

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of
March 2017

(added progressively after each Sunday)

Galatians – Chapter 4:21-31 (b)
Paul's Concern for the 'false teachers'.

(Review of last week)

Galatians: Chapter 4, verse 21 to end of that chapter. (continued)

Last week we saw how Paul's focus has turned to the false teachers: those *who desire to be under the law*. Which includes the recent converts to the churches of Galatia; the infiltrating false teachers who were leading the new members astray; and any today who have come under the influence of the Galatian heresy: that commonest of human devised religion, which seeks to create a god (or gods) that can be controlled by humans through their pride-filled desire to do things that will appease, their idea of such a God. Paul continues yet again to prove, convince, plead with his readers that the True God's Gospel is that acceptance and adoption by God is not by whom we are and what we do, but through who Christ is and what he has once and for all done.

In this argument, he turns the regard the Judaisers claim to have for the Law – the Old Testament – back on them, but using the history of Abraham's family to prove that their position is false.

He uses a Rabbinic form of argument based on the Rabbis' own acceptance that the story of Hagar/Ishmael and Sarah/Isaac is an allegory – it has a deeper spiritual meaning.

However the inspired Apostle Paul demonstrates a totally different spiritual meaning from theirs: the Rabbis say that the Gentiles descended from Ishmael and were cast aside by God, while those from Isaac – by natural, genetic descent – were the chosen of God, the Jews, who were saved no matter what. The false teachers drawing from this: that Gentiles must first become Jews before they can be saved as Christians. Whereas Paul, by inspiration, recognises that descendants of Ishmael, being slaves, are all those who are slaves to the law. A law which no one keeps and so fastens the bondage of sin on them. These being in his day, the Jewish establishment and the false teachers in particular.

By contrast, with the Rabbis' interpretation, Paul casts the spiritual descendants of Abraham – those having his faith – as the supernatural descendants of Isaac. The true spiritual, chosen people – the receivers of the promise. Those who are spiritually re-born and are made capable of belief and trust in the saving work of Christ – those that are the true Israel of God. Believing, biblical Christians, who include the faithful remnant of the genetic Jews. At that time some of these were like the Gentile, Titus and others like Paul the Jew, himself. And so on through the ages.

Using the name of a city – Jerusalem – to describe a group of people who are citizens of it, Paul further extends the allegoric interpretation to show that: Hagar's descendants, Ishmael *et al* – meaning those who are slaves to the law and bound in sin – are described as citizens of the earthly Jerusalem. On the other hand Sarah's

supernatural descendants – first Isaac and then all born again of the Spirit – are described as the citizens of the eternal, heavenly, Jerusalem.

We now continue from verse 27:

By now it is clear that the difference between those who rely on works and those who rely on Christ is perfectly illustrated by the two boys: two covenants, two citizenships, two places of belonging. The two boys don't stand for Gentile and Jew as the Rabbis thought. The two boys stand for those who are trying to get right with God by works – and failing – which is a bondage or slavery; and those actually getting right with God by faith in Christ, a faith like Abraham had – which is freedom! Because this is the only 'way' to come to know God.

Then Paul closes this part of the argument at verse 27, where he quotes from Isaiah 54:1

Isaiah looked out at the desolation of the exiles. He saw how the country was becoming more and more depopulated and he described it like a barren woman who nevertheless was going to bear more children than anybody could ever imagine. Isaiah looked forward to the day when there would be more Israelites than anybody could count. “That prophesy”, says Paul “has been fulfilled. Not in the linear physical descendants from Abraham, but in you the spiritual children of Abraham.” (verse 28)

And of course that promise is still fulfilled today. All over the world: the hundreds, thousands, and thank God, millions, of men and women who have a living faith in Christ and are the spiritual descendants of Abraham – the true Israel of God. Those who, having the faith of Abraham, are the inheritors of the Promise to Abraham. The 'more that stars' promise to Abraham (chapter 3) – from all nations – and the prophesy of Isaiah has come true! Where Isaiah says that by God's intention the new (that is spiritual) Israel will be more numerous than the Israel of natural descent. They are not those born of the natural descent – from Ishmael, as it were. But from Isaac as by supernatural descent. There is more than one type of child from Abraham. Those born naturally, and those (verse 29) born supernaturally – *according to the Spirit*.

The whole point of this allegory, is to show to you that the whole world is divided into two (and only two) sorts of people. Which has already been mentioned. Humanity is divided into two:

- those who seek to please God by something that they do. They rely on Mt Sinai. If you test them, and test them, and when you expose their heart, they reveal that their religion is a question of doing. Well they are in a terrible bondage. They are children of a slave and they are slaves themselves, because they can never please God sufficiently, ever to be accepted by Him;
- then there are those, who have come to spiritual life through a promise. All their faith is based on promises and their very existence as children of Abraham, is based on their dependence on a promise. Thank God there are millions of them, now and throughout the ages, Though in comparison with the population of the world a smaller number of people – ever a remnant!

Humanity is divided into two. There is no middle ground. Paul asks the Galatians –

and you as well, “Which sort of child of Abraham are you?”

