

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of
April 2017

(added progressively after each Sunday)

(see following pages)

Alternative Sermon for Galatians 5:13-24 (printed copies made available)

Galatians – Chapter 5:13-24

A Christian Life is Always a Changed Life (b) T Keller

We pause from our transcription of Stuart Olyott's study of Paul's letter to the Galatians.

In view is still the passage, Galatians 5:13-24. The Bible is so rich in meaning and application that any passage has more than one facet. More than one lesson to learn and ponder upon. So today we find a parallel insight into the inspired words of Paul brought to our attention by Timothy Keller in his book, *Galatians for You*.

In that universal religion, that is natural to the whole of human kind. [That religion that is common to all faiths with the only exception being true Biblical, Apostolic Christianity.] Morality and religious motivation is fear based. In Gospel Christianity (only) the motivation is a dynamic of love as Paul confirms in chapter 5, verses 6 and 14:

- ⁶ *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.* Being religious (works motivated) or non-religious (pagan) is of no value only faith working through love.
- ¹⁴ *For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."*

Verses 16/17: While the natural human nature is to gratify the desires of our sinful nature (lusts), walking by the Spirit will overcome these desires. These desires are against the Spirit, but praise God the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh and are at least as passionate and powerful. In fact in the true believer, steadily triumphant.

"It is most accurate to think of 'the Spirit' as the renewed Christian heart, made new by the Holy Spirit. Our sinful nature was there, ruling alone and unopposed, before we were Christians. The Spirit, however, entered supernaturally when we first became Christians and has begun a renewal that is now our developing 'new nature'. Paul, in Ephesians 4:22-24, refers to the desires of the flesh (our sinful nature) being *against (opposed to)* the Spirit. A competition between 'the old self' (or 'man') and the 'new self' (or 'man')

As the Spirit's gift of a new motivation takes hold and develops, a new 'nature' progressively replaces the old self, our 'fallen nature'. While that new motivation is that 'new sole manager' of last week's factory illustration, there is a conflict between the declining old self and the new. ¹⁶ *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.* ¹⁷ *For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.* The true Christian really has that desire 'of the Spirit' which is within him, as Paul clearly advocates and acknowledges with the words, "the things you want to do".

In the Greek the word σαρκὸς, (*sarx*) translated as 'flesh' in verse 16 (or sinful nature in other translations) when used in the New Testament, as being opposed

to the Spirit, has negative connotations. It however does not simply refer to the physical nature of our bodies but to the remnant fallen nature of our spiritual being. The *sarx* is our sinful heart – that part which is not yet renewed by the Spirit. But in the true Christian is inexorably being changed throughout our earthly lives.

It is also useful to look further in the Greek of verse 14. To the word ἐπιθυμίαν (*epithymian*) translated 'lust' in older English translations – which tends to encourage the meaning of sexual sins – or 'desire' which is still incomplete in revealing Paul's intended meaning.¹

Keller suggests: “Literally, *epithumia* means an 'over-desire', an 'inordinate desire', an all-controlling drive and longing. This is crucial. The main problem our heart has is not so much desires for bad things, but our over-desires for good things. When a good thing becomes our 'god', created by 'over-desires' (as mentioned in Ephesians 2:3 ; 1 Peter 2:11; 1 John 2:16). Paul says that sinful desires become deep things that drive and control us. Sin creates in us the feeling that we must have this, or that, or the other.”

Further insight comes from David Powlison:

“If 'idolatry' is the characteristic and summary, Old Testament word for our drift from God, then 'desires' (*epithumia*) is the characteristic and summary, New Testament word for that same drift ... The New Testament merges the concept of idolatry and the concept of inordinate, life-ruling desires ... for lust, craving, yearning and greedy demand (Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5).”

Continuing with Keller:

“One of the most intriguing statements here is when Paul literally says in verse 17. 'The flesh over-desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. Notice that Paul does not actually say the the Spirit 'over-desires' (how could the Spirit desire something too much?), yet the construction indicates that the Spirit has passions and yearnings as well, and that they are at least as strong! What is it that the Spirit longs for? Jesus teaches that the Holy Spirit will come into the world to 'glorify me' (John 16:14. ESV). So while our flesh glorifies and adores and yearns for all sorts of created things [even good things] and conditions and people, the Spirit glorifies and adores and yearns for Jesus. The Spirit speaks of the beauty and greatness of Christ.

The Spirit, then, longs to show us Christ and to conform us to Christ. And ultimately, this is what the Christian wants, too. It is easy to overlook, but Paul makes an extremely telling statement when he says, the Spirit and the *sarx* *are in conflict with each other so that you do not do what you want.*' This is a parallel passage to Romans 7:22-23, where he says, *'for I delight in the law of God, in my inner being'*, yet he finds there is *'in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members'*.

Living the way of the Spirit is what we most deeply 'want', yet the sinful nature

¹ Matthew Henry's Commentary: If it be our care to act under the guidance and power of the blessed Spirit, though we may not be freed from the stirrings and oppositions of the corrupt nature which remains in us, it shall not have dominion over us. Believers are engaged in a conflict, in which they earnestly desire that grace may obtain full and speedy victory. And those who desire thus to give themselves up to be led by the Holy Spirit, are not under the law as a covenant of works, nor exposed to its awful curse

continues to generate alternative and competing desires which we experience and can give in to, but which now contradict our most abiding love and goals. The reborn person has both sinful desires and godly desires, but 'we' most truly want what our Spirit-renewed heart wants.

The statement is filled with hope and affirmation. Even when we are falling into sin, we can say, with Paul that: This is not the real me; this is not what I really want. I want God and His will.

[The idea is that we fall back to the old motivational system because we don't keep reminding ourselves that we have nothing to prove. God is 'all in all'. In His sight we have Christ's righteousness and the complete forgiveness earned by Christ's sacrifice. We are already heirs – adopted children of God the Father through the completed work of God the Son and the internal presence of God the Holy Spirit. One God, for ever. Amen!

Where do 'complexes' come in.

- A superiority complex: how can we harbour superiority once we recognise that it is Christ's merit that puts us 'right with God'. We must boast of what Christ has done, but never about ourselves.
- An inferiority complex: how dare we feel inferior when we do Christ's good works in the power of His Spirit.

Neither religious motivation nor non-religious sloth have any meaning when we are true adopted sons and daughters of God's promise. We are the 'fruits' of His grace (unmerited favour) and loving kindness.]

Remembering that the Greek word, *sarx*, is rendered as 'flesh' or 'sinful nature' we find a parallelism in verses 16 and 18 which leads us to recognise how the *sarx* works. For Paul the two connections are: *walk (live) by the Spirit* (v 16) being accomplished by -- (be) *led by the Spirit* (v18), in contrast with choosing to *gratify the desires of the sarx* – sinful nature or flesh-- (v16) and consequently be *under the law* (v18). They are not so much just closely related but rather two ways of saying the same thing.

None the less what we see is not just the cause and effect of *gratifying the sarx* leading to committing to works righteousness – being *under the law* – but also reveals the motives of the sinful nature (*sarx*). Not only does it disobey God, but reveals why our sinful nature 'wants' to disobey God.

The remnant of our initial fallen nature, that is within us, still would want to be our own saviour and lord. That ubiquitous worldly religion! This *sarx*-heart functions 'under law'; rejecting the free gift of Christ's righteousness and salvation, continuing to seek its own. To do by ones own effort (works) the perceived requirements (laws) to bring about the reward (salvation) of a self made god. The sin that is the root of all sin – the motive of our disobedience – is as always, a lack of trust (faith) in God's grace and goodness, demonstrated by our desire to fall back on our own works-salvation.

