g.
- a. They try to do what is least disruptive for themselves.
 - b. They try to do what best attracts others to themselves.
 - c. They try to do what most suits their previous upbringing.

It may cause much distress of soul to decide how best to achieve those things.

But the believers' struggles are different:

In believers the struggle is about how best to please Christ.

- a. This may involve hardship and a cross for themselves.
- b. This may mean they become isolated from others.
- c. This may mean making great changes in their lives.

See Luke 9:57-62; 14:25-33.

Clearly the struggle may be much fiercer in believers because it may mean greater sacrifice and persecution.

- (C) **In unbelievers** the struggle is usually about keeping laws or standards, e.g. unbelievers often rebel against doing what they feel they ought to do. They may even feel angry at any restrictions they think to be preventing them doing what they want to do.

In believers the struggle is more likely to be about how to use the new spiritual freedom from law-keeping that Christ has given, e.g. believers are more often fighting against their old sinful habits which hinder them from freely expressing their new love for holiness and their desire to serve Christ. See Romans 7:15-21.

The struggle will be fiercer for the believer because love for a person (for Christ) is more powerful than fear of rules.

- (D) **In unbelievers** the struggle is usually more intense in public than in private life. When no one is watching them, they will do what they like – there is little inner struggle. Only when others see and know do unbelievers struggle within themselves in order to appear acceptable to others. Moreover, unbelievers' struggles are more concerned with visible actions than with secret thoughts.

In believers the struggle is as intense, or more so, in private life than in public. Because the struggle is between the Holy Spirit and their sinful natures, it does not cease when they are in private. And the Holy Spirit can challenge secret thoughts as well as outward actions. See Matthew 5:21-30.

The struggle will be more intense, more continual, for believers, because it concerns their inner life more than their public lives.

Conclusion

- i. Which kind of battle do you know?
- ii. Even though the Christian's life is a battle, the Christian is not continually being defeated. As well as continual struggle, the believer can know continual victory - verse 18. Believers do not have to sin, even though old sinful habits still affect them because now the Holy Spirit indwells them in order to empower them to refuse to sin and to behave in a holy way. Believers have the choice! To be led by the Spirit is to follow the desires he puts into us and to refuse to follow what he shows to be wrong. That way of life will mortify the flesh.

The Spirit educates us through the teachings of the Bible. To ignore them will grieve the Spirit.



Over to you

How would you answer anyone in your congregation who asked you what freedom that person has in Christ? What could be the problems in your society for the wrong understanding of this teaching?

From the teaching of Paul against the reliance upon the law of Moses, do you think it would be wrong to have rules in your church?

How far would you use the commandment of "Love your neighbour as yourself" to be a pointer as to whether someone has truly trusted in Christ for salvation?

laws. Nowadays economists calculate the cost of such sins to the local and national economies.

and the like.

The above list of 15 things is not all! The fact that a specified sin is not included by Paul does not mean it does not count. It does, because the sin will fall into one of the above pattern groups.

I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this

There are consequences for all those who continually practise such things. It is a serious matter that has very long-term effects. The activities that arise from human sinful nature lead only to a disastrous and terrible end. Therefore Paul is warning the Galatians of this. It is not simply friendly advice, but making the Galatian believers aware of the serious danger, i.e. any who repent of these things and cease to do them may be inheritors of the kingdom of God.

will not inherit the kingdom of God.

The warning is clear: such people who continually pursue their sinful nature will not inherit the kingdom of God. Notice that “the kingdom of God” is an inheritance - a gift, not a reward to be earned. Nevertheless evil deeds disqualify a person from entering it. This will be the end result for those who follow the false teachers and rely upon their observance of keeping to the rules (law of Moses). They will fail because the law cannot help them to overcome the sinful nature but only emphasises it.

Note: “The kingdom of God” means “God’s rule in the hearts and lives of his people”. This has a three-fold effect upon such people:

- i. it causes their salvation
- ii. it forms them into a purposeful church, and
- iii. equips them to inhabit the new heavens and a new earth.

Sometimes verses referring to the kingdom apply to i, or ii, or iii. The different parts of the kingdom are not contradictory; all are included in the term. So the kingdom can be both present (i) and future (ii and iii); visible (i and ii) and invisible (iii).

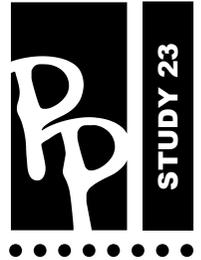
Verse 22

But the fruit of the Spirit is

In the believer the sinful nature has the same tendencies as in the unbeliever. However the Christian’s behaviour is controlled by the Spirit and not the sinful nature. The believer is not without sin, yet Paul is convinced that we can use outward behaviour as a test of a

TWO DIFFERENT RESULTS:

**THE NATURE OF THE FLESH AND
THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT**





Galatians 5:19-26

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: The doctrine of the Holy Spirit
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

In our last study Paul began to apply the theological teaching he has been giving in the first four chapters. He has been showing the Galatian believers how the false teachers were perverting the gospel message that he had brought to them. They had believed the good news they heard from Paul. The false teachers had been persuading the Galatian converts to follow the practices of Judaism. Paul, himself an expert in the system of Judaism, knew that it was a religion that was based upon man-made rules and that it was a gross misinterpretation of Old Testament teaching. Having set out a number of arguments to make the Galatians see what they were being asked to do, Paul now illustrates how it all works out in practice. In verse 13 Paul urged the believers to strengthen their fellowship by serving one another in love. Easier said than done! Why? Because within the Christian believer dwells the new Spirit, who is in conflict with the old sinful nature. In verses 19-21 Paul lists all the characteristics of the sinful nature. These we find common in the society in which we live. The effect of the sinful nature destroys fellowship and therefore must not be present among believers in the church. Verses 22-23 set out the

results of a Spirit-led life. The contrast could not be greater. One is the product of the man-centred approach (i.e. by obeying the law) whilst the other occurs when there is a total submission to Christ alone. Pick the wrong one and you will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. That is how crucial it is.

What these verses mean

Verse 19

The acts of the sinful nature

For the meaning of sinful nature (or “flesh” in some translations) see note on verse 16 in Study 22.

are obvious:

The detailed description of the sinful nature is well known. Nobody has to be instructed in these matters; even unbelievers realise these things are bad! The list can be divided into four groups of sins, those of a sexual nature, religious, social and sins of excess. It is important to remember that there are no new sins that 21st-century human beings have invented. Our modern societies like to think that they have made huge improvements compared with previous generations. However human nature has not changed and continues to be plagued by the same problems that have always beset people since the fall of Adam.

Group 1: Sexual sins

sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;

Sexual sins are probably the most common. It is not sex that is sinful but its misuse. This group covers any kind of sexual behaviour outside the biblical standards of marriage. It is not just the physical act but covers any impurity in deed, thought or word. Any act that shocks public decency is included, though the standards of decency in a society can change easily. However, whilst there may be growing segments of our society who will want to lower the standard of acceptable decency, there is an in-built mechanism in the core of people that sees certain sexual behaviour as indecent. We must not forget that we are people made in the image of God and therefore part of us knows deep down when things are not right.

Verse 20

Group 2: Religious sins

idolatry and witchcraft;

Idolatry is the worship of anything other than the true God. This can take many forms and will differ from society to society. In affluent

communities possessions can become the things that people worship. Hobbies and sport are a great danger as they take over people’s lives. There is danger for Christian believers as they could idolise a leader or preacher. Witchcraft is the use of the powers of evil spirits. There is just as much interest in meddling with the evil spirits today as there ever was.

Group 3: Social sins

hatred,

Any hostile act or thought.

discord,

A quarrelsome spirit.

jealousy,

This refers to a selfish jealousy. There is a zeal or jealousy that is good when it desires the good of others. (See 2 Corinthians 11:2.)

fits of rage,

This is in the plural and means outbursts of undisciplined rage.

selfish ambition,

Pursuing position, power or wealth for oneself. The concern for others is not the motivation but to satisfy a personal craving. Such a spirit will produce a ruthless attitude, which will remove anything or anyone that stands in the way.

dissensions, factions

Dissension is the introduction of divisive teaching, whilst factions are rival parties in a fellowship. The tendency is for people with particular views to form groups. The original Greek word for faction (heresy) meant choice and is used to describe division into small groups within a church. This can be over small things, unimportant detail. Error has to be opposed, but splintering is more about egos and idiosyncrasies. This all stems from a sinful nature.

Verse 21

and envy;

Envy means anger at someone else’s success.

Group 4: Sins of excess

drunkenness, orgies,

This is the loss of self-control through excessive drink and any celebration leading to undisciplined behaviour. These sins are disruptive to society in many ways and create fear. They are restrained by civil

gentle, bearing with one another in love (Eph. 4:2). So gentleness produces love, patience, kindness and goodness. The principle is that the needs of others must come first. This applies to fellow believers and non-believers. A gentle and quiet spirit will win over where words cannot (1 Pet. 3:1-4). The meek and gentle will inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5). These are the agents God uses in conquering the world for Christ and his kingdom.

and self-control.