Finally the last section. Verses 28-31.

We have seen from the historical background there is a spiritual meaning and now to the end of the chapter where we have the personal application.

“So,” Paul says, “if you're a Christian brother this morning? In which case you're an Isaac. You became a child of Abraham not by natural descent – like Ishmael, but you've been born supernaturally as a result of a promise and you've entered into fellowship with God that way. Very well, you're an Isaac.” ²⁸ *Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.*

“But,” He goes on. “if you're an Isaac, expect to be treated like an Isaac.”

Verse 29 refers to what the Old Testament tells us: At the time young Isaac was weaned – about 3 years old – he was mocked by his half brother, Ishmael, who at that stage would have been about 17. Ishmael ridiculed Isaac. The younger boy was made the object of scorn. He was mocked and rejected by the older.

If you're an Isaac you must expect the same treatment, from this world's Ishmael's.

Persecution of the Christian Church doesn't come so much from the 'out and out' pagan. Very often when they hear about the Gospel they are only too pleased to hear it and embrace it. The worst persecution of Christian believers comes from their half brothers. People who are religious, but have their faith in a different method of salvation.

Who persecuted the Lord Jesus Christ? Opposed, rejected and mocked him, and condemned him! The then religious political establishment. Who thwarted Paul throughout his ministry right to the end? Representatives of that same establishment. All the time, whilst they were relying on 'works' for their salvation. Contesting his message of justification through faith!

Who persecuted the people of God through the long centuries, with ruthless philosophies – often burning them screaming alive? The mediaeval established Church from Rome. With its strong doctrine that included salvation by works – ceremonies, penance, indulgences, superstition and guilt.

Established traditions that promote Christianity PLUS. Those whose message is effectively justification by works. The persecution comes not so much from strangers who are non-related, but those who take the name of Christianity but believe in another covenant, another Jerusalem

If you're a Biblical Christian don't expect kind treatment from people, who use the name Christian but still subscribe to salvation by works. It's from them that the greatest difficulty will come.

If you're an Isaac expect the pain of persecution, However the chapter ends on a

happier note:

Hand in hand with the pain of persecution (verses 30, 31) goes the privilege of inheritance. Isaac had to endure the scorn, but it was Isaac, not Ishmael, who entered into the inheritance of Abraham. When Sarah saw her son being ridiculed she wanted the slave woman and her son out. God said to Abraham. "Yield to your wife on this particular point. Cast out the slave woman and her son."

And so it was that the natural descendant's of Abraham are disinherited. While the people who enter into that inheritance of God are the Isaacs of this world (Jew or Gentile) who have the faith which Abraham had. And are his spiritual children. People who are only physical descendants of Abraham and who rely on works for their salvation? God has disinherited them all.

The benefits of salvation that God gives to men and women are to the Isaac's – the supernaturally born children of Abraham. The only "Israel" that God recognises is not the physical Jew, but the spiritual Jew. The only people God has dealings with are not the people who rely on works but on those who rely on a divine promise.

Paul then has taken up the allegory and he uses this very one which the Rabbis and the false teachers were using against them. They said the the allegory showed that Gentiles were out and natural Jews are in.

He says, "No! The allegory shows that mere physically descended Jews and people who rely on their works are out and it is the supernaturally born, who rest on God's promises, are in". He takes up the allegory to throw down the doctrine of works and to establish again the great saving truth of Justification through faith. It's to Isaacs and Isaacs alone to whom the promises belong, they and they alone are the people of God. So there are two sorts of people in the world. You're either in bondage or you're free. If you're in bondage it's because you rely on something you do – and always fail to do properly. It's bondage because you will never make it,

If you're free it's because you rely on something that has been done and the benefits of it, that flow from it, from a Saviour who says ²⁸ *Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* ²⁹ *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* ³⁰ *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.* (Matthew 11:28-31)

There's no middle ground: Ishmaels persecute and Isaacs are persecuted. But Ishmaels are disinherited, while Isaacs enter into the inheritance of God, which being from God, is an everlasting, eternal, inheritance.

[1978]

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

Delivered Sunday 12 March 2017

Galatians – Chapter 5:1- 12
Beware of Faith PLUS Teaching (a)

(Review of last week)

In these verses the Apostle Paul faces us with two choices,

What's been happening is that the Galatian Churches have been troubled. They are composed of new (young) converts. The Devil delights to attack new converts! They are particularly prone to the Devil's activities.

These new converts in Galatia have been troubled by false teachers. Not the type that come knocking at the door these days, but these ones had infiltrated right into the very church itself. Not only into the church but into the pulpit of the church. So that the new converts, recently saved under the teaching of the Apostle Paul, are now forced to listen very regularly indeed to the preaching of 'another message'. And these false teachers had an advantage: they came from Jerusalem and they said, "We come from the mother church where the Apostles are." "We bring to you the true gospel message," "What Paul preaches is a perversion of the gospel." As we would recognise new converts are not very discerning: in being able to tell truth from error. So most of the people in the Galatian church had been 'bowled over' by this false teaching and they had come to believe what they were being taught by the false teachers. It can, unfortunately, happen so very easily.