How the Sarx Works:

Paul's two natures (the *sarx*, over against the Spirit filled new heart within us) are two semi-intact motivational systems at work within us:

“A motivational system is centred on a goal that the imagination finds beautiful and desirable. This goal generates what we perceive as 'needs', and manufactures 'drives' to attain them. The sinful nature is our old motivational system – with its own goals and its own needs and drives – still somewhat intact [but in the Christian diminishing throughout the Christian life]. It is focussing on some object that (may be) in itself good, but which it turns into an idol by which we seek our salvation ('I can have worth if I am loved ... if I have a good career ... if my children love me'), and which finally then creates over-desire (*epithumia*) for that idol.

What the *Sarx* Works:

In verses 19 – 21, Paul lists the “works, of the sinful nature (*sarx*)” which comprise actions and attitudes – all over-desires of the *sarx*. The list can be divided into groups.

- Sexuality: *sexual immorality (porneia)* – which is sexual intercourse between unmarried people; *impurity (akatharsia)* – unnatural sexual practices and relationships; and debauchery or *sensuality (aselgia)* – uncontrolled sexuality. (verse 19)
- Religion: *idolatry (eidololatria)*; and witchcraft, *sorcery (pharmakeia)*. Since idolatry is coupled with sorcery (or the occult) its meaning is not the broad one, referred to previously, when 'over-desire' can make good things like career into a “god” (see Ephesians 5:5 and Colossians 3:5), but he has in mind the specific occult and pagan religious practices. The first, idolatry, is providing an inadequate substitute for God and the second, sorcery, is faking the work of the Spirit. Verse 20a.
- Relationships: Eight words which show how the sinful nature works to destroy relationships. The first 4 listed here are destructive attitudes. *Rivalries*, selfish ambition (*eritheia*) – namely competitiveness, a self-seeking motive; *envy (phthonoi)* – coveting, desiring what others have; *jealousy (zelos)* – the zeal and energy that comes from a hungry ego; and *enmity, hatred (echthrai)* – meaning hostility, an adversarial attitude.

The next group of four describe the results of these attitudes on relationships. Discord, *strife (eris)* – being argumentative or seeking to pick fights; *fits of anger or rage (thumoi)* – outbursts of anger; *dissentions (dichostai)* – divisions between people (which is what rage leads to); and factions, *divisions ((h)aireseis)* – permanent and warring groups. Verses 20, 21a²

- Finally, two words denoting substance abuse: *drunkenness* and *orgies* – drunken orgies. One of the works of the flesh is addiction to pleasure-creating substances and behaviour. Verse 21a

In verse 21b, Paul doesn't beat about the bush when describing those who habitually³ demonstrate the 'works' of the sinful nature (*sarx*). They *will not inherit the kingdom of God*. Paul is referring to habitual practice, rather than infrequent, and repented-of, lapses. One's inmost desire is important issue here. Paul is warning in serious terms

² Note the NIV puts a “;” after “envy” at the beginning of verse 21 suggesting that it is grouped with the previous 7 'works' in verse 20

³ The Greek verb *prasso*, which is generally translated at 'do' means 'to practice' and by implication refers to 'a regular practice' in this case of the works of the *sarx*. Some editions of the ESV have a footnote in which the 'do' is expanded to mean 'make a practice of doing'.

those who continually indulge the sinful nature without battling against it. Since this shows that the Son has not redeemed them, nor has the Spirit renewed them. Christian assurance is not being undermined here, but a warning against complacency certainly is.

Further examination of these 'works' shows that the product of the remnant sinful nature of religious inclined people, such as selfishness, envy, jealousy, warring factions and the like, are as serious as those often associated with the non-religious, such as immorality and drunkenness. Once again we should accept the caution that we deal with the 'plank' in our own eye rather than fixate on the 'splinter' in an other's.

[2148]

May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.

Delivered Sunday 2 April 2017

Galatians – Chapter 5:13-24

A Christian Life is Always a Changed Life (b)

(Review of last week)

“Do you claim to be a Christian?”, says Paul verse 16 , “then live like one. If you claim to be a Christian then walk like one and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” “If you're a Christian “, he says, “or claim to be” (verse 18) understand that the Christian life, is a life of being lead by the Spirit.” And we live in a different way, not because we hope to get right with God, by doing the works of the law, but we live in a different way, because of the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit, who *leads* us.

Consider now the two different sorts of 'factory', (see last week) with their different managers. In order that we can clearly see that an unconverted person and a converted person are different. Radically different and can never be mixed up with each other.

Verses 19 -21: Here is a factory with only the old manager. The Spirit of God has not entered into this heart. The Spirit of God is not the dominating factor in this life. What will you find in such a life? The list of 'works' is given.

Not every sin that is listed is found in every unconverted individual. [Religious, 'good' people may tend to exhibit: idolatry (replacing God with their own pride in doing good); jealousy, envy, rivalries, divisions (reacting towards others because they in themselves are not secure in the merit of Christ, and need to protect the sense of their own worth, derived from their own efforts – a god). Non-religious, pagan, people may exhibit more obvious violations of God's standards: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry/sorcery (the occult – pagan practices providing an inadequate substitute for God and faking the work of the Spirit), drunken orgies (addiction to pleasure-creating

substances and behaviour).] Where any of these sins are found habitually, it is proof that the person concerned is devoid of management by the Spirit. Therefore unconverted. Therefore condemned, since verse 21 says: ²¹ ... *I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will **not inherit the kingdom of God***. If you live like this. If any of these things are regular in your life; any are characteristic of you; habitual in you, then ...

The list. Four groups:

- sexual sins (verse 19) – breaking the marital bond; intercourse between the unmarried; unnatural vices; lack of propriety. All examples of disregard for purity as God's character defines. Lives that show these sins are clearly governed by the flesh and are not Spirit filled lives. In this state they are not under the management of the Spirit and do not inherit the kingdom of God. [What you read and what TV and videos we watch are likely to demonstrate where your interest lies. Is this the nature of the Kingdom of God?]
- religious sins (verse 20) – worship that is not commanded. Which is not only bowing to images of wood or stone, but, equally, includes having (even good things) that are of so much 'worth' in our lives that we in fact worship (worth-ship) them; sorcery is contact with evil spirits and by this quest we blaspheme the Holy Spirit. Habitual involvement with the occult (spiritualism so called) shows that the life is managed by a fake and not the Holy Spirit. This also is not the way to the Kingdom of God.
- Social sins (continuing in verse 20 and into 21) – a list which has the traits and consequences that cause the breakdown of personal relationships. ²⁰ ... *enmity* (hatred), *strife* (*tantrums*), *jealousy*, *fits of anger* (the Greek word – *thymoi*, short tempered), *rivalries* (argumentative spirit), *dissensions* (*quarrelsome spirit*), *divisions* ('party' spirit, gangs), ²¹ *envy* (murderous thoughts and acts), Breakdowns in relationships – social sins, because when people are no longer in communion with God, they start despising those who are made in 'the image of God'.
- Last of all, sins in the realm of drink. Despite what scripture teaches, that there are not now any dietary laws, and therefore the word of God doesn't prohibit the use of alcohol, the word of God does prohibit drunkenness and orgies. Someone comes home drunk most Saturdays or they 'live' for parties and after that even more parties (with awful conversations and acts). It is clear that such people are ruled by the flesh, the indwelling, management of the Spirit is absent. Where then is the Kingdom of God, while they are in this state? Doesn't your heart break for them?

Paul of course doesn't say that a Christian cannot fall into these things. Chapter 6 verse 1 makes it plain that you can lapse. But if Christians do, it is a fall, something that is uncharacteristic. It is a contradiction of their 'heart of hearts'. It's not long before they are crying out with shame, that they have lived like the world for a moment, a day, or a week, like the unconverted. It's a contradiction of what they are 'inside'. Inside they have a different set of affections and love. Sometimes they just fall into them. Sometimes through folly. Sometimes from the sheer strength of temptation, or Social pressures. They suddenly veer away; suddenly wake up and realise its the

wrong way. Pain, shame and tears afflict their heart.