Self-control is the discipline of bodily appetites i.e. keeping them under control. Since the fall of Adam, all people since, everywhere in the world, have lost the will and the ability to control themselves. Paul describes this as selling oneself into the slavery of sin. Without self-control, we do the things Paul lists in verses 19–21. The consequence of such behaviour is that the kingdom of God cannot be inherited (5:21). But people can regain self-control. This can only happen by an act of God (Ezek. 11:19-20) through his Spirit. The person who has trusted in Christ is given the desire not to sin. The Spirit indwells the believer, instructing him or her to run away from sin, to continually repent and ask for forgiveness. In this atmosphere the Spirit teaches the believer to live in a way which is pleasing to God. The result will be that the fruit of the Spirit will be seen in the person, including self-control. Every believer has a responsibility to be self-controlled, and is required to avoid the sins of verses 19-21. This is not easy and is part of the daily struggle that the believer experiences. Sin is present, but the desire must be to move from sin to righteousness. Self-control is that part of the Spirit's fruit, which enables the believer to say "No" to sin. Whilst the believer cannot exercise self control without the Holy Spirit, there is continual action for the believer to do in order to regain control of him or herself. Self-control must not be looked upon just in its use against the sins listed in verses 19-21, but also applies to all our behaviour and attitudes.

Against such things there is no law.

The purpose of law is to limit the harm done by evil. There is no need to limit the good done by these and all other Christian graces!

Verse 24

Those who belong to Christ Jesus

i.e. all true believers. (See 1 Corinthians 15:23.)

person's spiritual state. If a person claims to believe and has put their trust in Christ, then Christ's Spirit will be within the person. The Spirit cannot be seen but his presence within that person will have an effect that will be recognised by others. Paul calls this the "fruit of the Spirit". The use of the word "fruit" to describe spiritual graces is significant. "Sinful nature" produces not fruit but thorns and thistles that damage fellowship. But spiritual graces are a profitable fruit that produces healthy fellowship. Compare Matthew 7:16-20. The word "fruit" is singular. The true Christian character contains these 9 ingredients.¹

The nine-fold fruit is sometimes divided into three groups:

(i) *The believer's relation to God* comprises the basic spiritual qualities of love, joy and peace.

love,

The kind of love God has. It does not think of self but always has another as its object. We are to love God and our neighbours. Loving God means being convinced he is great, above everything else. We are to delight in that greatness and to be desirous of what he wants. We are to be grateful for all that God does. We are to love God with sincerity (all our heart), so that our emotions are to be fully engaged in this (all our soul) and our thoughts are taken up supremely with God (with all our mind). This love is spontaneous towards others, putting them first, being patient, not holding grudges. This love will be seen in our actions. It breaks down barriers and the world around will see this love interacting between Christian believers. Non-believers will themselves experience a considerate attitude that they do not receive from others. This love is required for the smooth running of the Christian church and is essential to the preaching of the gospel. Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, places love first because it is the foundation for all the other items in the list that now follows.

joy,

This can be described as the deep inner happiness that comes from knowing and loving Jesus Christ. Joy arises from the hope of sharing the glory of God. This is why true joy can only be experienced by the Christian believer. It is a duty for the Christian believer to show their faith by displaying the joy of the Lord to those around them. In practice this means that the person is willing to be content with their lot. It is not about having a smiling face whilst attending church. It is

¹ The material on the fruit of the Spirit has been taken from notes by P. Tait.

a satisfaction and happiness with all that God gives. Paul exhorts us to be always rejoicing (Phil. 4:4), which means even in times of sadness and suffering.

peace,

This peace is not about the absence of war. It is about the inner wellbeing and wholeness of the person because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This comes about because the person has peace with God through believing in Jesus (Rom. 5:1). The person's guilt has been removed and consequently the liability of punishment. What follows is a peace of mind for that person. Peace then is an inner experience that is a natural accompaniment of the work of God. It is what sets the spiritual man apart from the worldly man (Rom. 8:6). Whilst this peace can only be the result of the Holy Spirit's presence in the believer, it is to be cultivated by the believer. In other words believers are to live as those who have had their sins forgiven and guilt dealt with. They are to be completely satisfied with what God has done for them. Being at peace with God also means being at peace with one another and living peaceably amongst all men. This may bring the anger of the world upon the believer, but it will be suffering for the right reason. (See 1 Peter 2:19-23.)

- (ii) The believer's relation to other believers. This group works out in more detail the themes of love and peace.

patience,

Patience means bearing with one another, forgiving one another. The problem with any church is that it is made up of sinners. Therefore it is inevitable that offence is going to be given by something that is said or done. Patience is love in action; it bears, forgives and makes peace. The church leader has to show patience when things go wrong. The people in the church need to be patient with each other as well as with their church leaders. (They are sinners as well.) If Christian believers serve Christ together they must bear with one another's faults and forgive as Christ forgave. The Christian must also show patience to the non-Christian. That person will be acting in ignorance and reject the gospel until he believes the message of forgiveness. He or she may not do so unless they see the forgiveness in the believer's life. What may be surprising is that patience has to be exercised towards God. This is because God's ways are not our ways and he may not work along the lines we have laid down for him. God will work when and where and how he will. The believer's life should show patience because God is patient and he is called to be like God.

kindness,

We start with God because he is kind in the provision he makes for men. We see this in Jesus, where God makes a provision that is not deserved. There seems to be no way out for sinful man as the law condemns him. Yet through his kindness God has provided a way for forgiveness to take place. His kindness is an expression of undeserved love, which is called "grace". This kindness is gentle because it does not expect to be paid back. Instead it is tenderhearted forgiveness, reconciling sinful men to a holy God.

goodness,

Being good means a spiritual and moral excellence. This does not come naturally to human beings because they have denied God. There is therefore a bias towards what is bad. God by his Spirit corrects that bias and people are made good within and therefore do good. It is the fruit of the Spirit. In Micah 6:8 three things are required of the people of God; justice, peace and humility. Justice means treating others in ways that are right, mercy means going beyond that and being good when they don't deserve it and humility means following the Lord, worshipping, following and submitting to him. Goodness is the work of the Spirit and we have had nothing to do with its origins.

- (iii) The believer's own inner basic attitudes of faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

faithfulness,

In the context of this passage, faithfulness is to be seen in the lives of those who have believed, i.e. being worthy of the trust of other people. It means being consistent and is an attribute of God to be copied. The consistency is to be found in the submission to God in all things, at all times and in all circumstances. In practice faithfulness means being consistent in loving, being joyful and good and all the other attributes of the fruit of the Spirit. Paul describes a man as being faithful when he consistently holds to the Word of God (e.g. Epaphras, see Colossians 1:7). Onesimus is described as being faithful (Col. 4:9) because his new life was consistent with the profession of his new-found faith in Christ. This consistency applies even to death, by the believer's being ready to die for his faith (Rev. 2:13).

Verse 23

gentleness

Faithfulness is our basic attitude towards God. Gentleness is our basic spiritual attitude to our fellow men and women. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul exhorts the believers to be completely humble and

1. Christians are described as “walking about in the Spirit” (verse 16). “Walking about” refers to “their whole conduct of life”. “To be in the Spirit” means being guided by the Spirit according to the Scriptures.
2. Christians are described as “led by the Spirit” (verse 18). This verb is used of farmers leading cattle, or soldiers escorting a prisoner, or wind driving a ship along. Our leader, the Holy Spirit, takes the initiative. He has already prepared the Scripture to teach us; he lives in us to make us willing to obey the Scripture truth.
3. Christians are described as “walking in line with the Spirit” (verse 25). The verb describes people all walking in the same path. To be Spirit-led does not mean that we become different from other believers. All believers who are walking in the Spirit will have the same fruit in their lives.

The fruit of the Spirit grows only as we occupy ourselves with spiritual things – it does not come automatically.

Be what you are! Don’t wander away from Christ’s flag! Examine your leisure occupations; the things you read and listen to; the places you visit; the friends you have; the use you make of private and public times of worship. Fight for holiness!

 **Focus Point:**
The doctrine of the Holy Spirit

1. Introduction

When a person becomes a Christian he becomes a son of God. That means that he is now part of God’s family. Because he is now a son of God, God sends to that person the Spirit of his Son so that the Spirit enters the heart of the believer, crying out, “Abba, Father!” (4:6). We have seen in his letter to the Galatians that Paul talks about walking in the Spirit and also mentions the fruit of the Spirit. What does all this mean?

It is an appropriate place in our studies in Galatians to consider what the Bible teaches about the Spirit of God’s Son. We usually give him the name of the Holy Spirit. Today there are many misunderstandings about the Holy Spirit.

have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.
This is different from 2:20. There Paul refers to an experience that happened to him. Here Paul refers to something he does himself.

2:20

Christ’s death, on behalf of Paul, meant that Paul was crucified, i.e. God’s law had received what it demands in payment of Paul’s sin.

5:24

At his conversion and by his repentance, Paul now determines he will not obey the desires of the sinful nature. He will strive to put them to death.²

Verse 25

Since we live by the Spirit,

Paul in this verse expresses the same truth as that in verse 24 but in a different way, i.e. those who are Christ’s are those who have been given spiritual life by the Spirit.

let us keep in step with the Spirit.