What was it they were teaching? "Faith in Christ isn't enough." (What we have become used to calling Christianity PLUS.) Faith in Christ isn't sufficient you must have something else, was being taught. In this case adoption of the Jewish law and ceremonies – fast days and feasts, first. They said that if you didn't submit to the law you couldn't be saved. "*Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.*" (Acts 15:1)

So Paul takes up his pen, but not lightly, he write this explosive epistle. Because when people are being led astray, false teachers have to be confronted. Confrontation is a Christian duty when there is error. So Paul shows to the Galatians, very strongly, that he, the Apostle, Paul, preaches the true Gospel. Despite all the slander, the things that are said about him. His is the true Gospel that he preaches because he received it from Christ Himself. A Gospel approved by the Jerusalem Apostles – contrary to what the lying false teachers had said. And the Gospel he preaches is: 'Justification through Faith'.

God does not demand of you that you keep the law to be saved. Christ has kept it on your behalf. God does not demand of you that you suffer punishment for your own sins. Christ has been punished on your behalf. To be saved is not a matter of doing. It's a matter of casting yourself on Jesus Christ. It's justification by faith.

He proves that by 4 supporting arguments; he's shown that the place of the law is not to save you, but to show you that you need to be saved. The law doesn't save, it

shows you that you need a saviour. He's pleaded with them with tears in his eyes. He's beseeched them. Implored them to come back to the only Gospel which can do them any good. He's shown to them that to listen to a false gospel is to be an Ishmael – a merely natural child, who lives in bondage. But to believe the true Gospel is to be an Isaac – a child supernaturally (re)born into divine promises and is gloriously free.

But he still hasn't finished, because the Apostle Paul will not give up until he has captured the whole church again for the truth. So that every man and woman, boy and girl, is brought back to the true Gospel.

So, in the first 12 verses of chapter 5, he puts before them again, very bluntly indeed, two choices. Pushing them into a corner, he says, "Here are the two choices. Now choose!" He looks at this false gospel and the true Gospel each from two viewpoints: from the person in the pew; and the preacher in the pulpit.

1. From the viewpoint of the 'pew'.

Verse 1. Paul, puts the overall choice to them. "Stand firm (Greek verb – στήκετε, stēkete) in the freedom of Christ; or submit (Greek verb – ἐνέχεσθε, enechesthe, 'be ensnared') again to the yoke of slavery."

To be free or under a yoke! Those who rely on Jesus Christ alone for salvation are free, from the law as a way of getting right with God. But those who adopt the false gospel, they're under a yoke. Something that bears heavily upon them.

Because they never know for certain if they've done enough to be saved and they go through life without being utterly sure that they are accepted by God. That's the choice: between liberty and bondage. So right from the start of verse 1 Paul says, *¹For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.*

Now we look at these two religions – because that is what they are – still from the point of view of the person in the 'pew'. Verses 2-6:

There are two examples of choosing between the two alternatives: The first is in verses 2-4 – where the false gospel, salvation by works, is in view, while the second example is in verses 5 and 6 – where Paul features the true Gospel, salvation through faith in the finished work of Another, Christ Himself.

The key word for the first example is, 'circumcised'. Because the false teachers were demanding, that to be saved you must be circumcised. But someone might object, "That's only a minor surgical procedure. What's all the fuss about? It's not so much the fact as the principle! The false teachers were saying that unless you **do** this you cannot be saved. Paul takes up the word circumcised as the token summary of their position. They were teaching that you must do something. That something must happen to you – something man-made must be done to you to be saved. That word, then, sums up their gospel.

What they were doing was declaring that faith in Christ is insufficient. Something else is necessary. Christ is not enough! You must have Moses as well. That was their position, just as Paul summarises it: verse 2. – accept circumcision; verse 3 – keep the whole law; verse 4 – be justified by the law. That's choice

#1.

What does Paul have to say about this position? *“I Paul,”* he says, with great certainty, *“say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.”* I you think that by doing something is the way to be saved, Christ is of no advantage to you.

What else does he say? (verse 4) “Christ has become of no effect on you – whoever of you seek to be justified by the law. You have fallen from grace,” If you think that doing something is the way to be saved, Christ is of no advantage to you; you are severed from Christ; fallen from grace. You are apostate: persons who have looked like Christians, but by falling away prove that they were not, and at present are still not Christians. [If they are 'chosen', then their true conversion is still to come.] Note however that Paul is very clear and very blunt.

Why is Paul so consistently 'strong' in his condemnation?

You accept Christ because you are brought to realise that you cannot save yourself. That's why you come to Christ. If you receive circumcision, in this context, it is because you think that you can save yourself. Can you have a religion that says, “You can't save yourself” and at the same time says, “You can save yourself!” The two are utter contradictions. You can't say that: I will receive Christ as I can't save myself, but I will have circumcision and the Jewish law because that way I can save myself. Both can't be right! They can't be. You can't have it both ways.