It's a fall away; a lapse. It's not characteristic or habitual.

But those who do these things without them being a lapse. Those who do them without the agony of repentance, do it because they are not Christian men and women. Because the desires of the flesh are manifest.

Now Paul's key point: How different is the 'factory' where the old manager is dead, and there is a new manager installed? There is of course frustration because that which is in the hearts of hearts is not lived out perfectly in the life. Meaning that they cannot do as they 'would' (want to). None the less how different is the character of a Christian, as Paul now gives us the 'fruit' of the Spirit. Note: **works** of the flesh – something that we fall into, but the **fruit** of the Spirit – the produce of the indwelt Spirit. Something that comes naturally and blossoms and bears fruit and can be seen on the Christian 'tree'. So that it is recognised as a Christian tree. Sometimes it is true that the apples on an apple tree are very small. But! They are still apples! They show what type of tree it is. Alternatively the fruit may be full and beautiful, yet both are still apples. Some times the fruit of the Spirit is evident but not very evident, but as they grow in grace it becomes very evident. Whenever the Spirit is in a heart, the fruit of the Spirit is always seen.

What is this Christian, Spirit filled, life like, that can (and must) be seen? (Verse 22). What is the Christian like towards God: *love, joy, peace* – the Christian loves because he loves God first, and therefore he loves those in the image of God; he has joy in his God – Communion with God excites him; he is an adopted son and the Spirit within can call God in a familiar way, *Abba Father*; he has peace between him and his God and the settled peace of God in his heart. These are some of the things about him with regard to God. Revealing a whole new dimension that we could never talk about when talking about the other people.

What is the Christian like towards others?

²² ... *patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* ²³ *gentleness, self-control;*

Long-suffering (patience), gentleness, goodness: he's pushed, and he's pushed, and he's pushed again – he may lose patience, he's not perfect ... yet, but he doesn't lose patience right away – he's long suffering. He's gentle – he doesn't go through life as some sort of bully, who's pushing people around pretending that he's superior or some exalted form of creature. A gentleness – not a heavy-handedness in his Christian life. There's goodness there – plain old-fashioned 'good'.

What's he like inwardly?

Faithful, self controlled, meek – in the sense of recognising ones own dependence on the grace of God not ones own merit. (This is the meekness *that inherits the earth.*) In his heart of hearts there is faith – not only faith in God, but loyalty; stick-ability, tenacity; perseverance – in good things!

Then there is meekness. Controlled strength of character.

Gentleness was used in the previous grouping (Greek: *prautés* – *prah-oo'-tace*) also translated with the addition of *meekness*. For the believer, meekness ([4240](#) /*praýtēs*, "gentle-force") *begins* with the Lord's inspiration and *finishes* by His direction and empowerment. It is a *divinely-balanced* virtue that can only operate through faith (cf. 1 Tim 6:11⁴; 2 Tim 2:22-25⁵).

Finally, self-control (also translated temperance). Self-control when he drinks, if he drinks. Self controlled in eating, sleeping habits, in fact all habits. Exhibits an element of self-mastery, Again, not perfect, often he has to cry, ²⁴ *Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?* Romans 7:24. None the less it's there – self-control.

A function of the law is to curb and restrain sins. but there is no function of the law against these 'fruits' of the in-dwelling Spirit in a Christian life. They are marvellous people that the Gospel makes. There is something marvellous in the Christian character. You just don't see it anywhere else. Perhaps if you've been assailed with doubt, yet you look around at Christian men and women that you know. You see a quality in their life that you just don't see in the world. That at the time being, at least, has been the proof to you of the divinity of the Christian religion. The proof of the divinity of the Scriptures and their inspiration.

The Christian is different from everyone else in the world. “Ah”, says, “ somebody, “there's some very moral pagans.” True, but a Christian is even different from them. They may do things that are in accord with God's word, but they don't do them because they are God's Word. While a Christian does the same things because they are God's Word! The others do them for various reasons, consciously or unconsciously, that enhance their self image. The Christian does them out of their love of God and because of the *change* in the Christians' character by the Spirit.

Don't heed the old complaint that there are some people in the world that are more righteous looking than Christians. It might be said that this person has a better control of his temper than that Christian has. But often when considered more carefully it can be seen that comparatively the favour rests with the Christian who may have been the worst short-tempered, unreasonable, spiteful person you would hope to avoid, before the Spirit came to him at conversion and is steadily changing him. Since grace came into his heart there has been for his particular natural temperament a radical change. In your eyes he may not yet be up to the desired standard, but the change already has

4 Fight the Good Fight of Faith

¹¹ But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.

5 ²² So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. ²³ Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. ²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,

been remarkable. Only attributable to the work of the Spirit in his heart. He lives this way out of love for Christ. He has a settled peace with God. There's been an inward change not an outward conformity. It all springs from faith.

It's even different from the moral pagan, and it's certainly different from the immoral pagan, who cares not for God nor His Spirit.

So we see here a wonderful picture of a Christian. He lives a life at peace with God. There's a whole new spirit about the man. Because of the in-dwelling Spirit of Christ.

Now it should be apparent if one is a Christian or not!

A person may say they were converted on such and such a day. Since that time does that person see any evidence that the 'fruit' of the Spirit is growing in their life? Since that day is there evidence that God is loved more than before. More joy in the things of God than before. More settled peace. Able to be more long-suffering with others. Perhaps only a little bit. Never the less progress. Less heavy-handed, more gentleness, more good. More able to deal with the difficult things that have to be done, since now they are being done for God. More meek, not pushing their weight around. Considerate of the feelings of others. The breaking of habits that though not mastered yet are better than they once were. Able to trace the change back to the time when they became a Christian. This is great encouragement.

But a person who says that they became a Christian at such and such yet cannot recognise any of these changes. Especially if those things mentioned as the desires of the flesh that are against the spirit continue to be habitual. Then it's time they found a quiet place to examine themselves as to whether they are actually 'in the faith'.

The Galatian false gospel never made anybody holy. The Gospel of justification by faith **with the parallel in-dwelling of the Spirit** makes holy, Christ-like, Christian people. When you have people who hold to that great saving truth, living out holy lives, the world is seeing something which it cannot duplicate.

[2252]

May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.

Galatians – Chapter 5:25-6:10
How to Live a Christian Life (a)

(Review of last week)

We have got to the point, as we take up Paul's Letter to the Galatians from Chapter 5:25, that Paul makes strongly: that every Christian life is a changed life. A Christian's life is always a changed life! It is not a life of anarchy. No true Christian is able to say, "I'll live as I please." No one is a Christian unless two things have happened to him:

- he has a new record in heaven. Emphasised many times by Paul, but the Christian also has,
- a new heart, here on earth. A Christian is not just a justified person, who is put right with God. He is a regenerated person, who receives a new nature, and that expresses itself in sanctification: that is a changed life.

Paul has also made this second point most powerfully.

If you are a Christian this Sunday morning you are in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit, who comes into your life like a new manager. The Spirit's influence being extended more and more over ones personality. Of course, in this life, the Holy Spirit never controls the personality perfectly. Because we still have Adam's 'members'. None the less the Spirit's influence increases all the time, so that every Christian's life, without exception, is a changed life.

If you do not have, in some degree, the 'fruit of the Spirit' as earlier described in chapter 5, (verses 22 & 23), then you are yet to have a spiritual experience. You profess to be a Christian, yet do not live differently: it is because you are not (yet?) a Christian. That's the emphasis Paul has been making. A Christian's life is always a changed life. There are no exceptions to this.