In some translations “walk” is used. Walking (i.e. living daily) in ways that please the Holy Spirit is the only way to crucify the lusts of the flesh and its affections. The Greek word “walk” (keep in step) in this verse is different from “walk” in verse 16. In verse 16 the word means “to walk about”; here, the word means “to walk in line” or “to keep in step” with the Holy Spirit. A very well-known French theologian, John Calvin who lived in the 16th century, said this about verse 25, “If God’s Spirit lives in us, let him govern all our actions. There will always be many who impudently boast of living in the Spirit but Paul challenges them to prove their claim. As the soul does not live idly in the body, but gives motion and vigour to every member and part, so the Spirit of God cannot dwell in us without manifesting himself by outward effects. Paul means that our works are witnesses to our spiritual life.”

Verse 26

Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Paul concludes this section with an exhortation. He wants us to understand how, in practice, keeping in step with the Spirit affects our

² Paul uses this phrase “to put to death” in his letter to the Romans (8:13). Grace Publications has a book called “What Every Christian Needs to Know”. Part 2 of the book deals with the whole subject of putting sin to death. For a free copy of this book please write to Grace Baptist Mission.

behaviour and attitude to ourselves and to others. To ourselves we must put to death the natural conceit of our fallen nature. We are not to have an opinion of ourselves higher than it ought to be. To others we are to avoid provocation and being envious. To provoke means challenging someone to a contest. Thinking too much of our own abilities is often caused by our envy of others who are greatly gifted. The behaviour found in this verse is that of people where the Holy Spirit is not present and they can only keep in step with the dark powers of this world.



Summary

The gospel, which Paul had brought to the Galatians, was the good news that God had intervened in man's hopeless plight and had come to his rescue. God did this by sending his own Son, Jesus Christ, to this earth to save people from their sin. This was made possible because Jesus who was without sin took the place of sinners and died in their place. In doing this God punished his own Son for the sins of others. God's law was met in that the penalty of death for sin was carried out. God accepted his own Son's death as the penalty so that whoever's sins were punished on the cross, that person has been freed from the punishment. The whole action that took place was of God and did not involve any human activity. This is what the Galatians believed. Now others had come and told them they must go through ceremony and ritual for God to really accept them. In effect the Galatians were being told that their salvation was reliant upon their effort. The Galatians were being misled and must not take in this false teaching. This is the whole point of the letter. The two different approaches will show themselves in the lifestyle of the person. If a person relies on their effort, their failure to meet God's standard will be clearly seen by their sinful nature. Paul sets these out and it makes painful reading. The person who has put their whole trust in Christ for salvation will have his Spirit living in them. This will be clearly evident in their life because of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Observing the law cannot bring about such a change in lifestyle, but Spirit-led behaviour can surpass the requirements of any law.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Be what you are!

In old times when two armies fought it was important for the soldiers to keep near to the flag of their army. To be cut off from their own flag would be a very dangerous, possibly fatal, situation.

Paul has been describing two kinds of armies – the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. Everyone on earth is a member of one or other of these armies. These two armies are in constant conflict in the world. Christians therefore need to be sure that their lives clearly indicate which army they are in. (See Romans 14:8.)

In order to make it clear which army we are in, there are two parts to our Christian attitude – a negative part and a positive part: “crucify” (verse 24) and “walk” (verse 25).

A. **Negatively** – “crucify the flesh”. Compare Mark 8:34. Every follower of Christ is to behave like a condemned criminal who carries his cross to a place of execution. We are daily to take our sinful nature and crucify it (i.e. to prevent it from controlling our actions).

1. Crucifixion was **pitiless**. It was kept for the worst criminals. We are to be merciless with the evil thoughts and desires that can arise from our sinful nature.
2. Crucifixion was **painful**. There was no more painful way of inflicting death. We must anticipate the anguish we may feel at refusing the suggestions of our sinful nature.
3. Crucifixion was **permanent**. No criminal ever survived a crucifixion. He was fixed there on the cross until he gradually died. So once we have refused to obey some suggestion from our sinful nature we must never obey it again in that matter.

The secret of holiness lies in the extent of our repentance – never pull the nails out again!

B. **Positively** – “walk by the Spirit”. Compare verses 16,18,25. As well as refusing to do what is wrong, we must occupy ourselves with what is right. In all three verses (16,18,25) the verb is in a form that means “keep on doing this continuously”.

rupted by sin. That is why Jesus said, “No one will come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (John 6:44).

How does God draw people unto himself? He does this by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit uses the truth about Jesus in the gospel and through this brings conviction of sin. Only the Holy Spirit can do this; for a human being this is impossible. Conviction is the knowledge of the reality of our sin. This means that we feel awful about our sin. We grieve as we realise we have offended God. This conviction brings about a longing for salvation. As the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to all these things, he points us to Jesus and we ask him for forgiveness. All this is the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

After we are saved the Holy Spirit continues his work within us. He produces within our lives his special fruit. This is what we have considered in our present study in Galatians 5:22-23. The Holy Spirit is our comforter and help in all our sufferings. Jesus told his disciples that they will suffer for his name’s sake and the Holy Spirit encourages us in our obedience to God to live our lives cheerfully, willingly and patiently.

5. The gifts of the Holy Spirit

In considering the ministry of the Holy Spirit no mention was made of gifts. We now consider this part of the Holy Spirit’s ministry separately. By his gifts the Holy Spirit enables us to become involved in the work of the gospel. Today it is quite a controversial subject. Some Christians think that all the miraculous gifts we read of in the New Testament are still available to the church today. Others say that God has withdrawn them.

The reference to the Spirit’s gifts is only made by Peter and Paul. They are found in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:7-11 and 1 Peter 4:10-11. The lists in these verses differ. The reason is that there is no complete list, which people can follow rigidly. God is sovereign and we must not try to limit him. We are given these lists to tell us about the sorts of gifts which the Spirit gives to the followers of Jesus.

Rather than trying to concentrate on all the gifts listed in these references, it is more important for us to recognise three principles concerning the Holy Spirit’s gifts. Paul sets these principles out in his first letter to the Corinthians.

- there is great diversity in the Spirit’s giving (12:4-10)

2. The Holy Spirit is a person

Many people think of the Holy Spirit as a power or a force. We accept and understand the being of God the Father and Jesus as God’s Son. We have no difficulty in accepting them as persons. Jesus when on earth had a human body. From that we can easily relate to his Father’s being a person. But when it comes to the Holy Spirit we have more difficulty, for the Holy Spirit has never appeared in personal form. Some parts of the Scriptures speak of him as wind and breath.

When you look at the whole of Scripture it is clear that the Holy Spirit is a person. In John chapters 14 –16 we find Jesus speaking of the Holy Spirit. In Galatians 4:6 the Holy Spirit is described as the Spirit of the Son, so we need to take notice of what Jesus says about his Spirit.

Here are some of the descriptions Jesus uses:

dwelling (John 14:16)
teaching, bringing things to remembrance (John 14:26)
testifying (John 15:26)
guiding, hearing, speaking, showing, glorifying (John 16:13-14)

Other writers too give us some of the activities of the Holy Spirit:

forbidding (Acts 16:6-7)
raising from the dead (Rom. 8:11)
interceding (Rom. 8:26)
searching, knowing (1 Co. 2:10-11)

and the reactions of others to the Holy Spirit

people lied to him (Acts 5:3)
people tempted (tested) him (Acts 5:9)
people resisted him (Acts 7:51)
people grieved him (Eph. 4:30)
people blasphemed against him (Matt. 12:31)

Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the helper, comforter (Counsellor). All these things point us clearly to the fact that the Holy Spirit is a person.

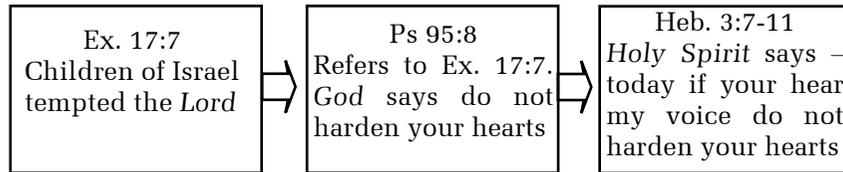
Divine person

The Holy Spirit is a divine person. Jesus as God’s Son is God. He sent the Holy Spirit to take his place after he left earth and ascended into heaven. How then could the Holy Spirit be a substitute for Jesus if he were not God? Here are four areas which show us the divine nature of the Holy Spirit.

(i) Names of God

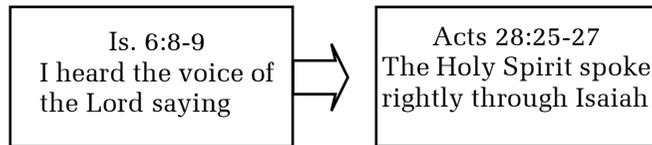
The Holy Spirit is called God in the Bible. Here are two examples where the names of God are used for the Holy Spirit.

Example 1



See how the names Lord, God and Holy Spirit are used in each of these verses, which all refer to the same incident.