So, ultimately you have to chose: between Christ or circumcision; between a religion of grace – unmerited favour, or a religion of works. Between a divine saviour or saving yourself. Between the Gospel or legalism. Between the free invitation of Christ or paganism – working your own way into the favour of a god.

The Gospel teaches that Christ is sufficient in Himself, to save sinners. The moment you say, I must have a plus you are saying that Christ is not sufficient in Himself. The moment you say that Christ is not sufficient you have spurned Christ. In other words what Paul is teaching is what modern people often miss. To add to Christ is to lose Christ. To add to Christ is to reject Christ. To add to Christ is to have no Christ. Christ is either sufficient in Himself or He is not!

If He is sufficient in Himself then come to Christ with no add-ons – no extras. If He is not sufficient in Himself, don't bother with Him at all! Is what Paul is saying.

So he has repeated then, that you either depend entirely on Christ for salvation or you don't depend on Christ at all for salvation. That's the first example. The religion of works.

The second example, verses 5 & 6: careful examination will show that while

Paul has so far been saying: “You ...”. he is now saying “We ...”. Because the point of view he is now looking at, is the choice that he has made for Himself. It's the choice of course that all true believers have made. And he hopes that by using the word 'we' he might appeal to his readers – he hasn't given up hope that the Galatians themselves may still be able to be considered as true believers.

The key word in the first example was 'circumcision'. Now it is 'faith'. (It occurs twice).

That's the great difference between the two choices – the two religions. Circumcision summarises the first example's choice – **do** something to be saved; faith summarises the second example's choice – **believe** to be saved.

In verses 5 & 6 he says two things about faith: “By faith we wait.” ⁵*For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.* This is the great picture of a true believer.

“Here we are,” says Paul, “we are justified through faith, having peace with God, and now we wait for the final outcome of our justification.” The final outcome of my being accepted by God is that I'm going to be with God. The final outcome of my being accepted in heaven is that I will be received into heaven. By faith we wait for that. He doesn't say that we work for that. We wait for that. The Christian believer isn't one whose life is one of anxiously hoping that he might come up to the right standard and then have sufficient marks on the board to pass into heaven. The Christian believer isn't someone who hopes to earn his salvation by piling up a great pile of merit, and when the pile is high enough – he's got enough – then at last he will be accepted.

The Christian believer is someone who rests on divine promises. And resting on them he waits for the final consummation and outcome of his salvation. He has faith in Christ: by faith in Christ he knows that Christ's righteous life is reckoned to be his life, Christ's death is reckoned to be his death. So he has a perfect record in heaven. There is no record of his sins there. Paul simply waits for the outcome of that decision. There 's no cloud (of sin) between him and heaven so he simply waits to go there at last. That's the great liberty of the Christian life. That's the glory of it. There's no yoke in that! No bondage in that. He's a free man waiting to go home.

Now, in verse 6, a second thing about faith. He says, that what matters is faith. Now to the false teacher what mattered was whether you were circumcised or not. Whether you went to the Jewish feasts or not. Whether you kept the Jewish (ceremonial) law or not. This is not the way of believers. Circumcision cannot improve my acceptance by God. Uncircumcision cannot spoil my acceptance by God. All that matters is if I am 'in Christ' or not. You come to be in Christ by faith.

The two great choices again! “But”, somebody says, “there's really not very

much difference between them. Choice #1 says 'be circumcised to be saved'; choice #2 says 'have faith to be saved'. So", says the objector, "they're really both the same. Except one says that you have to have circumcision, the other says that you have to have faith. Both are religions of works, except that they are not agreed on what you have to do!"

"Not at all". says, Paul. Look at verse 5, "We **through the Spirit**, wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.

We don't say that we have faith, therefore we deserve salvation. Faith is not the 'ground' on which God gives salvation. It is Christ's work which is the 'ground' upon which I am given salvation. Faith is merely the means, or instrument, by which I enter into the benefits of what Christ purchased for me. That faith itself is worked in my heart by the Holy Spirit. So that faith is in no sense a 'work'. Faith is a divine gift. So salvation is in no sense something earned, or merited or deserved by what I do. Even the faith I have is God's gift to me by the Spirit. And so this is a religion entirely of grace – unmerited favour. The undeserved kindness of God!

"Ah, but," somebody then says. "this false preacher has a much more responsible approach. Because he does demand a change in your life. This Gospel preacher, doesn't demand a change in your life . He demands that you have faith and can then live as you please."

"Not so," says Paul. So we look at verse 6: *6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.* - working through love! "Where ever there is true faith," says the Apostle, "that **faith** makes a difference in the **life**."

The difference that it makes in the **life** is that it makes that person a person of **love**. Wherever there is a **new record** in heaven there is a **new life** on earth. Where there is true faith in the heart, there is also love in the life.

So then, these are the two choices that the 'pew' must face. Paul puts it strongly and bluntly to the Galatians --- and to us.

[2504]

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

Next week: Verses 7-12. The two choices from the point of view of the 'pulpit'.