However, as Paul looked at the Galatians he could see in certain areas of their lives that the change was not easy to see. Certain areas where the change was not evident. So we now come to a section where Paul gives particular attention to those areas. So our title today and next week is: How to live as a Christian. After all every true Christian is anxious to make progress in holiness. As we consider this very practical passage, you're heart will already be engaged in asking, "What is the Scripture going to demand of me this morning as to how I should live, as a believer? I am changed! I thank God as I look back, I see a change, but I'm not what I should be. What sort of areas need to be put right? What sorts of things in my life need particular attention?" This is the passage to answer those questions.

Paul tackles it like this: firstly he looks at a Christian in his 'heart of hearts'; then he looks at what a Christian should be like in his personality; then he goes out a bit further and asks what a Christian should be like in his relationship with fellow Christians; and then out a bit further and ask what he should be like in his relations with non-Christians.

Recall the archery target: with a central bullseye and then an outward progression of circular (annular) sections. Paul's first topic: the 'heart of hearts' – this the bullseye. Then the next region: the personality and so on with the relationship with fellow Christians and finally with non-Christians.

We can see that the Pharisee – that Paul was – has been thoroughly converted. The Pharisees always started outside and worked inwards, when they were trying to get people's lives to change. But Paul is now converted. He talks about the inward – 'heart of hearts' of the Christian – and then works outward from that. Telling us as a result: How to live as a Christian.

So the first target: the 'heart of hearts' Straight to the bullseye!

Verse 25 (of Chapter 5) *If (or since), since we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.* Here we face something that can be a little confusing (convoluted): on the one hand it has been said that the Spirit is in you, but also, Paul now adds, as a Christian, that you live by (or in) the Spirit. Perhaps the more modern translation that uses 'by' – rather than 'in' covers the situation better. An analogy could be: a child at the seaside has a bucket which is filled with water 'in' it; he then takes it into the water and lowers it 'in' the ocean.

That's the way it is. The Spirit is in the Christian and the Christian is in the Spirit. The Spirit is in the Christian as a new manager and yet the Christian is in the Spirit in the sense that he breathes a whole new atmosphere, living as it were in a whole new dimension. The Spirit's in him and he's in the Spirit. He is a spiritual person. “Now if you are a Spiritual person”, says Paul, in verse 25, “Live in a Spiritual way.” If the Spirit really is the 'atmosphere' that you breathe, then don't live as if He isn't the 'atmosphere' that you breathe. In other words don't live like everybody else.

If you are a spiritual person, live in a spiritual way. *Walk by the Spirit.* Be different!

Paul keeps saying that in his 'heart of hearts' the Christian is a different sort of person. A Christian simply can not live like a non-Christian. It can't be done. He's different. And even more so by submitting to that new manager, by giving in to the new manager (the Spirit). In what ways?

The ways then are the subject of the rest of the passage.

So far: ²⁵ *If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.* Actions to be consistent with the inward 'heart of hearts'. If there really has been a Spiritual change let it be evident in the behaviour.

Now we move outward from the 'bullseye' from the centre:

What should a Christian be like in his own personality?

The answer is scattered through several verses in the overall passage:

- Chapter 5 verse 26. ²⁶ *Let us not become conceited,* (or vain glory in KJV) Paul says there is no place in the Christian's personality for conceit. Self-

centredness? No place! The two awful words, which caused the 'fall', in the Garden of Eden, were 'me first'. There is no place in the Christian's thinking. No place for the current, pervasive practising of the Post Modern philosophy. How can a Christian be somebody who's filled with vain-glory? Taken up with the philosophy of 'me first'. How can that be when that is one of the marks of an unconverted man. 'Me first' is unconverted thinking. If a Christian says, "me first" then he proves that there has really been no conversion. No real change in the life has taken place. In fact, a Christian is someone who receives Jesus Christ as Lord. How can he be lord of his own life while yet acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord? How can the Holy Spirit be the new manager, if the man himself is manager?

The whole concept of vain glory – 'me first' – is a contradiction of every principle of the Christian life. How can a Christian pray every day, 'Thy will be done', if his desires mean more to him than God's will? Or if his plans mean more to him than God's will? Or his ambitions are more important to him.

So a person in his own personality is someone who has abdicated the throne. He no longer says, 'me first'. Self-centredness (conceit) is gone.

- Again in verse 1 of chapter 6. We will have more to say about this verse later – but for now the last part of it: *Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted*. Here Paul has been pointing out that back-sliders should be restored. But he goes on to say that when you are putting somebody right for their sin, take heed for yourself. Don't say to yourself "I've arrived. I can never fall into what they have fallen into." "There is no place, he says, "for such arrogance in the Christian."

Don't think to yourself, "O look at what he's fallen onto, it could never happen to me"

There's no place for such superiority or such pride.

There is a place for fear! That would be far more appropriate. Taking heed to yourself lest you also be tempted to fall into the same sin.

It's the same spirit that Paul has been talking about as he just mentioned.

- The Christian is not filled with the self-confident arrogance that says, "Me first". Which would lead him in considering the sin of others to feel superior – in a different league. "Because you're nothing," he says in verses 3-5. And we are nothing this morning! You are no stronger than you were, now that you are a Christian! Nor is any believer. No stronger than the day we were converted. The only reason you stand right now as a changed Christian is entirely due to the (unmerited) grace of God. His patience with us and the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

There's no cause for pride if we have continued in the Christian faith.

No Christian can say to himself, "Look what I have achieved," "Look how far I've come."

"If you think you're somebody", says Paul, "when in fact you're nobody, you're deceiving yourself." "You blow out your chest, spiritually, thinking that you've

really made it, or begun to make it, then you're hoodwinking yourself," the Apostle is saying, in verse 3. we are helpless and hopeless without the grace of God. There's no place for any swell-headedness in Christian thinking. We don't have anything except for what we have received. Nothing! No form of self-congratulation is possible. So don't make yourself out to be a somebody, when you're a no body. You're nothing.

None the less there is something called 'growth in Grace'. Someone might ask, "How can I measure if there has been any growth in Grace?" "How do I measure if I'm getting anywhere in the Christian life?"

"Well this is how you do it", says, Paul in verse 4. "Do you want to know if you are getting any where? Do you want to know if you are making any progress in spiritual things? Do you want to prove – test the quality of – your work? Then do it like this: (verse 4) Don't compare yourself with others, but compare yourself with yourself."

⁴But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbour.

This concept can be explained as follows: Imagine a Christian who is comparing himself with others. He looks at himself and he looks at them and the result very often is that in his heart the old sense of pride and a feeling of superiority tends to come back, together with a sense of gloating. He gets that feeling, "Haven't I done well!" That's no test of anything.

Suppose you look at your temper and you realise that you have quite reasonable control of it. You look at him: so short tempered he seems to 'fly off the handle' at the slightest thing. So you think to yourself that at least your temper is under better control than his. Not realising that temperamentally you were quite even tempered before you were converted while he was a 'million' times more bad tempered, before he was converted. So by comparing yourself with him you have become feeling proud that you have made some progress in the Christian life. But the self-centred attitude that Paul is militating against here begins to creep back into the heart.

"If you want to find out if you've made any real progress don't compare yourself with others. Compare yourself with yourself," says the Apostle Paul. How does control of your temper today compare with that of a fortnight ago? How does the maintenance of your patience and your perseverance compare today with three or four months ago? "Compare yourself with yourself," says Paul, "and then you will have rejoicing in yourself alone" Rejoice in what **the Spirit has been able to achieve in you**. You won't continue in the Christian life gloating that you're a bit better than him. It will be personal, between you and the Spirit. You will have a personal rejoicing in the presence with God that you can see His work in your life, without any self-inflation or pouring contempt on other people.