Example 2



(ii) The attributes of God are given to the Holy Spirit

- eternal (Heb. 9:14)
- in all places at all times (Ps. 139:7-10)
- all-knowing (Is. 40:13-17)
- able to do all that he pleases (1 Co. 12:11)

(iii) The works of God are attributed to the Holy Spirit

- made me (Job 33:4)
- casting out demons (Matt. 12:28)
- renewing (Titus 3:5)
- transforming the characters of believers (2 Co. 3:18)

(iv) Worship given to God is also given to the Holy Spirit

- you can blaspheme against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31-32)
- that would not be possible if the Holy Spirit were not God

A distinct person

The Holy Spirit is a distinct person:

- he is God, as God the Father – but not the Father
- he is God, as God the Son – but not the Son

- having just considered the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit we find that this sin is only described as being against him, not against the Father or the Son
- in John 15:26 we read that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit from the Father
- so the Holy Spirit is not the Son, because the Son sent him
- nor is the Holy Spirit the Father, for the Son sends him from the Father

3. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity

The Trinity is hard for us to fully understand. There is no satisfactory illustration that we can use to explain the Trinity. God is one but at the same time three distinct persons. In this Focus Point we have been considering the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity. Each person in the Trinity is distinct from the other two. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not different names of the same person with the names changing. Each person of the Trinity uses the description “I” (John 12:28;17:4; Acts 13:2).

They are three persons but one God. Their existence as one person is a deep mystery. One body – yet one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father (Eph. 4:4-6). They are so obviously three, but they are one. We believe this, though we cannot fully understand it, because it is a biblical truth.

4. Ministry of the Holy Spirit

We cannot separate the work of the Holy Spirit from the working of the Trinity. Their ministries are all essential for our salvation. God the Father planned our salvation, God the Son purchased it and God the Holy Spirit applies it to us.

The way the Holy Spirit brings this salvation to us is by giving us new life (John 3:5-8). This new life comes about as we are convicted of sin (John 16:8). Without conviction there can be no repentance. Without repentance there can be no salvation.

The reason we need to be saved is because of the terrible effect sin has on us all. It is very powerful and we cannot escape it by ourselves. When God planned our salvation he sent his Son, Jesus, to die on the cross. This was to enable our sins to be punished but that by itself could not break the power of sin. Sin has such a hold on us that we cannot by ourselves trust in Jesus Christ and his death for our sins. We were incapable of doing this; our minds and hearts are so cor-

What these verses mean

Verse 1

Brothers,

The illustration that Paul sets before his readers is one that affects the Christian believing community. He is addressing Christians about a Christian problem, namely a fellow-believer is caught out by the wiles of the devil.

if someone is caught in a sin,

It is not clear whether the meaning is that some sin has overtaken a believer and caused him to be at fault, or whether one believer has discovered that a fellow believer is committing some sin. Probably the former meaning is intended. The Greek word means “to be caught before one realises” – the believer has not planned to commit the sin but has fallen into it without realising it could happen. The Greek word here translated “sin” means “a false step”. To commit (or fall into) such a sin is the opposite of “to walk in step with” of 5:25. It does not refer to a wilful, deliberate sin, but to an unexpected sudden mishap which will make the believer feel guilty of failure.

you who are spiritual

That is those in whose lives the fruit of the Spirit is seen (5:22,23). This should describe all professing Christian believers. Paul is not intimating that there are two classes of Christians, normal and super-spiritual. He is referring the reader back to the description of what a Christian’s attitude should be like. He could have said, “You who have trusted in Christ,” but he is emphasising his teaching that a person cannot claim to be a true Christian believer and not display the fruit of the Spirit. This will now be evident as Paul continues.

should restore him gently.

See 5:23. It is easy for some religious people harshly to condemn the faults of their fellow-believers. That is not the way of Christ. Evidence of true spirituality is a willingness to help with great sympathy those who stumble. The Greek word “to restore” is used of mending torn fishing nets or setting a broken bone. The idea of mending is more prominent than any idea of punishment; i.e. the aim of discipline is to restore the erring one to full church fellowship again.

But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

In the first part of the verse “you” (plural) is used; now “you” (singular) is used. Each of the Spirit-led believers is to examine

- all gifts are for the good of the church (4:7)
- the Spirit decides who receives what gifts (12:11,18)

Remember too that the Holy Spirit may give a gift for a particular occasion and then withdraw it afterwards. This would apply in areas such as healing. Preachers can experience extraordinary power when preaching one week, which is not repeated the following week. The Holy Spirit gives his gifts in accordance with the will and purpose of God. Be very careful about claiming a continuing gift from the Spirit. Note that the gift of tongues does not prove the Holy Spirit is present. Plenty of people who follow other gods exercise that gift. Nor are elated and emotional feelings a sign of the Spirit’s presence. The presence of the Holy Spirit is recognised because he brings about a spiritual change within a person for which God gets all the glory.

6. False Ideas about the Trinity

- Tritheism:** There are three gods, all of the same sort but separate and distinct from each other. A belief in more gods than three is called *polytheism*. The Mormons are a modern sect who follow this way of thinking.
- Monarchianism:** The three persons are not equal. The Son and the Holy Spirit are lesser than God the Father. This philosophy appeared early on in the 2nd century. Today it is the Unitarians and Jehovah’s Witnesses who follow this line.
- Modalism** One God, who like an actor, plays three parts. He appears as God the Father, then as God the Son and finally as God the Holy Spirit. Early in Church History this was called Sabellianism, after Sabellius who first taught it.

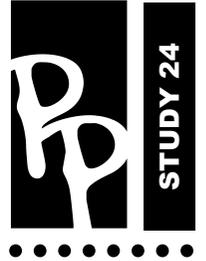
7. Division between East and West

In AD325 the Council of Nicaea met and defined the doctrine of the deity of Christ. They were vague on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and just declared a belief in him. The Council of Constantinople in AD381 added to the Nicene Creed concerning the Holy Spirit by saying, “I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father.” The Latin-speaking churches of the West were unhappy with this because they wanted the scriptural teaching of the Spirit being of Christ as well as of the Father. So the Council of Toledo in AD589 added the words “and from the Son”.

The Greek-speaking churches (East) opposed this. The Nicæan Creed, as added to by the Council of Toledo, is accepted by the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. It is rejected by the Orthodox Churches (Greece, Balkans, Eastern Europe and Russia).

Sources used: Peter Jeffery, *Bitesize Theology* (Evangelical Press); Stuart Olyott, *The Three are One* (Evangelical Press); Roger Ellsworth, *Strengthening Christ's Church* (Evangelical Press).

PRIDE AND SELF-EXAMINATION



Over to you

Has the study of this passage changed the way you ought to deal with the problems and sins of people?

Have you tried to make your people conform to a moral set of rules without discerning their true spiritual state?

If a professing believer committed one of the sins listed in verse 19-21, how would you deal with the situation? Would it be different from your method with a person who had made no profession of faith?

How does your understanding of the fruit of the Spirit affect your preaching and teaching?



Galatians 6:1-5

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: "The law of Christ"
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

Paul has been urging the Galatian believers to live in a way that is filled with the Spirit (5:16-25). The evidence of Spirit-filled people is not some mystical experience in their life, but rather loving relationships with other people. Paul closes the previous chapter with an exhortation about not putting ourselves higher than we really are. As we begin the last chapter of the letter, Paul moves from the dangers of conceit (5:26) to the subject of humility and pride (6:1-5). Those who wanted to observe the law would themselves be in danger of falling into the sin of being spiritually proud. This is what Jesus had accused the Pharisees of. To help the Galatians understand this, Paul sets up a situation in which a Christian falls into a public but unspecified sin. Other believers would be shocked. In their hearts they would feel that they could never do something like that. A fellow-Christian sinning in such a way is hurtful to his fellow-believers. Such hurt can so easily lead to a superior and judgmental attitude. Some may want to be quick to move for action and church discipline. Paul is not so hasty. The fallen person needs to be restored whilst the spiritual pride of fellow-believing onlookers needs to be curtailed and dealt with.



Focus Point:

“The law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2)

Jesus, more than once, indicated that he was a law-giver: e.g. “whoever hears **my** sayings and does them” . . . “keep **my** commandments” . . . “take **my** yoke upon you” . . . “a new commandment **I** give you.”

Christian believers are not required to observe the laws and ceremonies of the Old Testament as their way of life (1 Tim. 1:9). But that does not mean that Christians can live carelessly or lawlessly. Paul says they are to be under “the law of Christ”. In another passage Paul describes himself as being “under the law to Christ” (1 Co. 9:21). “The law of Christ” does not ignore or cancel out the Ten Commandments given to Moses at Sinai. The commandments were part of Jesus’ teaching, e.g. adultery, murder, divorce etc. (Matt. 5). So whilst the Christian does not have to keep to ritual or ceremony (outward), his behaviour and lifestyle is governed by the principles of the commandments, because they are incorporated into the law of Christ (internal).

The whole argument of Galatians is that believers are free from slavish adherence to the law of Moses. But what is meant by “the law of Christ”? How does that law differ from the law of Moses? Are believers freed from one law only to become slaves to another?

The law of Moses consisted of very many regulations on every aspect of daily life; there were detailed laws about food, clothing, hygiene, health, social life, family life, national life, economic life, religious life. Jews never had to think for themselves how to live. They had only to obey all the regulations meticulously.

Christian believers, however, have the Holy Spirit indwelling them (4:6) and no longer need the schoolmaster of the law to dictate how their lives should be (3:24-25) because the function of the law is to lead a person to Christ. For the Christian that has taken place and now he is led by the Spirit (5:18) and lives in the Spirit (5:25). But this does not mean that believers are to be guided in their lives only by some mystical, inward voice of the Spirit, to the neglect of all instruction from any other source.