Galatians – Chapter 5:1- 12
Beware of Faith PLUS Teaching (b)

(Review of last week)

In these verses the Apostle Paul continues to face us with two choices: verses 1-6 (last week) are addressed to the people in the 'pew'. Now, verses 7-12, to the preacher in the 'pulpit'.

1. He has already shown that people who chose one gospel or the other are different, now those who preach one gospel or the other are different. There are differences in those who receive the distinctive messages and there are differences in those who give the distinctive messages.

Verse 7-10: The first preacher mentioned. Verse 7. "You've been running so well in the Christian life", says Paul. (We remember that he often uses the illustration of a runner in the arena as a picture of the Christian life.) "You've been running so well!" And look by the way how he defines the Christian life, here in verse 7. Christian life is **obeying** the truth. Some think that Christianity is believing the truth. But Paul says that it is obeying the truth.

Paul continues, "So here you were in Galatia, you had the truth and you obeyed the truth. You had the truth and you lived by the truth. But something has happened to you. You've been caused to leave the path which you were running. Who did hinder you that you should not obey the truth? You heard the Gospel: that you are saved by Christ alone, but now you have gone back to works. You have left the road which you were running. Somebody has pushed you off the pathway. Who is it? What has happened to you?"

Verse 8: "When God called you into union with Christ, He called you to turn your back on a religion of works (that earlier version was paganism) now you've gone back to a religion of works (now it's Christianity PLUS) and as a consequence: turned your back on Christ. This new persuasion doesn't come from Him!" "Not from Christ!. Leaving the pathway of grace; going back to the pathway of works, isn't a persuasion which comes from the One who called you."

The origin of false messages is never from God. The origin of a religion of works is not Christ. It is the supreme blasphemy to promise, in the Name of Christ, salvation to people who are told to live (work) in a certain way. This supreme blasphemy is going on all around us at the moment. In the name of Christianity people are being told that by attending a sacrament; or by regular church attendance; or religious exercises; or by moral achievements, they can be saved. But this persuasion does not come from Him who calls you.

Verse 9. ⁹*A little leaven leavens the whole lump.* "This false teaching has such small beginnings, but now the whole church is affected."

And not just one church in Galatia, but all the churches of Galacia. Paul seems

to be implying that this awful leaven is spreading throughout the churches. It has done, and is doing so, today. Nobody in the Name of Christ preached salvation by works until these false teachers came along. Now 20 centuries later on, people are still preaching salvation by works, That little leaven, that commenced in Gallatia, near the middle of the first century, has now spread throughout the whole world. There is hardly a church that is not affected by it.

“None the less,” says Paul, verse 10, “I’m convinced that the error isn’t going to triumph.” And it didn’t in Galatia, thank God! The error hasn’t finally conquered, then or now! Thank God.¹ Throughout the world the great Gospel of grace is still being preached. And still being believed and obeyed. Numbers – like the number of stars seen above – of people, have, are, and will be, never conquered by the Galatian heresy. They understand that Christ is sufficient. All their hopes are based on Christ alone, without any reference to their work. “When the judgement falls,” as it will, says Paul, “God’s judgement will fall on the false teacher, who ever he may be.”

That’s worth reminding our world. Anybody who stands up and says, “In the Name of Christ, that salvation, none the less depends on your works.” upon him, God’s judgement will fall. A person that gives an impression that you can contribute anything to your salvation, upon him the judgement of God will fall.

So there is preacher #1: He comes in quietly; but very soon his influence begins to spread; he troubles and unsettles those who believe: justification through faith: he causes them to depart from the path of grace to the path of works; the origin of the man is not from God and the destination of the man is condemnation at God’s judgement seat. That’s preacher #1, who would dare to be such a preacher?

Verse 11 & 12: Preacher #2. What does a true preacher look like? A true Gospel preacher. These verses tell us three things:

1. He is persecuted. (verse 11) Some false teachers had even dared to teach that Paul shared their views. They spread the rumour that even Paul had been won over. That even Paul was now preaching circumcision. They were spreading throughout Galatia and beyond that the Apostle, Paul had changed his mind. That he preached works now.

“But is that so?” says Paul, “If that is so why am I still being persecuted?” Nobody persecutes the message of circumcision! If you go to a sinner and say, “Do this ... and do also this and you’ll be saved.” They’ll not persecute you. Never! Because it massages such a person’s pride to be told that he can do it. “Salvation is in my own hands,” he thinks to himself. All that human pride is inflated in his heart. He doesn’t persecute the person who tells him that he is

¹ Taking Paul’s strong words on a particular issue, that he feels strongly about, can be so compelling that other issues which he also strongly defends, elsewhere, can be overlooked. For example his love and regard for the moral law as the blueprint of God’s character and the guide for the way to express ones gratitude to God for our salvation. Similarly the hope (certainty) we wait for – our justification on the last day – the assurance of all true believers, is not threatened by a momentary – but not permanent – lapse into any sin ‘that so easily befalls us’. Paul it seems is confident that at least some in Galatia are true believers and will recover from this false race episode. Since he expresses *confidence in the Lord* to achieve this. Still grace: His work not ours!

able to work his own ticket.”