- "Because", says Paul, verse 5, "when the Judgement Day comes you won't have to answer for their Christian lives, but you will have to answer for your own. ⁵*For each will have to bear his own load.* The Greek of verse 5 can be translated: every man will have to shoulder his own pack. A different word here from the

one used in verse two which was translated as 'burden'. You don't have to 'carry the can' for anyone else (where in verse 2 is was another's burden of sin that motivated you to help them). In that area of your life, revealed by your personality, you alone are answerable for it. At judgement you will be answerable not for how they lived but for your way. That sense of responsibility and answerability is the greatest possible restraint in this area of personality.

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- That is how the person is to be in his own personality. Free from the 'me first comparing with others; and with the sense that at the last he will answer to God for his own life alone and not for nobody else's.

[2305]

May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.

Next time (after the Easter Service next week): we move further from the 'bullseye' to see the relation that the Christian life has with other Christians and then with non-Christians.

Delivered Sunday 16 April 2017

On the Mountain

Mark 9:1-13

"This is my beloved Son; listen to him!"

On this Easter Sunday, we examine the insights that are recorded by Mark in the latter part of Chapter 8 and particularly the first three verses of Chapter 9. Regarding the Person and purpose of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 8 ends with a stern rebuke to Peter, whose culturally conditioned concept of the purpose of the Messiah was against the purposes of God as being implemented by Jesus. Peter, as representative of the disciples who were gradually becoming aware of who Jesus really was, 'confessed' – put into words – that Jesus was the promised, 'anointed' one. The King of the developing Kingdom – of God. The Christ (Greek), the Messiah (Hebrew). And so they have come a long way in discerning who Jesus was. Defining His person. But why He came and what His purpose in coming, His 'life's work' we might say, was, was far from clear to them. Peter could not reconcile his idea of THE Messiah with the suffering and death Jesus had just clearly and plainly told them He must voluntarily take up and endure. Jesus turns to look at the other disciples as He rebukes Peter as doing Satan's, not God's will. Indicating that they were as misguided and guilty of rebuke as Peter.

Of course it was this same Peter, who much later in Rome, recounted His vivid memories of all these events that He shared with Jesus. It was Mark who wove them into the narrative credited to him. No doubt Peter had great remorse and sorrow over many of the things he remembered. But this only served to make his eye-witness accounts all the more accurate, compelling and telling.

Peter and the disciples are learning. Now in verse 1 of Chapter 9 they have yet another unexpected change of thought to cope with. Jesus says that within the lifetime of those present, they would see the Kingdom of God come with power. Remember this statement comes immediately following Jesus having said that He, the Messiah, MUST suffer and die, and after three days rise again. Later, at least after the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus and the general coming of the Power of His Holy Spirit, they would understand that 'rise again' referred to His resurrection to a permanently glorified physical body. The body that ascended to heaven to be with God the Father. But at the time the events of Chapter 9 were occurring, they had great difficulty. Those Jews who had been educated by the Rabbis in the Synagogues, had been taught that there was resurrection of the body after death. But this was firmly in the context of the 'end of time', when the judge would come, in glory and take to Himself those who were righteous. Earned righteousness in the sight of God according to their most commonly held understanding. Here Jesus was saying that there would be a singular, separate resurrection, His, before the general one. This because He had said that some, at least, would still be alive to see this unique, glorified Christ coming in power. As Mark writes his narrative he knows what this means. But the disciples, including Peter, have still a lot to learn.

Six days later, Jesus takes three disciples, Peter, James and John, up a high mountain probably fairly near to Caesarea Philippi. Mount Hermon most likely. This is going to be the first instalment, a foretaste, of the disciples' being shown Jesus' glory and their beginning to recognise that He was not just THE Messiah, but the second 'person' of the almighty God. The One who at the Father's will (or design) spoke the Word at Creation which caused the hovering Spirit to breathe life into man, created in the image of God (Gen 1:2; 2:7) Or again the One whom the witness, John, would describe in the opening verses of the Gospel that he wrote, with the words. ¹*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* ²*He was in the beginning with God.* ³*All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.* (Jn 1:1-3) The event on this mountain was the start of this tremendous revelation. This completely new understanding that was breaking in on the world through God's presence as the man, Jesus. The understanding that enabled John to write His Gospel and Peter to relate his witness to Mark. And as we read about the transfiguration in verses 2-10, we can see details that point to the eye-witness validity of the narrative that resulted.

What did the three disciples witness? Yes there were three. A most appropriate number of witnesses as specified by Jewish Law. But the number three is also instructive.

- There were three persons seen together on the mountain: The central character was Jesus. With Him was Elijah and Moses. Elijah synonymous with the Prophets and a principal foreteller of the true nature of the Messiah that now had come in Jesus. Moses, perhaps the greatest human figure in the Old Testament. With him was associated the Law from God. Jesus is seen with the representatives of the two 'pillars' of the Old Covenant: the word from God through the Prophets; and the Law of God from the Commandments. And He is there to fulfil them both.
- Then there were the three persons of God: Just as at Jesus' baptism the full complement of the Triune God – one God in three Persons – took part. Jesus the Son was there of course and the Father spoke and the Spirit implemented. Just as the power of the Spirit brought the decree of God the Father and the Word of the Son into existence as the whole creation, the Spirit revealed the Glory of Jesus and made the disciples recognise, without identity pictures the presence of Elijah and Moses. Without photographs how else would they have so readily recognised, even such famous icons, of centuries before?

We know from their own words, recorded later, what Peter and John had to say: ¹⁶*For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.* ¹⁷*For when he received honour and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased",* ¹⁸*we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.* (2 Peter 1:16-18); and ¹⁴*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* (Jn 1:14) But what did they see that had such a life long and serious affect on them?

The real transfiguration (change in form) of God the Son occurred at the incarnation, through the power of God the Holy Spirit, resulting in the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus' glory had been with Him from before time began, but as He accepted His humiliation, descending to human form, with a full human nature (though without inherited sin) His former glory was not normally made visible. His glory had been visible at special times in the past. When the 'angel of the LORD' had appeared to particular humans. Moses had several encounters: Moses had also ascended a mountain and seen Christ's glory. The reflection of this so affected Moses' face that he had to place a veil over it when he relayed God's messages to the people of Israel. (Ex 34:29-35)

Now, briefly, the glory of God the Son shines through His human body. His face shines not with reflected glory as Moses' had, but in a manifestation of His divine self. It shone through His normally dull coloured clothing, making them appear *dazzling white*. This all was a foretaste of Christ's final re-transfiguration to the risen Lord Christ after His victorious Resurrection.

Then the cloud covers them and the Voice from the Father says, "*This is my beloved Son; listen to him!*" God has some centuries before chosen to show and seal His Presence through the appearance of a cloud. The cloud hung over the tabernacle by day in the wilderness and went before the people when they moved on. (Ex 40:34ff) And at the inauguration of Solomon's temple the cloud signifying and sealing God's presence was there also. ¹⁰ *And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD,* ¹¹ *so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.* (1 Kings 8:10,11) The cloud had confirmed God's presence as the temple was consecrated, but not since. Until that day when Jesus and the three disciples heard that affirmation of Jesus. "This is my beloved Son ..." There are various translations for this passage, but Stuart Olyott believes that the Greek conveys the idea of the only Son, the unique Son of God. And this was the message the disciples were gradually getting. This Messiah they had recognised at last after all the time He had been with them was none other than God the Son. The executor of the will and purpose of God the Father whose Word causes the Power of God the Spirit to act in Creation, Providence and Salvation.

At the end of Chapter 8 God's purpose in the incarnation was beginning to be revealed. Jesus the God-man was to suffer and die. Not for His own sin. But for the sin of all those the Father would give Him. He would take all that sin and suffer the just penalty that was earned. Not only as the one perfect, 'proper' man who had no sin of Himself, but also as the incarnate, unique, one and only, beloved Son of God. The pre-existent Word. God Himself taking the penalty, (of His own perfect justice that could not ignore our sin), upon Himself.