The “law of Christ” is the authority of spiritual love (Rom. 5:5) controlling believers’ actions, causing them to be self-sacrificing for the benefit of others. Christ himself is the supreme example of the

himself. See 1 Corinthians 10:12. He who truly examines himself will not become self-righteous when looking at others.

Verse 2

Carry each other’s burdens,

The obligation to be helpful is for everyone to help each other. Paul is saying in effect, “This is the proper burden-bearing for Christians, not the bearing of the burden of the law of Moses (compare Acts 15:10), but the burden of being patient with fellow-believers’ weaknesses.”

and in this way you will fulfil

The Greek word is very emphatic: i.e. this kind of behaviour completely fulfils the law of Christ.

the law of Christ.

See John 13:34, 15:12; 1 John 4:21; 1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 5:14. Paul is saying, “If you must keep any law, let it not be the observance of ceremonies of the law of Moses but instead reproducing the quality of the life of Christ.” See Focus Point in this study on “the law of Christ”.

Verse 3

If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

Anyone who becomes proud, thinking himself better than others, will not bear others’ burdens. So pride causes him to break the law of Christ. The Judaisers would have been pressing upon the Galatians the importance of observing the law. This emphasises the works of man and encourages self-righteousness. The person who has put his total trust in Christ and knows that he cannot merit anything in God’s eyes (through observing rules, ceremonies or doing good works), will realise that he is nothing and that all he possesses is in Christ. To think and behave in any other way is dangerous self-delusion.

Verse 4

Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else,

As a remedy to self-importance Paul advises self-examination. As we do so we are not to evaluate our own behaviour by comparing ourselves to others whom we consider to be wrongdoers, such as the person in verse 1. If we do this then we are comparing ourselves to those whom we judge to be inferior, which will boost our own egos.

That will do nothing to promote our own spiritual growth. We will find ourselves back in the list of the works of our sinful nature, which Paul sets out in 5:19-21. We are not to look at the sins of others but to put our own actions under the examination of the Bible. That will tell us of our spiritual quality. If our actions pass such a test then we can rejoice (take pride, boast) about it. If not then we have a lot to do to put our own life in order. We will then not have time to worry about the shortcomings of other fellow-believers.

Verse 5

For each one should carry his own load.

The word for “load” was often used by the Greeks for a ship’s cargo, i.e. its own proper load, or for a soldier’s pack, i.e. each man’s own equipment. In verse 4 Paul has been saying that each believer is responsible for his own spiritual growth. In the day of judgment we will not be judged on how other believers have developed. Each believer will be judged on his own performance. This verse does not contradict verse 2. We are to help one another (verse 2) but we are responsible to see that we ourselves are what we ought to be (verse 5). This verse 5 prevents an abuse that could arise from verse 2. Some might make unjust demands on the generosity of others – “The law of Christ means you must help me.” But if each believer conscientiously bears his own load, he will not be tempted to impose on the good nature of others.



Summary

The Christian believer is to be different from a non-believing person. Behaviour and lifestyle will arise from the attitude a person has. For the Christian this will come from the effect and influence of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the believer. The Bible describes this attitude and lifestyle as the fruit of the Spirit. Paul is not writing these things as a theory but that all the parts of the fruit as described in 5:22-23 must be seen in action. The problem the Galatians were facing, through the false teachers, was self-righteousness. This is the work of the sinful nature and not the fruit of the Spirit. Paul then, having set out the difference, puts before the Galatians a scenario of a sinning believer. The fruit of the Spirit

Summary continued on page 241

Summary continued from page 234

will respond differently in such a situation from the sinful nature. If his fellow-believers are truly spiritual, they will restore him with gentleness and humility. This does not always happen as the sin of pride rises so quickly and easily within the believer. The person may not readily realise that he is putting himself above the fallen believer. We are not to measure ourselves against others but against the standards set out in the Word of God. Only then will we truly know our spiritual condition. It is the responsibility of every Christian believer to evaluate his own life against the Bible. We are to carry our own load, for our spiritual development is our own responsibility and not that of others.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Burden-bearing

1. **What it is: “restore him”**

If we see a fellow believer doing wrong, we are not to ignore it, nor to despise him. We are not to gossip about it. We are to try to raise the fallen one again. Compare Matthew 18:15-17.

2. **Who does it: “you who are spiritual”**

i.e. those of whom Galatians 5:16 and 22-25 is true. We may not excuse ourselves by saying, “I am not spiritual.” Every believer ought to be spiritual.

3. **How it is to be done: “gently ...or you also may be tempted”**

The related word “gentleness” occurs in 5:23. Evidently spiritual people are gentle. That gentleness arises from the knowledge of our own weaknesses. Only the spiritual have learned that of themselves.

To be a burden-bearer is a great ministry. It is something every Christian should be. Martin Luther, writing about these verses, said: “Christians must have strong shoulders and mighty bones.” i.e. they must be spiritually sturdy enough to bear the weaknesses of others.

Think of the examples in the life of Christ.

be handled if a fellow-believer falls into sin. The fruit of the Spirit is active and rather than condemn the person, the attitude should be to see how that person can be restored. Paul will now give a second application and then set out a principle for general Christian living.

What these verses mean

Verse 6

Anyone who receives instruction in the word

This is one practical example of the many mutual helps that should exist among believers, mentioned in 6:2. The word for “receives instruction” has the same root as the Greek word meaning “catechumen”. It is the word Luke uses of Theophilus: “you have been taught” (catechised) (Luke 1:4). “In the word” means the whole message of the gospel. Paul is therefore including all professing believers who come together in a Christian community (i.e. local church) for worship because as part of their coming together they will receive instruction. What is Paul telling these believers to do?

must share

The Greek word used here is related to the word “fellowship” or “sharing”. This idea of fellowship among believers is an idea that comes into prominence in the New Testament immediately after Pentecost (Acts 2:42). The presence of the Spirit in believers is proved by their new willingness to share what they have with others who have a need. (See Romans 15:27). The particular application here is to the teacher who gives knowledge to the pupil. What are they to share?

all good things with his instructor.

This means all the good things of this life (see Luke 16:25). The pupils are to support the teacher (1 Co. 9:11,14). In other words congregations should be ready and willing to support their pastors and ministers (elders). In the majority of societies today this will be financial support. In societies where goods are exchanged rather than the use of money, then the church leader (elder) who teaches is to be supported by food and clothing. This is not a new concept. We find in the Old Testament that the other tribes of Israel supported the Levites. The Levites could then devote themselves fully to the service of God by maintaining the temple and carrying out the sacrifices that the people brought. Today pastors (elders) are to be supported by the rest of the believers so that they can devote themselves to the service of

kind of life that is produced by living under the control of this law of love. The Holy Spirit continually reminds believers of the example of Christ’s life and so constrains them to govern their behaviour by the same principles. To live by the law of Christ is to properly understand the rule of the words of God (Ex. 20) through to the example of the Word of God i.e. Christ (John 1). Christ said that he had come to fulfil the law, not to abolish it (Matt. 5:17). The law God gave to the Israelites has not changed its requirements. It was only partially understood and the tendency was to interpret it in its outward form. With the coming of Christ, the full meaning of the law was revealed to us, showing that the law of Moses is moral and ethical. However, without personal faith in Christ’s death and sacrifice, complying with the law’s requirements is impossible. It is only Christ’s sin offering and the Spirit’s help that makes such things possible in God’s sight. (See Romans 8:4.)

The Old Testament Jews had no need to work out a pattern for their lives – the law of Moses dictated every detail of their lives for them. They lived like children under a schoolmaster (3:24)! Christians, however, are expected to work out for themselves the pattern of their lives by the urging of the Spirit and from the example of Christ. That is living under the law of Christ. It involves the believer in

- (i) responsibility, to think about every action, and
- (ii) spirituality, to think in a Christlike way about everything.

This is a mature way of life, unlike the childish way of life in the Old Testament (4:1,2) where every action was dictated by rules.

One interesting result of living “under the law of Christ” is that sometimes believers may appear to act inconsistently with what has been done at other times, i.e. the believer may not always act in the same way in different situations (1 Co. 9:20-22). The expression of self-sacrificing love may take one form in one situation but another form in another situation. But always the same motive is present: the law of love.



Over to you

Think back to when a believer in your church may have fallen into sin. In what spirit was the matter dealt with? Would you deal with it differently now?

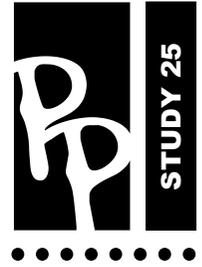
Does your preaching and teaching deal with the standards that God sets for his people? If not, how do you propose to remedy the situation? How do you expect your congregants to check their spiritual condition?

How would you, in your situation, encourage your people to help each other by carrying each other's burdens and at the same time to take responsibility for carrying their own load?