“If I have become one of those preachers, why am I still being persecuted?” So Paul declares that a Gospel preacher is always persecuted! Because his message is distasteful.

2. The second mark of a Gospel preacher however is the offence that he generates by what he says about the cross. Circumcision – the message of works – that removes the offence of the cross. You don't have to preach the cross when preaching the message of circumcision. But the Gospel message says that you cannot save yourself. God is just. You are judicially condemned by a wrathful – angry – God. (Romans 1:18) You're helpless. Left to yourself, you can do nothing. Not even 'run to the Saviour'. Left to yourself. You're lost! You're without hope. You're done and you're finished. Unless God has mercy on you.

The Gospel preacher goes on to mention what went on in the life, of Christ and he presents the cross as the great centrality of the message. He assures people that if they become believers they may be saved if they repent of the way they have been living and flee to Christ. To come like a suppliant. Come like a beggar to a great King and rely entirely on Him and nothing on themselves. If they look outside themselves to look with distaste at themselves, then they may be saved. That message is offensive.

False teachers try to deliberately avoid the offence of the cross. (A point we will come to in the next chapter at verse 12.) True believers and true Gospel preachers are Isaacs, who will always be persecuted by Ishmaels. One of the words used in the New Testament to describe the Gospel is 'scandal'. The prophets, the Apostles, the martyrs, their message was considered a scandal². Where ever you may find a Gospel preacher there will be someone who will ridicule him. Someone who will scorn him. Someone who will plot against him even. Against his reputation. That's how you recognise them. If the Lord was spoken against – was a scandal – his followers will also be!

3. The third mark of a true Gospel preacher is that he is impassioned in his condemnation of salvation by works. Verse 12 is an astonishing verse: What Paul is saying is this, “If they are so keen on circumcision, why don't they go the whole way and make themselves eunuchs?” People will say, “That's shocking, that's distasteful, that's a scandal. How can a man, a gospel preacher, say that?”

He can say it because he feels that deeply about salvation by works. He's impassioned against that error that tells men and women that if they only do certain things, salvation is in their own hands. He knows that if a man thinks, even for a mere minute in a day, that salvation is in his own hands. That man is lost and bound for hell!

² skandalon (σκανδαλον) : used at 1 Corinthians 1:23. A stumbling block (to the Jews); scandal – something that damages a persons reputation. To those who stumble their response is to treat Christ with derision. The great scandal: that the incarnation of God to earth was in a humble stable, and that God in human form was hung on a cursed tree.

Paul then is seeing that the eternal destiny of men and women is at stake. That's what was at stake in Galatia, which causes him to use such strong terms.

So a false teacher, comes in quietly and spreads his influence. Troubles and unsettles, the true believers, who believe justification through faith; preaches works and not grace. He's not from God but he will go to God's judgement seat. A true Gospel preacher comes into a world where he carries an unpopular message, but he's an impassioned 'cross preaching' man. He is concerned about the divine message, before he is concerned about popularity. That the true Gospel is alive in the world is due to such unpopular, impassioned, cross preaching men.

Now chose! The modern man doesn't like to chose. But chose he will one way or the other. The 'pew' must chose which of the religions it will believe; the 'pulpit' must chose which of the two religions it will preach. That's what verse 1 means: *stand firm*. Modern man says, "No. No. I won't chose. I want the best of both worlds. I'm not going to be forced into a corner." That's the language of 'post modern' people today. "There's no absolute right or wrong, just what feels right."

The New Testament says that you can not 'sit on the fence'. God insists that you be definite and polarised: that you chose Christ or you chose works – which is exemplified by the word 'circumcision'. That you chose divine achievement or you chose human achievement. You chose law; work; and bondage, or you chose grace; faith; and freedom. But you must firmly chose: *stand firm*.

"Can't I add one to the other?" "No!".
"Is there any middle ground?" "None!".
"Can I not have both?" "Decidedly not!"

The choice must be made by the 'pew' and the 'pulpit'.

Those who are bent on flattering themselves they choose: salvation by works, because to chose the cross means to humble yourself. But remember: *God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble*. (James 4:6 quoting: Ps 138:6, Pr 3:34, Matt 23:12 Luke 14:11 & Luke 18:14)

[1829]

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

Delivered Sunday 26 March 2017

Galatians – Chapter 5:13-24

A Christian Life is Always a Changed Life (a)

(Review of last week)

Here the apostle Paul teaches one lesson only: **A Christian life is always a changed life.**

Two very different messages were being preached in Galatia. Both these messages called themselves the gospel, and the second of these messages was beginning to win the day. It was becoming the faith of the church: It was the message of justification by **works**. These people were teaching that to be accepted by God – to be acceptable to Him – one must be circumcised; keep the Jewish law; attend to the Jewish feasts; observe the Jewish food laws. Ultimately then, your acceptance by God depended on what you do! Have faith in Christ but it's not enough. You must have something else: **PLUS**. This then was what they said was the gospel.