The Resurrection is fundamental, essential to the Christian.

It proves without doubt that God's decree for the salvation of His creation, so sorely corrupted by man's disobedience has occurred and is vindicated through the defeat of 'death' through the sacrifice of Jesus.

Because He Lives

1. God sent His Son - they called Him Jesus,

He came to love, heal and forgive;
He lived and died to buy my pardon,
An empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives.

Chorus:

Because He lives I can face tomorrow,
Because He lives all fear is gone;
Because I know He holds the future
And life is worth the living, just because He lives.

2. How sweet to hold a newborn baby
And feel the pride and joy he gives;
But greater still the calm assurance:
This child can face uncertain days because Christ lives.

(Chorus)

3. And then one day I'll cross the river,
I'll fight life's final war with pain;
And then, as death gives way to victory,
I'll see the lights of glory - and I'll know He lives.

(Chorus)

Jesus is the 'first-born' of those dead from sin. His death and resurrection shows that way for we that follow Him. Our sins taken to His cross so that we can rise with Him at the 'last day'. All who have heard of Jesus have some opinion of Him. That He is the Christ the unique Son of the Living God; the only One who can carry away our sin, through His sinless death; and the one who by His Resurrection demonstrates His divine Glory and shows the way for our salvation and eventual glory at the 'last day'. If we by the power of His Spirit working in us can share this opinion then we are the ones He does it for, and He will not be ashamed of us when we come before Him at the 'day of judgement', and we will be accepted to be with Him in glory with eternal life. We must say, Hallelujah, Jesus is Risen. Thanks be to God.

Pray this will be so for all the saints present today. Amen. [2036]

Galatians – Chapter 5:25-6:10
How to Live a Christian Life (b)

(Review of last time)

Now we move out to see how a Christian should be in his relationships with fellow Christians. This also is brought out in a number of different verses. So we will note them as we cover the point contained in them.

- Chapter 5 and the last verse: Verse 26, where Paul says, ²⁶ *Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.* Where we have already commented on the first part that can also be translated as “Let us not be desirous of vain glory.” Here he continues with ... not to provoke or envy one another,

Watch the words you use in your Christian relationships. Watch your actions. It's very easy to get under someone else's skin. How to avoid this? Put yourself in the other person's shoes.

Very easy for thoughts of envy or jealousy to creep in. “Don't tolerate it!” says the Apostle Paul. Of course such things don't just creep up. If the foundational habits of ones personality, that we examined last time, are obeyed. A Christian won't put himself first, with envy and jealousy if he doesn't see himself as superior. If a Christian isn't all the time comparing himself with others. If a Christian does remember that he is nothing apart from the grace of God. If he does call to mind that he answers to God for his own Christian life and not other people's.

- Of course then he doesn't fall into the sin of provoking one another, with envy and jealousy towards each other. “Instead”, says Paul, (chapter 6, verse 2) “do the opposite. Instead of thinking of yourself and your own needs, problems and temptations think of others and their needs. They've got heavy loads to carry.” says Paul. He uses a 'picture' of someone carrying an intolerably heavy load.

A person bought up in the 'far east' remembers how he used to look in amazement at the heavy loads some would carry down the streets. He once saw a lone man carry a piano on his back. He couldn't imagine how it could have been done!

Some burdens are such that one can't carry them on his own. It takes several people (or should)!

That's the picture the Apostle uses. People are carrying loads, but they are loads that are too heavy for them. Instead of thinking about how heavy your own load is, think of the other person's load. Help him to carry it. Don't wait for it to be brought to your attention, what other loads other people are carrying. Have the Christian grace to notice, Look to see. Help to carry.

Someone may answer, “That will bring pain to me.” Figuratively, “That will make

my back ache! It will be difficult. It will cost me something.”

“But that is the way,” says Paul, “to fulfil the law of Christ’s new commandment.” *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.* (John 13:34)

The Christian church, the Apostle Paul is insisting, isn’t to be a body of people, where they come together and they all moan, one to the other, and say, “Nobody knows what I have to put up with. Nobody knows what I have to bear, Nobody knows what I’ve been through.”

That’s not the language of a Christian church!

The Christian church is where every member recognises that every member has loads to carry and those loads cannot be carried alone, therefore they must be shared. The different members 'get under' each others loads. To help each person to carry it. In that way the fellowship is strengthen and the Church is united. And Christ's mind is seen in the church: ⁵ *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.*⁶ (Philippians 2:5) Christ thought firstly for the needs of others, more than His own rights and dignity.

- So we continue to see the relationship Christians are to bear with each other. Look at verses 9 & 10: “Don’t flag at it , “ Paul says. “Do good. Use every opportunity.” (verse 10) “Do good to everyone, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” That puts it all in the perspective that he wants.

The Christian church is a family. If a member of the family is ill, what happens? The members of the family gather around to support them in their distress. There's no need for this to be advertised. It is noticed and the response is automatic. So too for the family of a Christian church. The load is noticed. It is too heavy for one to carry. So it is carried together. That's the way it is to be!

- That's Christians in general, but in chapter 6 verse 1 he also talks about Christians in trouble. Because sometimes Christians fall into faults. Christians don't habitually, by habit, break God's law. None the less Christians do fall. The Greek word (ἄνθρωπος – anthrópos) is 'anyone' or a 'human', *is caught* (overtaken) *in any transgression*. Anybody can fall! You may say, “No Christian can do that!” But sometimes a Christian does become overtaken by the strength of the temptation. Failing to mortify (crucify) his sin with self discipline. He's absented himself, maybe, from the strength of Christian fellowship. Something you think no Christian should ever fall into. That Christian has done it. Now the apostle indicates that there is no spontaneous recovery from such a thing. When a Christian falls this deeply, someone has to act.

The spiritually mature must act. The fallen cannot get up on their own. (God's 'assurance' for any true Christian operates through 'means' and his will will be done if not by you then by another – but your responsibility is not extinguished even though God's will is otherwise, infallibly done.) “Restore them to their former spiritual condition, you who are spiritually mature.” says Paul. “It's your ministry, not to luxuriate in your maturity, but to restore those who have fallen to the point where they can not restore themselves.”

6 Or the classic, familiar text of the KJV ⁵ *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:*

(The word Paul uses to *restore*, **καταρτίζετε**, *katartizete* (kat-ar-tid'-zo) is a version of the verb used at Matthew 4:21 to describe the mending of nets – restoring to the original condition and function.)

Spiritually mature members have the responsibility to restore those who fall: to their original condition and function.

“In a spirit of gentleness, do it gently”, he says. “Do it firmly to be effective.” These are the two concepts which make up the Bible word 'meekness' as we have previously noted: the true spirit of (effective) gentleness.

Someone who is only gentle will get nowhere. Only firm – will crush and discourage. But someone who is gentle and firm is able to restore this person from their spiritual fault.

“And take heed for yourself,” he says, “lest picking them up may weigh you down, so you end where they already are.” *Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.*

That's how the Christian is with other Christians. Least of “me” and most for them. All for the strength of the fellowship.

- Then, in verse 6, Paul turns specifically to a particular group of Christians: Teachers – ⁶ *One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches.* Christians are bound and commanded by God to earn their living. But some Christians are released from earning their living so that they can give their time to labouring in the teaching of God's word. Those who are taught by such people have a responsibility to them. Those who are taught have this responsibility! It's those who benefit from these teachers, who have the responsibility to support those teachers. The Christian ministry is always supported by those who benefit from it.

Such a teacher shares the spiritual things that God has given him with the congregation. The congregation is to share the material things that it earns with the teacher. So there is a mutual dependence. He gives all his time in labouring in the word and sharing its treasures. They are earning their living in accordance with the Biblical command. He is not to suffer because he is a teacher of the Word. Therefore there is to be a sharing of spiritual and material things. This is part of Paul's explanation of how Christians should relate to one another.