WHAT YOU PUT IN



IS WHAT YOU GET OUT



Galatians 6:6-10

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: A man reaps what he sows and the teaching of Karma
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

The apostle Paul is a very practical teacher. He has had to defend very strongly in his letter to the Galatians the fundamental basis of trusting in Christ alone for salvation. A Gentile does not have to become a Jew to be accepted by God. Those who told the Galatian believers that they must take on the Jewish way were really saying that all the rules and regulations must be obeyed and followed. These rules were not God-given but thought up by men. To Paul this was all wrong and it could not be ignored because man-made rules produce different results from the results of following God's ways. Trying to earn salvation by keeping to rules has tragic consequences. It fails and results in the sinful nature's showing itself in all types of ungodly behaviour. Paul lists these in 5:19-21. Trusting in Christ alone produces a different set of results, stemming from the Holy Spirit's changing that person's life. This is called the fruit of the Spirit (5:22-23). In chapter 6 Paul sets out how the fruit of the Spirit works out in practice. In the first five verses Paul has shown the Galatians how a situation should

Summary continued from page 243

the important work of Christ, taking the gospel to people and teaching the believers. The elders appointed to do the task of teaching are to be supported to do this work so that they can give their time to it. Paul then lays down the general principle of Christian living. Those who have truly believed and whose lives have changed as a result will sow to the Spirit. They will live in a manner that glorifies God. They will reap everlasting life. Those whose profession of faith is false will only give in to their sinful nature. They will reap corruption. Paul therefore encourages believers not to give up, but to persevere and do good to all people and especially their fellow-believers. This way the reality of their faith will be demonstrated.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Sowing and reaping

To get a good harvest of rice, we must sow good seed and sow it plentifully. This is a natural law which no one doubts. No one sows poor seed and then expects a good harvest.

Yet in the realm of moral and spiritual things many people behave as though they believe they can sow what they like and still reap a good and blessed harvest! No one can outwit God's law of life like that. The sowing-reaping law is seen:

i. **In the area of Christian ministry** (Gal. 6: 6-7)

Where the good seed of God's Word is being sown, those being instructed should respond by giving financial support to the teacher. To support good teaching is to make possible the good harvest of mature, well-established believers.

Note:

- The teacher is to be earnest about teaching the Word well. The good seed must be sown liberally. A lazy, careless teacher must not expect to be supported: Compare with 1 Timothy 5:17.

God. This is what they do when they instruct people in the Word. They have to study and prepare. It is the responsibility of all believers to give financial support and for churches to pay their pastors adequately. From the beginning Paul appointed elders in the churches (Acts 14:23) whose duties included teaching the church members (1 Timothy 3:2 – “apt to teach”). If an elder has to work to support himself and his family, what quality of teaching will he be able to give?

Verse 7

Do not be deceived:

The Galatian believers were being misled. They were being tricked into doing something they should not be doing. What was the result of their being taken in by the false teachers?

God cannot be mocked.

They were ignoring God and no one can get away with that. They were turning up their noses at God. They were being disrespectful which would end in their disregarding God. If the Galatians fail to accept those who teach them the truth, they are disrespectful to the will of God in this matter.

A man reaps what he sows.

The principle is generally true. Everyone will be judged according to their works. No one will be able to outwit God. The principle is true in the particular Galatian instance. If they fail properly to accept and follow the truth (the grace of Christ 1:6), they will be led into error by false teachers.

Verse 8

The one who sows to please his sinful nature,

“Sinful nature” here means (as in 5:19-21) not the physical realm but human nature under the control of sin. To sow to please the sinful nature (flesh) means to allow yourself to behave in ways described in 5:19-21. (See Romans 8:13.) Those who sow in this way are motivated in their thoughts and actions by indwelling sin. Their sinful nature shows that no change has taken place in their hearts and God is not deceived by their claim to be his children. This means that they ...

from that nature will reap destruction;

This is to bring into a worse condition. There is no suggestion of annihilation or total destruction. Since it is contrasted with eternal life, the implication is that the worse condition resulting from sowing to the sinful nature is also everlasting (2 Thess. 1:9). No amount of

religion can help such people to be rescued from God's anger. They will be condemned eternally. What is the only answer to this problem?

the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Sowing has the same meaning as earlier in this verse. It means living, behaving, doing the things we do. If all this comes from the leading of God's Holy Spirit, then it is proof that we are God's children (Rom. 8:14).

Verse 9

Let us not become weary

Paul often uses words about agricultural workers who may grow slower in their work after hours of toil and who may be overcome by the heat in which they work. Our human nature always finds it difficult to persevere, especially when results are not immediate.

in doing good,

The word "good" means "something beautiful" and includes both physical and spiritual activity. It is possible that Paul refers here to the collection of monies to help poor believers in Jerusalem as one example of well-doing (2:10; Rom. 15:25-28; 1 Co. 16:1; 2 Co. 9:1-8).

for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

There is always, in God's purposes, a proper time for events to take place (4:4; 1 Tim. 2:6, 6:15; Titus 1:3). The appropriateness of God's timing is a part of the splendour of the event; the harvest of well-doing is therefore worth waiting for. To have it earlier would be only half as glorious!

Verse 10

Therefore, as we have opportunity,

Paul uses the same word as "proper time" in verse 9; i.e. there are suitable times in which we should do the good we ought to do (Eccl. 3:1-8).

let us do good

"Doing good" is doing the kind of beautiful thing Paul is writing of from 5:22-6:9. Earlier in this letter Paul has strongly condemned justification by works. This was for those hoping to gain favour with God by doing good works. Now Paul is encouraging good deeds, but the difference is that the motivation comes from being in a right relationship with God. The person has trusted in Christ alone; their life has been changed as the Spirit has cleansed them and dwells

within them. These good works will have a mark about them, which can be identified as follows:¹

Good works

Through these good works God will be glorified (John 15:8)

These good works will conform to the Bible (2 Thess. 3:14)

The good works will arise out of the indwelling Spirit (Gal. 5:25)

The motivation behind these good works will come from love for God and his Son (2 Co. 5:14-15)

to all people,

God gives many good things to all people, whether they are believers or not (Matt. 5:45). By those universal gifts God makes continuing life possible for them. So believers are to follow this pattern and do good to all.

especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

God's universal care of all people does not deny that he also has a sphere of particular and special concern for his people (1 Tim. 4:10; Eph. 2:19). The translation used in this study describes such people as "the family of believers". In other translations the term "household of faith" is used. The phrase "of [the] faith" describes all who accept the doctrines of the gospel, whether Jew or Gentile (i.e. the things believed, not the act of believing).



Summary

Paul has given two examples of how the fruit of the Spirit influences the way the Christian behaves. Paul may well have picked on these two because of a specific problem amongst the Galatians. The first was self-righteousness and Paul addressed this by considering how a person who has fallen into sin should be dealt with (6:1-5). The second example is about Christian giving (6:6). Instead of thinking about self, the Christian believer is to consider others. In this case it is

Summary continued on page 250

¹ Edgar Andrews, *Free in Christ* (Evangelical Press).



Over to you

What is the attitude of believers in your situation or culture towards their responsibility of sharing what they have to support the pastor (teaching elder) in his ministry of teaching? If it is negative where does the problem exist?

How would you deal with a person in your church whose way of life appears to please his/her sinful nature? (Note that this is not the same situation as is found in 6:1.)

Hopefully, there will be a lot of good deeds being done by the people in your congregation. Why are they doing these good works? What answers would you get if you asked them? This may inform you what you have to do as a church leader and Bible teacher.

- Those being taught must not demand that the teacher only say what they want to hear, because they pay him. The right relationship between teacher and taught is described by Paul as “a sharing together”.

ii. **In the area of Christian holiness** (Gal. 6:8)

Our thoughts, words and actions are seeds. It is our duty to “sow to the Spirit”. There is no other way to expect the spiritual harvest of everlasting life.

(a) Every time we allow our minds to be occupied with impurity, jealousy, evil intention and hate, we sow to the flesh. Holiness is a harvest that only comes from spiritual sowing.

(b) By the books we read, the friends we have, the means of grace we use, we can sow good spiritual seed and expect to reap holiness.

iii. **In the area of Christian well-doing** (Gal. 6:9-10)

Doing good to all is sowing seed. Here too there can be a good harvest if good deeds are sown. Good deeds do not earn salvation, for that is God’s free gift. Yet good deeds do produce a good harvest: e.g.

- People may be comforted and helped;
- Moral deterioration in society may be halted;
- Respect for what is good, true and beautiful may be fostered;
- A life of faithful goodness earns a reward in heaven (Matt. 25:14-23).

In none of these spheres can God be mocked. To reap a **good harvest** we must persevere in sowing **good seed**.

Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.



Focus Point:

A man reaps what he sows and the teaching of Karma²

The link that the Bible makes between our life on earth and the consequence it will have for our eternal destiny can be easily misunderstood where other religions also stress this relationship. This is

² See page 252 for the footnote

very relevant in regions where Hinduism prevails. Paul is not teaching in Galatians 6:7-8 the Hindu doctrine of Karma. Paul is teaching that we are each responsible for the effects that our actions produce. This is very different from the Hindu teaching.

Bible Teaching	Hindu teaching
Paul is writing about how we use this life.	Karma suggests that what a person is in this life is the inevitable result of what he did in former lives.
Paul is teaching that the believer is free to behave in godly ways that lead to eternal life.	Karma suggests that a person is a prisoner of his fate. His fate was determined in a previous life, and from which for the ordinary person there is no escape.
Paul's teaching is that everyone will be judged according to their works; no one will evade God's righteous judgement. God is not mocked.	Karma teaches that each individual can himself struggle to find a way of release from eighty-four lakhs (one hundred thousand) of reincarnations.