The original message by which the Galatians had taken on the name of Christians, was the message that Paul had preached: Justification through **faith**. To be **accepted** by God, you don't need to live a righteous life, because somebody has lived it on your behalf. To be accepted by God you don't in any sense have to bear God's punishment, because somebody else has borne it in your place. You are a sinner and the only hope for you is the Saviour of sinners, who loves you and gave Himself for you. Therefore you are finished with sin and fly to the Saviour to rely fully on what Jesus Christ has done and is. Nothing less and certainly nothing more.

That was Paul's message, but they had departed from this message and were following the other message which the false teachers had brought in.

Paul has spent a great deal of time showing that his message is the true one because it came from Christ Himself. It's the message that the original Apostles preached and approved. He supported it by all sorts of arguments from the Old Testament, He's shown that the place of the law is to bring to you the conviction that you need a Saviour. But the place of the law isn't to save you. He's pleaded with the Galatians, not to adopt the new message. Because to adopt this new message is to go back to paganism. Because paganism – every other religion, except true Biblical, Apostolic Christianity – preaches that the way into a god's favour lies with you. You who ultimately created this god in your own image and to serve you.

Only the Christian religion teaches that the way into God's favour, lies with Christ.

To go back to a works based religion is to sink back to the equivalent of paganism!

Paul insisted that these are two different religions. Just calling itself Christianity doesn't make it the Gospel. It not Christianity! They are as different as Ishmael is to Isaac. Producing two different sets of people in the pew and two different sorts of preacher. They are two different religions.

That brings us to the current passage.

The false teachers were gibing at Paul (insulting remark that is intended to make someone look stupid) by saying: “If we are saved without keeping the law, why keep it afterwards? If Christ has kept the law on your behalf and it doesn't matter if you've kept it or not to be saved? Well it doesn't matter then if you keep it or not. You say Christ has kept the law on your behalf. Christ has borne the penalty of the broken law on your behalf, therefore you Paul and the people who believe as you do, can just go and live as you please. You can descend into the worst sin and uncleanness, because your salvation doesn't depend on anything you can do. So therefore you can live as you want.” They accused Paul of preaching antinomianism.

Paul answers this serious charge.

He shows that the Christian can not, and does not, live as he pleases. He shows that a Christian life is always a changed life. It is not a life of anarchy: a life free from restraint and restriction. Indeed if a professing Christian does not live in a way which is markedly different. It's because he's not a Christian at all. **A Christian life is always a changed life.**

The passage divides into two. We begin with verses 13 to 15:

This states the case in the negative. It shows that the Christian life is not a life of anarchy.

How do you enter the Christian life (verse 13)? You enter the Christian life through a 'call'. Some people think that you enter the Christian life by a decision. That's not entirely untrue but that's not the way the New Testament usually looks at it. You enter by a call. There you are dead in your trespasses and sins and bound for hell; the call of the Gospel comes to you in the general way and the Holy Spirit makes it effective in your own conscience and your will, in an effective and particular way. You are summoned to **repent**. You are summoned to **believe**. You are summoned to call on the Lord Jesus Christ. Now .. You've been called into what? (verse 13) Into *freedom*, liberty! That's a marvellous definition of the Christian life. *Called to freedom*. Yes I'm free. I'm free from trying to keep the law to please God. Christ has kept it for me. I'm free from the fear of future punishment. Christ has died for me. I'm free from the bondage of ceremonies and rituals, because everything I need is “in Christ”. I've been *called to freedom*.

That's not the way the world looks at the Christian life. The world today looks on the Christian life as a collection of rather eccentric 'do gooders' who congregate for two hours – or maybe less – on a Sunday and go about condemning everybody else all week. They think it's a life of misery! They have no idea that it is a call to freedom: the New Testament perspective of the Christian life is a call *to freedom*. That we are of all the people in the world the most free. Because we are free from trying to get right with God – because we are right with Him through Christ. We are free from the fear of death and judgement in and for eternity. Wonderfully free! This is the experience of

every Christian: Paul says, “You brothers were called into freedom!”

However, Paul immediately sets himself to define that freedom. He wants to clear up misunderstanding. To answer those who are accusing him of being **antinomian**. (one who maintains that the moral law is not binding on Christians) [The great cry of the established Church at the point of the Reformation: that the ordinary (peasant) people would 'run a muck' without the threat and guilt of punishment for moral sin. The civil authorities, by and large, shared this view. A point taken up by totalitarian governments who considered religion as the 'opiate of the people', a phrase derive from the critique by Karl Marx in proposing socialism against capitalism.]

In clarification Paul tells us three things, in the negative, about the nature of the freedom we have in Christ.