Self interest is gone. The great concern is the welfare of the fellowship. The responsibility to teach lies on a few, but the responsibility to do good lies upon the whole.

- So far then: in a Christian's 'heart of hearts', he is to be spiritual; in his own personality, he steps down; in his relationship with fellow Christians, he lives for the good of the fellowship.

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Now his responsibility as to how he should live and behave towards non-

Christians.

This is taught to us in verses 9 & 10. ⁹ *And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.* ¹⁰ *So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

As far as non-Christians are concerned, we are to seek the good of *everyone* (v 10). Do this as opportunity occurs and to all! Some may be comfortable with doing good with people of their same age, or circumstances. Paul does not limit his instruction in this way. Paul doesn't say that we should only do good to those who are amenable to us. Or in our particular social class. Or whom we find likeable or in our age group. If any opportunity to do good occurs. Then do good! *Do not grow weary of doing good.*

Smile at the person in the queue; give a friendly word of greeting to your neighbours; do errands for those that need such help; visit the sick; the 'thousand and one' things that cannot be put in any catalogue or category. We are to live for the welfare and benefit and happiness of others.

But he is speaking about more than that. (verse 9) *in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.* Here he is using a well know figure for soul winning. Reaping people to the Kingdom of God is a well used figure in the new Testament. We're not just to be concerned for their physical (and mental) well being, we're also to be concerned for their spiritual destiny. Because we are concerned about people – creatures, originally made, in God's image. Therefore people are not just bodies they are also souls. Our concern is for the total person. Not just their physical welfare and comfort but also their salvation.

“Well”. Says someone, “I try to witness to people and I get nowhere.” “I've be trying for so long with Mrs X. But I'm no nearer than I ever was.” Keep sowing; keep watering. Don't *grow weary* for in God's *due season we will reap, if we do not give up.* Eventually the harvest time will come.

Look what dangers Paul has avoided. He isn't telling us to go into the world and just be 'do gooders'. He's not saying go into the world being an unfeeling 'preacher'. You may have met those 'preacher creatures': they don't care at all about anybody. All they care about is shoving their message down anybody's throat. Whether they want it or not.⁷ Whether they like them or not. Whether there is any empathy. They are just down-right aggressive in the worse sense of the word.

He is saying, that you go into the world as a warm, loving person who cares about the whole person. A warm loving caring person who cares for that person's salvation. In fact the context of 'soul winning' done in the context of friendship. Meaningful friendship. The vast majority in any Christian community,

⁷ Unfortunately a person who confronts a total stranger on a first meeting with the accusation, “Are you a Christian?” gives the impression that they are boasting about their own status.

were not converted because a stranger came up to you with a message. Nor because someone simply came to you and did you good. The vast majority of those who were initially strangers to any Christian influence, who then came into the sphere of Christian influence and were converted, became so because there was a friend who cared about them as a total person. Cared about their physical and mental welfare and their soul's salvation. Befriending them as a person (and not a trophy). In that context was witnessed to and brought under the sound of God. It is to that sort of approach, that the Apostle gives the promise that: *in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.*

That's how evangelism is to be done. That's how non-Christians are to be treated.

We close as we return to verses 7 & 8.

The Christian in his 'heart of hearts' is a spiritual person, so let it show in your own personality, your relationships with Christians and with non-Christians. But before we leave this passage we look at the great principle to be kept in mind in these two verses as we sum up this whole topic of how a Christian is to live.

⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

“Don't deceive yourself. God is not mocked, – you can't 'pull the wool over God's eyes'. You can't laugh at God behind your hand. Every day you live, every thought you think, every word you speak, every action you perform or don't perform is a seed that you sow. Depending on what you sow that will decide what you reap,” says the Apostle. “Go on.” he says, (verse 8) “live like everybody else, sow unspiritual thoughts, words and actions. If you sow what everybody else sows, then you will reap what everybody else reaps: you'll reap corruption. You'll reap the second death.”

What the Apostle is saying there is that if you profess to be a Christian and live like a non-Christian, you will die and be condemned like a non-Christian.

But look at the end of verse 8: “Live spiritually,” he says, “sow spiritual thoughts, sow spiritual words, sow spiritual deeds and you will reap a spiritual harvest: everlasting life.”

In other words: if you profess to be a Christian and live like a Christian you'll die and enter into bliss like a Christian. The principle Paul is saying, that must govern our thinking about this whole subject, is: the blessings of the Christian life are only for those who live the Christian life.

[2476]

May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.

Galatians – Chapter 6:11-18
Justification & Sanctification – a Summary of the Letter

Paul's final words to the Galatians (Chapter 6:11 to the end) is a summary of the whole letter involving two key concepts: justification and sanctification.

Justification – being made right with God – appears to be possible in two ways.

- You can earn it by your own effort through being a slave to law – such as the Judaisers, who were confusing the Galatians, required. Which is what all the world's, essentially pagan, religions require, except – Apostolic, Biblical Christianity. This is slavery because you can never know if you have done enough to satisfy your idea of god. This is a justification by works!
- The true God does not demand that you succeed in obeying his laws – Christ has done that on your behalf – or pay the penalty for your sin – Christ has borne that for you. God demands that you repent and believe (trust, rely, rest) on the Lord Jesus Christ through the faith that is given by the Holy Spirit. This is justification through faith!

Paul's concern for the Galatians is because he knows that there are only these two choices for everyone. And only the second mentioned, leads to salvation and eternal life.

Sanctification – being made one with Jesus so that the nature that controlled Him will control us.

You and I – the whole world – have a tendency to feel that if God's holy law has been covered by Another (Jesus Christ) and that we are justified despite who we are and what we do, then we might as well do as we please.

Paul makes clear that the Christ given 'new record in heaven' will always be accompanied by a 'new heart'. A heart that is being managed by the indwelling Holy Spirit who has fashioned it. As a consequence every true believer (to some extent) displays the 'fruit of the Spirit' by a changed life. Changes that start with the changed heart and result in a changed:

- personality,
- relationship with fellow Christians, and
- non-Christians.

A set apart (changed) life: sanctification.

How does Paul, then, close such a letter?

Verse 11 to the end:

Paul used an amanuensis to write his letters as he spoke his thoughts⁸. However he generally took over the pen for the last sentence or two⁹. This letter is unique in the length of the final section written in his own hand and *with what large letters*¹⁰. (verse

⁸ This would be a difficult task for the amanuensis since Paul was prone to pursue lengthy asides before returning to his main train of thought.

⁹ It appears that some letters were being circulated in Paul's name that had not come from him. So he writes a few words at the end in his own hand as a personal signature to prove the authenticity of his letters: eg 1 Corinthians 16:21; 1 Thessalonians 3:17 ¹⁷ *I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write.*

¹⁰ Greek was typically written at that time only in capitals. So for emphasis using larger than usual characters could be used to convey importance.

11) Paul wants us to pay particular attention to this summary.

The summary is structured with an opening verse (verse 11) and a closing one (verse 18), between which are 3 points each of 2 verses: 12/13 the false gospel; 14/15 the true Gospel and; 16/17 two ways in which the two gospels are in direct contradiction with one another.

False gospel: These teachers were seeking to *force you to be circumcised* (verse 12) *they desire to have you circumcised*. (verse 13). They require that converts must do something – basically submit to Jewish ceremonial law, symbolised by circumcision as a pledge of this. They say approval and acceptance by God depends on what you do. Salvation by works!

Yet these false teachers themselves had not kept the whole law successfully – to earn salvation – despite observing the Jewish rites. They were preaching a message that hadn't even been able to save them. This is the poverty of all pagan religion. They had no assurance, no joy, no sense of acceptance by God.