For these reasons we must say that Paul is not teaching the Hindu doctrine of Karma.

Moreover there are other reasons why the Hindu doctrine must be regarded as wrong.

1. Karma ignores the fact of the solidarity of mankind. What any person receives in life is **not** the fruit of **his** actions alone, for he is

² Karma was originally a name for a religious rite in Hinduism. Today it has come to mean the belief that one's actions in this life affect one's future destiny for better or worse. The doer of good becomes good and the doer of evil becomes evil. Karma derives itself from the attitude of a person. For example, actions performed from duty in a disinterested way stem from an attitude of no desire and therefore will have no "karmic" effects. It will not build up any positive credit for the life to come.

continually being affected by the actions of others. The lives of people are not like the hairs of the head, where each fibre hangs separately. Human life is like a closely woven cloth in which the stresses and strains suffered by the whole affect each individual thread. It is wrong to say that the only destiny a person can affect is his own. All suffering is not the result of one's own actions.

2. Karma ignores the fact that there is suffering which some people may choose to endure for the benefit of others. Mahatma Gandhi voluntarily endured the suffering of fasts, nearly to death, to alter the destiny of others and to bring benefit to society. All suffering in this life is not therefore the result of behaviour in a previous life. And the results of suffering are not limited to the benefit of the life of the sufferer alone.
3. Karma ignores the fullness of the nature of God. Karmic law that where there is sin there must be penalty too, is only half of the truth. God is not only righteous; he is also love. Thus, it is also true that where there is sin, the gracious love of God will cause him to enter into this sinful world and, being incarnate as Jesus Christ, to die for sinners. God cannot express himself fully in the punishment of sin alone; he can express himself **fully** only if, with the inevitability of punishment, there is also a divine activity to destroy sinfulness. The coming of Jesus Christ as Saviour was not an optional thing; it was the revelation of a divine compulsion and of an eternal plan.
4. Karma ignores the true nature of sin. By suggesting that a person can himself **escape** the consequences of sin by many reincarnations the seriousness of sin is belittled. Because sin could **only** be atoned for by the infinite value of the death of Christ (2 Co. 5:19), it is obvious that no mere human endeavours can provide such an atonement.

See page 254 for Over to you

world (1:4). As far as he was concerned the world was dead to him; it was not part of his life (crucified to me).

and I to the world.

Unbelievers, who place all their hope of satisfaction in the material benefits of this life, will find Paul's spiritual teaching unattractive and will ignore him. He would not have any significance in their opinion; he would be as good as dead to them.

Verse 15

Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything,

Paul regards the gospel of the cross as more important than argument about circumcision. See Special Note 1 on 5:11 in Study 21 explaining Paul's flexibility in the use of circumcision. It was not fundamental as far as salvation was concerned, more of a cultural issue. Paul would use or not use circumcision depending on the circumstances, his main concern being in the interests of the gospel.

what counts is a new creation [in Christ Jesus ¹].

The salvation Christ obtained through dying on the cross for the sins of a person makes that person a new creature; circumcision cannot do that!

Verse 16

Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule,

True faith in Christ is inward, unlike circumcision which is outward. The rule that Christ's salvation is more important than circumcision and law-keeping is the only rule that is valid in the sight of God. Those who follow this rule experience peace and mercy. They do so because Christ, through his death on the cross, brings the peace of sins forgiven. Once we are forgiven, and are no longer plagued by guilt or fear of punishment, peace comes into our hearts. We become the subjects of God's everlasting mercy towards undeserving sinners. Paul can then pronounce this benediction upon all who trust in Christ and his work on the cross.

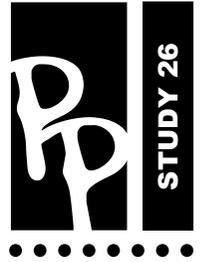
even to the Israel of God.

There are two Israels; there are all the natural descendants of Abram, and there are those descendants of Abram who also have the same spiritual faith as Abram – these latter are the Israel of God. See Romans 9:6. Paul says that all who follow the rule of making salvation

¹ Omitted from this verse in many versions of the Greek New Testament. See also 2 Corinthians 5:17.

THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

IS WHAT MATTERS



Galatians 6:11-18

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 Concluding note to the Galatian studies
- 📁 Two suggestions of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

The final part of the letter is written in Paul's own handwriting. It is not just a final greeting but a personal note full of passion. Paul concludes with what to him was the crucial point of his whole letter, the centrality of Christ and the cross. This is what his life as an apostle of Jesus Christ was all about. It is why Paul in this letter was so determined to persuade the Galatians that they were being misled by a message that was replacing Jesus Christ with man-centredness. The true gospel is about Jesus dying on the cross. Omit that and there is no good news. Anything else is no gospel at all.

What these verses mean

Verse 11

See what large letters I use as I write with my own hand!

Paul usually dictated his epistles (Rom. 16:22), writing only the greeting in his own handwriting (1 Co. 16:21; Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17). But in this letter to the Galatians, Paul seems to have himself written not merely a greeting, but verses 11-18, and to have done so in large letters.

Some suggest he had poor eyesight and so had to write large letters. But since these eight verses are a summary of Paul's pleading with the Galatian believers, perhaps he wrote to them in large letters to show how emphatically he wished to warn the believers.

Verse 12

Those who want to make a good impression outwardly

These teachers were not primarily concerned to benefit the Galatians. Instead, they hoped to benefit themselves by being able to boast that their compromise teachings were so good. The true characteristics of these teachers are now exposed. This is one of the ways that those who do not proclaim the truth of God's Word can be found out. Their concern is to want other people to think well of them. They want to be popular. The true gospel message provokes people to hatred, which is directed at the messenger. It is only when the Spirit touches the hearer's heart that the gospel is received gladly. There are many today who peddle a man-centred gospel. The result is that it becomes a personality cult where God is not at the centre of worship.

are trying to compel you to be circumcised.

The false teachers were trying to force the Galatians to be circumcised, a cultural, physical act. True faith cannot be forced upon a person. A religious ceremony that leaves a physical mark does not change the inner person. But having a row of people lined up for such a ceremony makes the leader feel good because it is a result of their persuasion (which they would interpret as teaching). Man is at work and not God.

The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.

Here we come to the real reason for the position of these false teachers. Any Jew who became a Christian and ceased to practise the ceremonies of the law of Moses would be fiercely persecuted by militant Jews. So these false teachers were trying to make a compromise – believe in Christ for salvation and be circumcised as the law commands. Why add the circumcision? In order to minimise the likelihood of persecution. This goes completely against the teaching of Jesus (John 15:18-25). True faith in Christ will bring about the hatred of the world. Preachers who say that following Jesus will make life happy with no problems are not telling the truth. They are trying to force people into an outward form of religion with a promise they cannot bring about. Who wants a religion that brings about persecution? No religious leader is going to build up a following in that way. But the true gospel

will bring persecution and true faith in Christ comes about by an inner conviction by the Spirit, not by the forceful persuasion of men.

Verse 13

Not even those who are circumcised obey the law,

Paul is not yet finished with these false teachers. In 5:3 he explained that if salvation is to be obtained by law-keeping, then every command of the law must be kept perfectly, always. It is not enough just to be circumcised. And these teachers of circumcision fail to keep the law themselves. Their boast that they are defenders of Moses is therefore hypocritical; they are not really interested in law-keeping, or in the salvation of the Galatians. They are not true shepherds caring for the flock, but wolves in sheep's clothing.

yet they want you to become circumcised that they may boast about your flesh.

By making circumcision such an important thing, these teachers regarded the numbers of bodies cut as the evidence of success! All that mattered was numbers and it didn't matter how you got them. Numbers meant earning praise for themselves. But Paul measured success by the growth of spirituality in the believer's character (5:22-26).

Verse 14

May I never boast

Paul does not boast about his keeping of the law as some did (Rom. 2:23); he does not boast about his social status (Phil. 3:4); indeed, no Christian can boast about anything relating to himself (Rom. 3:27), because he owes everything to the grace of God (John 3:27).

except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Death by crucifixion was regarded with such loathing and disgust that the word "cross" was a word not used in polite society in Paul's day. Such a death was too shameful to talk about (1 Co. 1:23). Instead, the phrase "hung on the unlucky tree" was often used to describe such a death. But Paul not only sees no shame in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, but actually boasts about it! He joyfully calls the gospel "the message of the cross" (1 Co. 1:18).

through which the world has been crucified to me,

Paul's thinking was so different from the general opinion of the world. His boasting about the cross made it practically impossible for him to be wrongly attracted by any standards or opinions of this present evil

A righteousness that can never be tarnished	(2 Co. 5:21)
A peace that can never be destroyed	(Eph. 2:14)
An acceptance that can never be questioned	(Eph. 1:6)
An inheritance that can never fade	(1 Pet. 1:4)
A title that can never be disputed	(Rev. 5:9)
A pardon that can never be reversed	(Heb. 8:12)
A justification that can never be cancelled	(Rom. 8:33)
A hope that can never be disappointed	(1 Pet. 1:3)
A glory that can never be clouded	(John 17:22)
A strength that can never be exhausted	(2 Co. 12:9)
A wisdom that can never be baffled	(Rom. 11:33-34)
A friend who has power in heaven and in earth with resources that can never fail	(Matt. 28:18) (Phil 4:19)



Two suggestions of what to preach about from these verses

1. **What is meant by boasting in the cross?** (Gal. 6:14)
 - A. Understanding the significance of it.
 - a. It teaches how serious our sin is; nothing less than the cross can save us from sin.
 - b. It teaches how great the love of God is; he was ready to endure the cross for us.
 - c. It teaches how excellent the wisdom and power of God are, to design such a righteous way of justifying sinners by a substitutionary sacrifice.
 - B. Acknowledging the importance of it.
 - a. By placing our faith in the Christ who was crucified for our salvation and by trusting no other way for salvation.
 - b. By seeking to live in a Christ-like way, as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.
 - c. By proclaiming the death of the Lord Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation.
 - d. By defending the gospel of the cross of Christ from every attack upon it.

by Christ the supreme thing in their lives may properly be called the true Israel of God.