- It is not the freedom to indulge the 'flesh'. ¹³ *For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, . . .* “As a Christian, you can't say,” says Paul, “'Christ has kept the law on my behalf, therefore there is no need for me to keep it. Therefore I'll go out and if I chose to disobey God's wishes, I will do as I please.' You can't talk like that as a Christian.” Paul doesn't say why at this stage but the instruction is quite plain.
- Secondly the freedom that you have is not the freedom to walk all over other people: verse 13b ¹³.. *but through love serve one another*; and verse 15 ⁵ *But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another*. You're not free to say, “Well Christ has lived the law on my behalf, I can live as I please. If I want to be selfish, I'll be so. If I want to live 'loose' to other peoples feelings and sensitivities, I'll do so.” Not at all! The Christian life demands that you serve other people, because you have a burning concern for their welfare. “Be careful,” says Paul, “if you engage in biting and devouring other people you'll get 'bitten to death' yourself.” Which is what every gossip and 'back-biter' should remember.
- The third thing he says is in verse 14: “The freedom which you have is not the freedom to behave as if there is no 'Law of God'. It's true that you're not put right with God by keeping the law, but none the less in a Christian there is a certain quality of life which is consistent with the law. It's true that you don't rely on the 10 commandments to be right with God, to be accepted by Him, but in the Christian life there is a consistency with the 10 commandments. He talks here about the law not being broken; neglected; or ignored, but about the law being **fulfilled!** ¹⁴ *For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”*”

Still he doesn't explain why at this stage. But the point is clearly stated. There can be no misunderstanding. The false teachers are saying that Paul is preaching that Christians can live as they please. “No I am not!” he replies, “They are not free to indulge the flesh; they are not free to walk all over other people; they are not free to live as if there were no Law of God.

Let the position be stated. Let it be understood. Let there never be any misapprehension in the future: Christians are not free to live in the way you accuse them of living.”

Why this is so will become clear in the next section.

Now we make a start on this next section: verses 16 -24 (we will need to continue later to complete it).

Paul's point is this: if a professed Christian does not live differently, markedly differently, it's because he isn't a Christian at all! The false teachers were saying that if you follow Paul's teaching you might as well live as you please.

"No we can't," says Paul, "and I'll go further than that. I'll say that if a Christian's life isn't radically different from other peoples lives, it's because he's not a Christian at all." The point is that the Christian life is not just a matter of a **new record** in heaven. That's only one part of the story. There are two blessings in the New Covenant: the first is a new record in heaven; and the second is a new **character** on earth. The Prophets never separated the two and nor should we.

You'll remember that the Prophets talked about a time when people would be right with God through the mediation of another. But not only that: they talked about the Holy Spirit coming on all flesh, coming to reside in all people, taking out their stony hearts and giving them a soft heart of flesh; putting God's laws and statutes within the heart. They talked about a time when people would not only be right with God, but they would be changed characters upon the earth. So the two aspects are both ingredients of the Christian Gospel. That's why 5 times in verses 16-24 you have the Holy Spirit mentioned. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is one of the high privileges of the Christian. Paul has already spoken about it in chapter 4. ⁶ *And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"* ⁷ *So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.*

Now he shows in practical terms what it means when the Holy Spirit is in the heart!

Now to make this clear we use the illustration of a factory (acknowledging Stuart Olyott)

A Christian is like a factory in one sense. Imagine a factory. There is the manager of the factory. The one who controls it all. Some people paint the Christian life as though there are **two** managers in the factory, the original one plus a new one, and they are continually at odds with each other. From the start of day they jockey for supremacy. Now one, then the other are actually in charge, but each not for very long. Often there are two voices barking instructions at the same time. Some paint the Christian life like that. That however is not a New Testament picture.

The New Testament picture is that the first manager is dead! Thank God he's dead. Adam is dead. And the new manager is the Spirit of Christ who is now there replacing the flesh of Adam. But in the factory there are still all the old men, the old fabric and the old machinery. So although there is now a Manager with a completely, radically different principle of operation in control, His control is not lived out perfectly in the operation of the factory. The old men are still used to doing things in the old way and the machines are yet to be readjusted to the new purposes. The influence of the new manager, though apparent from the beginning, is never perfect, though constantly extending.

There IS only one manager. Look at verse 24: ²⁴ *And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.* [Once again the Greek used there has the *aorist* tense of the verb – a decisive (unlimited) act in the past. Once for all finished] Paul is not talking here about mortification, he is talking about something that is decisive and has happened. The old ruling principle of human desire is crucified; the things once loved are no longer loved; and the impulses of the heart, which once existed are no longer the impulses of the heart. There's a whole new direction. There is only one great managing principle in the Christian: verse 17 at the end: ¹⁷... *to keep you from doing the things you want to do.* The Christian does have his heart set in a certain direction. It's true that he is to experience the most awful frustrations, as verse 17 tells us, but he's not a schizophrenic, he has his heart set on holiness and on Godliness and on what is pleasing to Christ. He experiences this terrible frustration because there is sin still in the 'members'. [As Paul goes into in Romans 5,7 and 8.] But there are certain things that he **would** (wants to) do! 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* so he can't do the things that he **would**. But he's not a schizophrenic. There's a full, clear, principle in his mind. A whole new direction.

“Do you claim to be a Christian,” says Paul, verse 16, “then live like one. ¹⁶ *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*”

[2588]

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Continued next week.