Why would they be preaching a message that failed for them?

Their motivation stems from being *those who want to make a good showing in the flesh* (verse 12) and that *they may boast in your flesh* (verse 13). They wanted to be able to boast to the dignitaries back in Jerusalem that they had so many people submit to the Jewish laws¹¹.

How can we recognise a false gospel when it is preached?

Do they say, “The all important thing is how you live. You must do something.”? It's false.

Does the gospel being preached allow for boasting? It's false.

Do those who follow this gospel, all do things a particular way? It's false.

True Gospel: By contrast verses 14/15. Golden words!

No place for boasting. (verse 14) *But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Never ever about what I have done. Never ever about what you must do. No place for it.

The true Gospel is not man-centred. The importance is in what Christ has done on the Cross. The 'golden words' used by Paul here show the way true Christians talk.

All their talk is about His cross; how it was planned; promised through long Centuries; accomplished; and applied to the individual. Though unsought and undeserved done

11 The false teachers themselves were converts from Judaism and were aware that their previous fellow Jews tolerated such defection as long as the Jewish rites were maintained. However once gentiles were being converted without the adoption of these rites the Jewish establishment would begin strong persecution of Christians in general. Which was what happened. Perhaps the false teachers were hoping to avoid this persecution, but Paul goes on to show that it is this very persecution which is the 'mark' of a Christian and not circumcision.

The world is happy with justification by works: You approach men and women, telling them they are rather good chaps and if they live a little bit better, then God will accept them. There is nothing offensive with such a message. It flatters them. They believe salvation is in their own hands. It even comes to the point that they consider that they can save themselves without any reference to God. God doesn't become an embarrassing interference in their lives.

Tell a man that he can never save himself and that if he remains as he is he is lost – already under the wrath of an angry, just and righteous God. That he must repent and change, from his sin and cast himself, like a supplicant, at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ, who he's never seen, then he is offended. He's scandalised and he persecutes the message.

to display the justice and love of God. That's how Christians talk.

A substitute – dying in my place.

A sacrifice – giving His life for mine.

A propitiation – bearing the anger of God which I deserve.

Providing redemption – buying me back when I was a slave to another.

You can't add 'works' to the Gospel. The false gospel looks within – the true Gospel looks to Christ, *the founder and perfecter of our faith*. (Hebrews 12:2)

The whole Gospel is about crucifixion. But what is the conclusion of verse 14 about?
... by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Believers, because of the cross, have parted company with the world and the world is separated from us. When Christ died on the cross He didn't just die for me, but when He died I died with Him because God reckons me to be united with Christ – in His righteousness His works and His death and resurrection. This is what being 'in Christ' means. The old life is over and a new life has begun, lived under His Lordship. I can never be the same.

Others rely on the way they live for their acceptance by God or gods. We rely on what He did. We are separated from the world¹². We cannot be the same as those of the flesh (the world). We not only believe in justification through the cross, but the cross leads us (through being 'in Christ') to sanctification also. Both go hand in hand so we can never be the same as the world.

(verse 15) “That change that happens (sanctification) is all that matters”, says Paul. It doesn't matter if you're circumcised or not. What does matter is if you are 'in Christ' and are thus a 'new creature' ¹³

So different are the false and true gospels.

The false: emphasises what you must do. The true: what He did.

The false leaves room for boasting, but the Christian can say: *Boasting excluded, pride I abase, I'm only a sinner saved by grace*. (Verse 1b REJOICE! 381)

Verses 16/17 Two further points of contrast:

- **Who is the Israel of God?**

The cumulative structure of the end of verse 15 leading through verse 16 draws attention to the target of the sentence. Such a grammatical construction in the Greek would be rendered in English by replacing the final 'and' with 'even'. So verse 16 could be rendered: *And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and*

12 Keller makes a qualification regarding separation from the world: *Paul is telling Christians that there is nothing in the world now that has any power over them. (Notice that he does not say that the world is dead (crucified) but that it is crucified to him. The Gospel destroys its power, Why? .. if nothing in the world is where I locate my righteousness or salvation, if there is nothing in the world that I boast in, then there is nothing in the world that controls me – nothing that I must have. [Galatians for You - Timothy Keller pp 182,183]*

13 A direct appeal: Are you 'in Christ'? Is your whole acceptability to God based on Christ having died in the place of sinners and that you are a sinner? That He rose again to save sinners? Can you cry out confidently to Him for salvation? That you realise nothing in yourself can ever bring you into that acceptance by God. In Christ you come, and having died with Him. Risen with Him, you're a new creature in Christ. This is the only emphasis the Gospel has!

mercy be upon them, even upon the Israel of God. What Paul is saying is that those who correctly use verses 14 & 15 as a measuring rod, to decide which is the true Gospel and which is not, are the Israel of God¹⁴.

The false teachers said, “Become a Jew and you'll be saved.” Paul is saying, “Believers, circumcised or not, are the only Israel God recognises.” They say, “become members of Israel.” Paul says, “Become believers and you are members of Israel – a company of men and women who rely for salvation on the Cross.

A stark contrast indeed: they disagree upon who is the true Israel. With this qualification for the membership of the Israel of God settled, Paul proclaims, *peace and mercy be upon them.*

- Bearing the 'mark'¹⁵: (verse 17) *From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.*

“Don't create any more trouble for me”, says Paul, “by insisting the body be marked – with circumcision. There are higher marks than that. Better marks. I bear on my body the marks of the Lord Jesus, the stigmata of Jesus”.

He's talking about the scars and wounds he received while preaching the Gospel. The false teachers said that the body was to be marked.

“That's true,” Paul could say, “but the mark is not that of circumcision, but of persecution.” Circumcision marks you out as being a Jew, persecution marks you out as belonging to Christ. Each has its own 'brand mark'. You can tell who the master is by what 'brand' is on the person.

So then, do you bear the mark of a Christian? Not necessarily in the way of physical scars. Nevertheless are you marked for Christ? Jesus said, “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple,” (Luke 14:27) or “And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.” (Matthew 10:38).

So we have in verses 16 & 17 the false gospel and the true Gospel compared through these two stark points of contrast. Written, for emphasis, in Paul's own hand *with what large letters.*

Finally, in the same 'hand' the closing greeting, prayer and benediction, verse 18.

Paul has spoken bluntly to them causing his words to be written down by his amanuensis, but without any malice.

He's written, in his own hand, bluntly to them, but he loves them still. This is why he

¹⁴ We have seen that already in Chapter 3:7. *Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.* You're a member of God's Israel not because you have Abraham's blood flowing in your veins nor because you have the same practice of circumcision as Abraham. You're a member of God's Israel when you have the same faith as Abraham. That's the only Israel, God recognises. That's what Paul said about the allegory at the end of Chapter 4. The modern day equivalent of Isaac is the Christian believer (Gentile or Jew). The result of the work of the 'seed' God promised.

Paganism – the Galatian heresy and all other forms – is the Ishmael. It is to be 'cast out', having no acceptance by God.
¹⁵ The Greek word used (stigmata) denotes the branding used to mark a slave as the property of a certain master and also the mark on a pagan priest which identifies the god he serves.

uses 'brethren'. In the Greek (but not the KJV) this word is the last word he writes (before the 'Amen') so that it is left 'ringing' in their ears as it were.

They had been in danger of adopting a man-made religion, so he uses the words *our Lord Jesus Christ*; they had been in danger of substituting works for the grace of God, so he speaks of the 'grace ...'; they are standing on the edge of spiritual ruin – because they are sympathetic to the false gospel – so he prays to *be with your spirit*. The letter closes with that spiritual prayer and blessing. That's what the letter to the Galatians is for: to bring to Christians, spiritual health and blessing. May that be so for all the saints gathered here today and throughout the previous six months.

[1802]

May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.