Verse 17

Finally, let no-one cause me trouble,

The final words of the letter contain a warning and a benediction. At the beginning of the letter (1:7) Paul wrote that there were those throwing the Galatians into confusion. These stirrers of trouble were not only bothering the Galatians but the apostle himself. Paul felt for the churches he founded and their troubles were his troubles. These troublemakers therefore opposed the appointed messenger of God.

for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

The scar of circumcision has no spiritual significance now, but the scars of all the wounds that Paul suffered by being stoned and beaten brand him as a slave of Christ (2 Co. 4:10, 11:23,24). It was a common practice for slave-owners to brand their slaves with a mark to show who owned them. Paul saw his physical sufferings, which were evidenced by marks on his body, as being in the sovereign will of God. He recognised that it all served a genuine and necessary purpose. He could rejoice in his sufferings if they enabled him to follow in the footsteps of Christ. His scars were a proof of his ministry and a God-given authority as a teacher of the truth. Because Paul is owned by Christ, only Christ has authority to tell Paul what to do. Let everyone else, therefore, leave him alone!

Verse 18

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

Paul has written in a severe way to the Galatian believers yet he leaves them with the word “brothers”. (See note on 1:11 page 22 of Book 1.) In spite of all the grief that they may have caused him, Paul writes to the Galatians as believers in Christ. He recognises their weakness and the threat of the apostasy around them. He wants to restore them to faith in Christ alone and therefore commits them to “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ”. He knows that in the end it is only the grace of God in Christ that can establish them in the truth. God’s servant can proclaim the truth, but only God’s power can apply it with saving and preserving power. ²

² Edgar Andrews, *Free in Christ* (Evangelical Press).



Summary

The final words of the letter, written by Paul's own hand, set out the essential truth of Christ and his saving work on the cross. Paul's whole argument in his letter has been to steer the Galatian believers away from the damaging false teaching that was spreading amongst them. Instead of Christ's being at the centre, religious ritual and ceremony were being emphasised. They are so man-centred and in total contradiction to the work of Jesus. The cross was essential to the ministry of Jesus. Without it he could not fulfil his mission of saving people from their sins. It was the only way that sinful man could be reconciled to God and delivered from this present evil age. Nothing must impede or take the place of this great and magnificent atoning work, especially the puny and miserable acts of sinful man. Paul boasts in the cross of Christ; it is the only thing that matters. This is authentic Christianity. The Galatian believers and all subsequent readers of this letter are not to oppose Paul's teaching, for to do so is to oppose the God whose messenger Paul was.



Concluding note to the Galatian studies

The early controversy over whether circumcision is necessary for the salvation of believers has never re-appeared in the history of the church. Perhaps Paul's letter to the Galatians and the letter from Jerusalem (Acts 15:22-29) together served to preserve the church from this error. Moreover the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD70 by the Roman army brought to an end the influence of Old Testament Judaism upon the Gentile believers.

However, circumcision in the context of this letter represented the principle of observing the law of Moses. It had the idea that faith in Christ had to be accompanied by the keeping of this Old Testament law. Without it the believer was not entering into the fullness of salvation. It gives the idea that Christ alone is not enough for salvation and requires something further. This thinking, that the believer must

add some other experience to be sure of salvation, exists in different forms today. Here are some examples.

Some of the mainstream churches teach that people must believe in Jesus plus other ceremonies and traditions of that church. There are examples where the church itself becomes the interpreter of the truth. This is subject to manipulation to suit the objectives of the hierarchy of such churches. After many centuries people have been led astray and it is not possible to easily identify those who trust in Christ alone because following the teaching of the church has taken the place of Christ's central rôle.

A more modern phenomenon has been the movements that teach that the believer in Jesus also needs a special experience. This can be what is termed the "baptism by the Spirit". In such cases claims are made that the Holy Spirit gives such extra gifts in order for the person to be a first-class Christian. The so-called gifts and the emphasis on the quality of the person take over from the centrality of Christ and the cross.

Within Christian Jewish circles there are pressures for believers to follow the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) as well as Christ. It is part of a movement for those who trust in Christ as the Messiah not to lose their Jewish identity. Whilst that is a legitimate and a worthy goal, confusion has arisen as to what is meant by being Jewish. Some advocate that this must involve accepting the traditions that include rabbinical teaching. This is a replica of the Galatian situation.

If it is necessary for us to add anything to what Christ has done for our salvation, then the work of Christ must have been incomplete! To suggest those ideas is a serious heresy. We must resist all such teaching as firmly as Paul resisted the necessity of circumcision. To add any human action to what Christ did for us by his life and death is to subtract from his glory.

In Ephesians 1:3-14 we are taught that all born again believers have every blessing that it is possible to have as soon as they believe.

What believers have to do is to grow in the knowledge and experience of what they already possess.

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then" (5:1).

All Heavenly Blessings in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:3)

A life that can never be forfeited	(John 10:28)
A relationship that can never be broken	(Gal. 3:26)

Index to Focus Points in Preachers' Study Papers
published up to 2006

Focus Point	Book	Study	Page
Angels	Galatians 2	18	166
Apostles' creed	Galatians 2	16	147
Apostleship - qualifications	Galatians 1	5	40
Biblical Theology	Galatians 2	12	105
Chronology of Paul's movements	Galatians 1	6	49
Church meeting	Galatians 1	6	50
Cleanliness and Purification	Malachi	5	77
Covenants in the Bible	Galatians 2	19	178
Elders	James	16	146
Election	James	3	35
Election - doctrine	Malachi	1	48
Election - preaching	Galatians 2	16	145
Faith	James	7	65
God's law in the Christian life	James	6	58
Grace	Galatians 1	2	18
Grace	James	11	99
Guarding our spirits	Malachi	4	68
Holy Spirit - doctrine of	Galatians 3	23	230
Indwelling sin	James	3	34
Israel in the New Testament	Obadiah	2	27
James and Paul	James	8	72
Jealousy of God, The	James	11	99
Jewish rules for eating	Galatians 1	8	63
Judgement - doctrine	Obadiah	1	24
Justification	Galatians 1	7	59
Justification - further notes	Galatians 1	9	80
Karma - teaching what a man sows	Galatians 3	25	251
Law of Christ, The	Galatians 3	24	242
Leaven - significance of in the Bible	Galatians 3	21	204
Miracles	Galatians 2	10	88
Offerings	Malachi	2	55
Paul's conversion	Galatians 1	4	32
Pharisees and Sadducees	Galatians 3	20	194
Prayer	James	1	12
Preaching, The Ten constituent elements of great	Preaching	9	52
Priests	Malachi	2	55
Providence - The doctrine of God's	James	13	114
Regeneration	Galatians 2	15	134
Rewards for Christians	James	6	59
Second Coming, The	James	15	134
Sinless perfection, Does the Bible teach the doctrine	James	9	83
Slavery	James	14	127
Speaking against God today	Malachi	7	94
Suffering as a trial	James	2	22
Things that are opposite that Christians hold together	James	12	107
Tithes and offerings	Malachi	6	85
World, The	James	4	42
Worldliness	James	10	91

- C. Demonstrating the effect of it.
 - a. By no longer being a slave to the opinions, favours or values of unbelievers.
 - b. By cultivating a spirit of self-sacrifice and love in ourselves towards others, following the example of Christ.

2. The nature of true religion.

- A. Divine, not human (verse 14). Human religion consists of certain ritual acts done by people which do not affect their whole life (verse 13). True faith in God's way of salvation by the cross causes the believer to become separate from unbelievers.
- B. Inward, not outward (verse 15). What matters more than any Christian ceremony (even baptism) is whether a person is born again. God is Spirit and must be worshipped in spirit. Our characters, not our ceremonies, count most.
- C. Biblical, not traditional (verse 16). False teaching seeks to impose a way of life based on what has always happened in the past. Blessing is promised to those who "walk by this rule" – i.e. the doctrine of the apostles, especially the doctrine of the cross and the new creation.



Over to you

Examine the content of your preaching. What has been the main theme of your sermons? Has it been more towards what people must do or have you been bringing Christ and the cross to the people?

Do you believe in what you preach or do you say things to avoid making life difficult for yourself?

Can you identify the things in your culture that people mistake for being biblical (pleasing to God), but in fact get in the way of the Lord Jesus Christ and the cross?